

THE WORLD OF ROERICH

by Alan Senior



'The Messenger' by Nicholas Roerich

INTRODUCTION: THE WORLD OF NICHOLAS AND HELENA ROERICH

I am sure that the name Nicholas Roerich (1874-1947), Russian artist, author, philosopher, educator, explorer and archaeologist is familiar to most readers, but this was not the case when I first discovered his paintings in the early 1960s, and a little later the Agni Yoga teachings. Since then his influence has grown, particularly in America and Russia when Mikhail Gorbachev dedicated a large building in Moscow in 1989 to house the creative works, now the International Roerich Museum.

This versatile genius has left a lasting impression and, together with his wife Helena, precious teachings and ideas even more relevant today than when they first appeared in the first half of last century. Time passes and the world's problems grow ever more acute, but the thoughts and writings of Nicholas and Helena Roerich, who had a profound love of humanity, do not fade; neither do the colours of those brilliant paintings by the man known as 'Master of the Mountains'. Indeed, the majestic Himalayas are sometimes called 'The Realm of Roerich', which he often peopled in approximately 7,000 paintings with saints, heroes, messengers or Avatars, and he was the first outsider to paint this most mystical part of the world – northern India, Tibet and Altai-Himalaya... intensified by a sense of magic and mystery, with colours seen only in those sublime heights at various times of the day, painting in a style free of detail and enhanced by poetic titles.

Here, then, were two emissaries of the Great White Brotherhood, sent to help further humanity's spiritual awakening in an age when disaster and destruction threaten the collapse of civilisation amidst needless suffering, selfishness, corruption, greed and unending wars, with societies seemingly built on personal gain and materialism in all its forms. But the vision of the Roerichs – father, mother and sons George and Svetoslav – was impersonal and universal, to turn men's minds to spiritual realities, to unify people in a synthesis of East and West, and to found an enduring order that will revive beauty, harmony and peace, so important for the future of all Races.

So we are concentrating here on the work of the Roerich family, particularly the paintings of Nicholas, and I have drawn heavily on two important books by Jacqueline Decter and Ruth Drayer, as well as the expertise of Kenneth Archer, art historian and author of many books and scholarly papers on Roerich, and Australia's Michael Breen who toured galleries and museums around the world from 1975-91 to photograph the paintings, later producing a DVD, 'Master of the Mountains', in 2003. Finally, Frank Perry has spent many years composing music with Tibetan singing bowls, creating sounds which he associates with the feelings gained from Roerich's paintings. All three have devoted the greater part of their lives to furthering the work of Nicholas and Helena Roerich, forever influenced by their spiritual endeavours.

It is virtually impossible to cover the vast accomplishments of this unique family, but by concentrating on their creative outpourings, so often achieved amidst the glories and splendour of the world's highest places, one can perhaps be aided in finding one's true place in the universe, with oneness of mind and heart... then, with the inspiration gained from their sacred work, we might also help provide the necessary response to an increasingly secular world. Throughout their lives the Roerich family worked with the principles of universal brotherhood and a love of humanity, as did H.P. Blavatsky whom they always revered.

Finally, I have to thank those museums and galleries displaying Roerich paintings, also *wikipedia* and *wikipaintings*, for the many images needed to illustrate the articles seen here.

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A PAINTER'S PROGRESS

Isvara was the name of the Roerich family's country estate, 55 miles south-west of St. Petersburg, and it was here that the young Nicholas gained his love of nature, whilst the library provided him with many tales of warriors, martyrs, saints, heroes and great battles of the past. But the ancient tumuli amidst the mossy hills, and the influence of a family friend, the archaeologist **Evanovsky**, led to a lifelong interest in unearthing ancient artefacts and collecting plants, minerals and birds, which he often illustrated.

Nicholas had been destined for a career as a lawyer like his father, a St. Petersburg notary, but he was allowed to enrol at the Imperial Academy of Arts in 1893, where the **Symbolists**, with their search for religious truth, ancient wisdom and beauty, provided a constant source of inspiration, and as a very young man he was writing and illustrating articles in literary and art journals, excavating in Pskov and Novgorod, also publishing poems in Russian magazines.

But painting predominated and under the influence of the influential teacher **Kuinji**, with his visionary sense of inwardness in his landscapes, Roerich travelled widely and began a series of paintings depicting legends, folk-tales and saints of old Russia. He also lectured at the St. Petersburg Archaeological Institute on the results of his excavations, becoming a Professor, and at the same time developed a love for Wagner's music-dramas, which were performed regularly in the city, and felt a close affinity with the composer's love of ancient legends.



Николай Константинович и Елена Ивановна Рерих

Whilst in Novgorod in 1900 Roerich met **Elena Shaposhnikova**, the niece of Prince Putyatin, an expert on Stone Age Russia. She was descended from Tartar princes, a gifted pianist and was related to the composer Mussorgsky. Nicholas proposed and she became a lifelong companion and inspiration. He called her **Lada**, an old Russian word meaning 'harmony, Inspiration and strength'. She introduced him to Theosophy and it is said that they studied 'The Secret Doctrine' together in English before they were married in

1901. Both were inwardly certain of the inner guidance of the Mahatmas and regarded themselves somewhat as guardians of Blavatsky's teachings. She, inspired by the Master Morya, would later write down a whole cycle of teachings *'for those preparing for a new era and the coming of Maitreya.'*

Now Roerich studied the French artists **Gauguin** and **Degas** in Paris and we'll see their influence in Roerich's daring colour combinations – clear pale yellows, phosphorescent jades, violets and magentas, all conveying the sought-for luminosity, together with a monumental quality. 'The Idols' is a scene before an early morning sacrifice taking place on a hilltop in prehistoric Russia, with tall wooden idols and horses' skulls guarding the sacred space, a painting from a series which reflects the artist's search for authenticity and man's early co-existence with nature. On his return to Russia, although he continued to paint scenes from long ago, the canvases would now contain more intense colours, the essence of the Roerich of the future.



'The Idols', 1901, Roerich Museum, New York

Like Van Gogh, Roerich painted rapidly, as though under tension and driven by a creative flame, which lasted for 45 years and involved painting nearly every day, though some pictures were worked on for months, even years. He never used models or drew preliminary sketches, so he cannot be regarded as a pure realist. He used oils, tempera, aquarelles, pastels and combinations, always intent on producing the luminosity found in old Russian paintings. But oil was rarely used as he deplored what he called the 'sad changes' that came with age as the paintings often cracked and darkened into 'the colour of old boots.'

So he preferred a form of tempera on canvas to achieve his remarkable clarity of tone and spoke openly about the therapeutic power of colour and its symbolic attributes – red as courage, blue as peace, green as wisdom. He preached continually about the beauty and importance of Russia's national heritage and ancient art, when man and nature were in harmony and nature seemed animated and possessed with mysterious powers, the land stretching endlessly with man only a tiny speck amidst nature's grandeur.



'St. Procopius blesses the Unknown Travellers'

Roerich and his wife travelled through Russia in 1903-4, where he painted ancient churches, monasteries, castles, city walls and towers, as a way of drawing attention to the need for preserving them. He designed modern icons, murals and mosaics for several churches but, influenced by Helena's profound interest in Eastern religions and the St. Petersburg orientalists, he grew to value the great Indian epics and the poetry of Tagore.

In 1906 Roerich became Director of the School of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, where the children of tradesmen and peasants studied alongside the offspring of generals, and the students included the penniless Marc Chagall, who was given a scholarship. Soon the School became one of the largest in Russia and by now Roerich's easel paintings were produced almost entirely with tempera and pastels, giving his works the characteristic pure, bright colours and a flat, velvety surface, creating unexpected effects and unique colour combinations.

But the theatre was inseparably linked to his easel painting, and stage designs and costumes now occupied much of his time...

'A FLEETING VISION': ORIGINS OF 'THE RITE'

Nicholas Roerich designed sets and costumes for many ballets, operas and plays, some echoing the primeval world, ancient folk tales and legends found in his paintings, and all paying close attention to ethnographic, archaeological and architectural detail. There were set designs for Wagner's 'The Ring' in 1907, a composer whose music and vision had been a great influence, and the rich, multi-coloured sounds of Rimsky-Korsakov's 'Snow Maiden' in 1908 inspired a pantheistic view of nature, where every stone and tree seemed endowed with an animate quality. Then came costumes and scenery for **Diaghilev's Ballets Russes** Paris production of Borodin's 'Prince Igor' in 1909, depicting the austere and endless expanse of the Central Asian Steppes, the brilliant colour and ornamental primitivism of Rimsky's 'Invisible City of Kitezh' in 1911, and a year later sets and costumes for Ibsen's dramatic poem 'Peer Gynt'.

But I'm writing this in 2013, the year of a much-publicised centenary, so it seems appropriate to concentrate on 'The Rite of Spring'. It's said that Diaghilev asked Roerich to come up with an idea for a new ballet and introduced him to the young, talented composer **Igor Stravinsky**, who, speaking in 1935, related how 'a fleeting vision' appeared in his imagination. *"I saw a solemn pagan rite,"* he said, *"Sage elders seated in a circle watched a young girl dance herself to death. They were sacrificing her to propitiate the gods of spring."* But how true is this?

When Stravinsky published that recollection he had already given other contradictory variants on the story, whilst Roerich was saying that the original inspiration had been his. In 1913 their relationship was definitely one of collaboration, and Stravinsky referred to the ballet as 'our child'. Roerich had been utterly absorbed in dreams of prehistoric life, according to a fellow artist, which is born out by his paintings with titles such as 'The Stone Age', 'The Idols' (see above) and 'The Elders Gather'. There were also the previous stage sets of primordial times and Roerich's numerous archaeological excavations of historic Slavic tombs and burial mounds, where he unearthed axes, bones, urns and ritual objects.

In 1912 he'd also written an essay which conjured up a primitive scene... *'At the mouth of a river stands a row of houses. On the banks... canoes and huts. Hides are drying on the kilns – bear, wolf, lynx, vixen, beaver, sable, ermine... A holiday. Let it be the one with which the victory of the springtime sun was always celebrated, when swift dances were danced, when all wished to please, when horns and pipes of bone and wood were played. The people rejoiced. Among them art was born.'*



'A Kiss to the Earth' – set design, not used, by Nicholas Roerich

So it seems more probable that Roerich brought Stravinsky *his* idea for a Stone Age ballet, already titled 'The Great Sacrifice', whilst conflicting accounts say that Stravinsky sought out Roerich to put flesh on the bones of his 'fleeting vision' of a dance of death and rebirth. But it is unlikely that Roerich merely provided the settings (see opposite) and Stravinsky the 'dance element' in music to bring life to the concept. Together they studied antique folk customs on which Roerich based the décor and costumes for the ballet, and he briefed the press even before

Stravinsky's score was complete, saying that there would be scenes from a ritualistic night in the time of the ancient Slavs, 'a reincarnation of antiquity' he called it. For **Nijinsky**, the choreographer, Roerich's sets and costume designs proved inspirational and the basic postures and movements of the dancers appear to owe much to the carved wooden idols appearing in Roerich's paintings of ancient Russia, as he wished to emulate this spirit of the early inhabitants.

Before that famous opening night – May 29, 1913 at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées – Diaghilev was well aware that 'The Rite' would challenge all previous conceptions of ballet's meaning but he didn't anticipate the audience's reaction. From the first movements of the dancers the theatre erupted with shouts, whistles, hissing and stomping that drowned out the orchestra led by **Pierre Monteux**. Some fights broke out, leading in one instance to a duel being fought the next day. At one point, when the maidens held their hands against their cheeks, there were shouts of *"Is there a dentist in the house? They've all got toothache!"* The rioting continued even during the brief intermission between the two acts, but things quietened down somewhat during the mystic circle dance at the beginning of the second act. But the ritualistic stamping of the bearskin dancers around the Chosen Maiden led to more shouting and booing, which subsided only when she began her sacrificial dance which would end in her dancing herself to death to placate Yarilo the sun god.

Nijinsky was tremendously upset by the reaction, as was Stravinsky who had left his box after the first act, whilst Diaghilev may have been secretly pleased by this scandalous spectacle which would ensure world-wide publicity. And Roerich? He commented that the ballet had unleashed this brawling, bellowing mob's primordial instincts. *"Who knows?"* he said later, *"perhaps they were inwardly exultant, expressing their feelings like the most primitive of peoples. But such wild primitivism had nothing in common with the refined primitivism of our ancestors, for whom rhythm, the sacred symbol, and subtlety of movement were great and sacred concepts."*

The Ballet would be performed only eight more times that season, in Paris and London where there was a more favourable response. Diaghilev revived it seven years later, again with sets and costumes by Roerich, but this time with less controversial choreography by **Leonid Massine**. But it wasn't until 1987, seventy-five years after the première, that a re-creation of it was staged by the American



Joffrey Ballet Company, and thanks to the supreme efforts and extensive research of dance historian **Millicent Hodson** and Roerich expert **Kenneth Archer** – see his book featured on page 33. The two painstakingly reconstructed the Nijinsky choreography and Roerich's costumes and sets, and the response was a testament to the elemental power of the Roerich-Nijinsky-Stravinsky evo-cation of that eternal phen-omenon, the rebirth of spring.

Later, when Roerich was travelling through the vast expanses of Kashmir, he suddenly came upon The Rite's exact setting. *"Fires were burning,"* he said, *"there were the same costumes, the almost prehistoric dances, even the same style of music. When we composed 'The Rite of Spring' how could we conceive that Kashmir would greet us with its very setting?"*

Above: The Chosen One, Gaia Straccamore, in 'Le Sacre du printemps' at Rome Opera, by Kenneth Archer and Millicent Hodson after Nicholas Roerich and Vaclav Nijinsky (photo by Shira Klasmer, 2007)

THE WAR YEARS AND AN EXPEDITION

But now Roerich saw the Great War approaching, leading to the expression of his feelings in vast, gloomy canvases such as 'Conflagration', 'Cry of the Serpent', 'The Doomed City' and 'Battle in the Heavens'. But later, amidst charitable activities, came a more optimistic phase, lighter in tone and with imagery drawn from the oriental dream-world of the Baghavad-Gita and The Arabian Nights... pictures with lotus flowers, waterfalls, priestesses, dawn on the mountains – all conveying peace and serenity in time of war. 'St Panteleimon – the Healer' (below) was one such symbol to turn men's minds to peace, healing and tranquillity, and we see this gentle saint searching for medicinal herbs on the hillside, this later version displaying a halo around the saint's head.



But gradually Roerich drew closer to the mythologies and perennial philosophies of the East which spoke to him in a positive way, encouraging him to write poems about love, goodness, peace and unity. Such works would, with the added inspiration of Helena's writings, evolve into the system of **Agni Yoga** – a yoga of fire and action, rather than contemplation. He wrote: *'The world is in turmoil. Strive for salvation. In creation realise the*

happiness of life and into the desert turn thine eye.' But the strain of trying to paint and write through the war years took its toll, leading to a collapse and pneumonia in 1915.

Soon after his recovery Roerich decided to leave Russia for London, foreseeing the revolution to come. Here, in 1920, he exhibited his paintings under the title 'Spells of Russia' and designed sets for Covent Garden. In October of the same year he arrived in America with his family and exhibited 400 paintings in New York, followed by a tour lasting eighteen months through 29 principal cities. But all the time it was the East he yearned for, and in 1923 he, Helena and their 18-year-old son George embarked for India on a tour of sacred cultural sites.

Roerich was persistently drawn to the Himalayas and a quest for the legendary city of Shambhala, which he had heard of in St. Petersburg many years before, whilst involved in the construction of a Buddhist temple there. Shambhala was rumoured to lie hidden in a remote valley amidst snow-capped peaks. Was it only a state of mind, a spiritual symbol of enlightenment achieved in meditation, or an actual place reached by physical pilgrimage, the dwelling-place of Maitreya, the future Buddha who would return to initiate a new cycle of world-peace? Whatever the answer, the Roerichs would mount two ambitious expeditions (1924-8, 1930-31), covering fifteen and a half thousand miles and some 35 mountain passes at heights from fourteen to twenty-one thousand feet through Sikkim, Tibet, Kashmir, Ladakh, Siberia, Altai, Chinese Turkestan, Siberia and Mongolia. It is an amazing story adequately dealt with in Ruth A. Drayer's 'Wayfarers: The Spiritual Journeys of Nicholas & Helena Roerich' and Jacqueline Decter's 'Nicholas Roerich: The Life and Art of a Russian Master', as well as the writings of Roerich himself – 'Heart of Asia', 'Altai Himalaya', 'Shambhala' and the important monograph 'Himalaya'. Other objectives of the Expedition were to create a record (in words and paintings) of the lands and people of Inner Asia, to survey the possibilities for further archaeological exploration, and to secure art treasures and ethnographical collections revealing the culture of Asiatic peoples. Meanwhile, in New York, the first Roerich Museum had been opened and groups were formed which later became Roerich Societies, proclaiming his ideals for Peace, Beauty and Knowledge, recognising him as a great humanitarian and spiritual leader...

THE POEMS OF NICHOLAS ROERICH

Between 1916 and 1919 Roerich compiled a significant collection of 64 blank verse poems, published in English as 'Flame in Chalice' which can now be purchased from the Roerich Museum, New York or read online. Like the English composer-theosophist Cyril Scott, who was also writing poetry at this time, he searches within and there is always a *quest*, told in a direct way but with the same depth and intensity to be found in his paintings. *'I summon the heart, wisdom and labour,'* he declares in lines filled with spiritual responsiveness, prophecy and the necessary pilgrimage to achieve that expansion of consciousness, a theme brought out in so many of his artworks. There are three main themes in the poems; 'Sacred Signs', where readers are directed to the workings of the divine spirit within; 'To the Blessed One', the Light guiding man on this earthly path; and 'To the Boy', a kind of lecture to an adolescent outlining the necessary patterns of transformation which will lead to the Eternal. The last group includes the narrative verse 'To the Hunter entering the Forest', where 'Hunter' can also mean 'Catcher' as in 'catcher of men' (*fisherman* in the New Testament).

Many of the poems are reminiscent of H.P. Blavatsky's 'Stanzas of Dzyan' and sometimes reflect her 'Voice of the Silence'. Roerich was forever a believer in the progress of Self (from darkness to light) with the promise of a brighter future for humanity, and the soul's realisation of its divine, eternal origin is continually spoken of in an archaic language like 'The Voice of the Silence', but with an intimacy and wise simplicity aimed at those seeking truth. The divine principle governing all creation is shown as belonging to no particular time or environment, and we are encouraged *'to think of that which for all is unchanging. To think of the eternal'* (from 'Of the Eternal'). Theosophists often use the phrase *'live in the Eternal'*, for only by so doing is true happiness possible. Again like Cyril Scott in 'A Lakeside Cemetery', Roerich's poem 'Into the Earth' tells us not to mourn over those who have passed out of the physical body but allow the mind instead to identify with eternal things. *'Thou ancient one, imperishable, Thou everlasting, eternal, thou striving to the heights, Joyous, reborn.'*

The true seer is always a poet, and it is only the poetic spirit that can see beyond 'the Veil of Isis'. The intellect cannot do it – it can only go so far before it meets the Guardians of the Gate of the Temple. In 'At the Last Gates' Roerich sees how spiritual development will eventually allow us to penetrate that which is 'forbidden' and instead be permitted to pass, after conquering the illusions of recurrence, passing-time, habits and appearances – to achieve a new consciousness and self-transformation, penetrating to the eternal reality of our being, with realisation of the All. Although the road is steep and thorny it leads to the heart of the Universe and once we have passed through the Last Gate it closes firmly behind us, as we have fully committed ourselves and there is no turning back. In 'Tomorrow' we see the aspirant having taken on a new body, and in this present incarnation he regrets not being able to remember the experiences and wisdom gained in past lives. There is a longing for greater comprehension and higher knowledge... *'When will it come – the tomorrow?'* But his study of the Ageless Wisdom taught him that memories are submerged, not destroyed; when we feel intimate with a stranger on first meeting, memory is there, the spirit's recognition of a friend of ages past. The mind-body, the brain, are new, we are the result of the past but without memory of past events, and no brain could store the memory of the actions of numerous lives.

The poem 'Light' attempts to describe the Absolute which has no form, no sound, no taste, no end, no beginning... and he chooses light as a definition. When the soul gazes on the One Pure Light that is free from affection, the disciple has summoned the heart-wisdom and strives to apprehend the divine Image. *'Everything gleams through Thy light. In the darkness are shining particles of Thy glory. And in my closed eyes dawns Thy wondrous light,'* or, in 'The Voice of the Silence', *'Behold! Thou hast become the light.'* Having shaken off the 'dark garments of illusion', this inner light, which is

always present, is allowed to shine through, overcoming the deceptive, illusive brightness of the personality. We have to identify with the divine Self within us, not the personal self.

In 'Drops' Roerich has experienced an ecstatic, direct moment of communion with the Highest, finding himself suddenly out of time, no longer confined to the earth plane. But the wisdom gained is too much to be grasped, it flows through his fingers to be lost, like a drop in the ocean. *'Thy benevolence fills my hands. In profusion it is pouring through my fingers. I shall not keep all.'* He is unable to bring back that mystical, ecstatic vision, in order to aid others. At this stage of his development, to be one of God's messengers is too much to cope with, but he must not shy away from labour, facing all obstacles in tireless self-training, one-pointedness and proceeding step-by-step on the Path of Perfection.



'Drops of Life', 1924

In conclusion, the poem 'To Him':

'Finally I found the hermit. You know how difficult it is to find here on earth a hermit. I asked him whether he would show me the path and would he accept graciously my works?

He gazed a long time at me and asked what is the most loved that I have. *"The most beloved?"* I answered, *"Beauty it is."*

"The most beloved thou must leave."

"Who commands it?" I asked.

"God," answered the hermit.

"Let God punish me – I shall not leave the most beautiful that will lead us to Him."

That was Roerich's Gospel of Beauty. "Find God through beauty." "Make the World beautiful." "Create beauty in yourselves." He would readily disobey God's commands rather than abandon the commands of Beauty.

THE ROERICH PACT AND BANNER OF PEACE

In 1929 Roerich launched the Roerich Pact and Banner of Peace, and as a result he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. This unique project stipulated that all educational, artistic, scientific and religious institutions, and all sites of cultural and historic significance and value, should be recognised as inviolate and respected by all nations in times of war and peace. A treaty was eventually drawn up, hopefully to be signed by all nations. It had great educational significance. "A pact for protection of cultural treasures is not only needed as an official body," said Roerich, "but as an educational law that, from the very first school days, will educate the young generation with noble ideas of preservation of the whole of mankind's true values."

Roerich's idea was later signed in the office of President Roosevelt in the White House in Washington in 1935. At first, 21 countries of the American continent ratified the document. After the signing, Roosevelt said, in an international broadcast: "It is most appropriate that on this day, designated as Pan American Day by the chief executive of all the republics of the American continent, the governments (members of the Pan American Union) should sign a treaty which marks a step forward in the preservation of the cultural achievements of the nations of this hemisphere. In opening this Pact to the adherence of the nations of the world, we are endeavouring to make of universal application one of the principles vital to the preservation of modern civilisation. This treaty possesses a spiritual significance far deeper than the text of the instrument itself. Let us bring renewed allegiance to those high principles of international co-operation and helpfulness, which, I feel assured, will be a great contribution to civilisation by the Americas."

Subsequently, in 1954 the Pact was placed at the very foundation of The Hague 'International Convention for the Protection of Cultural Values in the Event of Armed Conflict'. Roerich also suggested a special flag, the Banner of Peace, seen here in the painting 'Madonna Oriflamma' of 1932. Together with the motto 'Pax Cultura' it would mark all treasures of culture and art as inviolable objects and has been called the Red Cross of Culture. This symbol has been found all over the world throughout history and contains three magenta spheres on a white background enclosed in a circle. This sign of the triad is interpreted as a symbol of past, present and future, enclosed in the ring of eternity. Others consider it as religion, science and art, held together in the circle of culture, a medium for meditation. To this day, the flag waves above many cultural and educational institutions in many countries.



How possible is it for the world's nations to agree on international currency, free trade and disarmament treaties? Efforts of this kind must continue but at times like these we should endeavour to present, wherever we can do so, the ideal of the oneness of the human heart in its

reverence for beauty, culture and education for all, thinking less about rights and more about duties and the bonds that hold us together. In 'Cultural Unity' Roerich said: *'Real Peace, Real Unity is desired by the human heart. It strives to labour creatively and actively (as a) source of joy... The heart speaks its own language; it wants to rejoice at that which is common to all, uplifts all and leads to the radiant future. All symbols and tablets of humanity contain one hieroglyph, the sacred prayer – Peace and Unity.'*

ROERICH'S HIMALAYAN PAINTINGS

Roerich's mountain paintings are a constant focus for meditation, also creating a longing in the viewer to experience the challenge of gaining those heights, both physically and spiritually. At one level the paintings are masterful studies in light and tone, at another one feels that the artist is making an unprecedented effort to raise the thought of the world.

The Himalayan paintings number about 2,000 executed over 20 years, part of a staggering total of around 7,000 pictures. For Roerich they were always a symbol of transcendence representing regions he called *'the treasure house of the spirit'*, and they forever present us with a profound sense of peace. 'Kanchenjunga' from 1944 (below) means 'The Five Treasures of the Great Snow'. The painting has a peculiar radiance, an iridescence that is his alone; into it he has resolved something of the light of his known world... other shores of the spirit.



So, like the pyramids, mountains are symbols of ascent from the earthly plane to the spiritual, and mystics quite frequently use the analogy of mountaineering and spiritual ascent, speaking about climbing to the heights, whilst depicting mountains as beautiful and uplifting emblems of the stable and the eternal. St John of the Cross, the great Spanish mystic, wrote a work called 'The Ascent of Mount Carmel', describing the way of the mystic as the climbing of a mountain.

These summits symbolize a spiritual world accessible to those who are attuned to the higher realities. In the words of Roerich, from his 'Himalayas - Abode of Light': *'All teachers journeyed to*

the mountains. The highest knowledge, the most inspired songs, the most superb sounds and colours are created on the mountains. On the highest mountains there is the Supreme. The high mountains stand as witnesses of the great reality. The spirit of prehistoric man already enjoyed the greatness of the mountains.' The paintings are meant to inspire and teach, uplift people and awaken in them that quality of universality and our inner connection with it. A solitary mountain often stands as a sentinel, a tower of strength over the countryside and, by contrast, valleys are low-lying, at the opposite pole from the highlands. Most of us live in the 'Vale of Tears'; all the hurry and bustle takes place here below, where humanity is living largely at a lower level, engrossed in the cares and high-speed living of the material world. But, as we are called to the heights (on the path to self-illumination) that which lies at a higher level within beckons, urging us to *"be still and know that I AM God."*

But, as with mountain climbing, this new level cannot be reached directly; it demands effort and some instruction on how to reach it, how to apply the given Truth, living it sincerely by one's own inner efforts. Then illumination will take place on the Mountain of Vision, achieved through silence and meditation after years of striving for the inner truth, applying the disciplines necessary to correct the many errors before embarking on the next great step. But, on reaching the summit the disciple looks around and – sure enough – there are even higher mountains to be climbed until he reaches that Mount of Transfiguration (which means, in the Greek, metamorphosis or transformation of form, going beyond ordinary form).



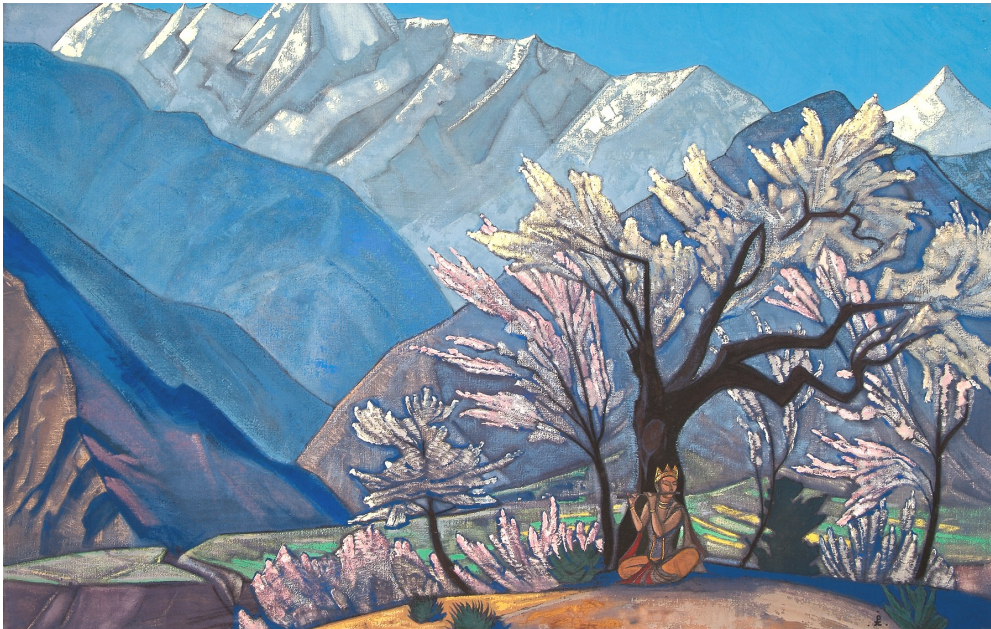
'Kanchenjunga', 1936

Thus, transformation has often been described in terms of ascending a high mountain to show, as Christ showed, that the transformation of Man is a reality, entirely possible. So we should let our consciousness stretch to those great heights in the vast wilderness... let the mountains renew and regenerate us, so that the energies from the mighty Mountain Devas may flow through us. Again, the words of Nicholas Roerich: *"Where can one have such joy as when the sun is upon the Himalayas; when the blue is more intense than sapphires; when from the far distance, the glaciers glitter as incomparable gems. All religions, all teachings, are synthesized in the Himalayas..."*

An inner impulse irresistibly calls people to the blessed path of self-denial and sacrifice but the highest strivings of the spirit involves a call to action. Like mountaineers we must surmount all obstacles, building and joyfully creating for the welfare of all people and coming generations. The great esoteric teaching, the Doctrine of Supreme Enlightenment (which is transcendental and inconceivable) must be intuited, though it is understood completely by those yogis who dwell in the heights, endowed with the highest serenity and all-pervading cosmic consciousness.

THE LAST YEARS AND THE TEACHINGS IN RUSSIA

The amount of material that was gathered during the Central Asian expedition had to be systematized and studied, so in 1928 the Roerichs decided to settle at Naggar in the Kulu Valley, North India, at a height of 6,500 feet where Nicholas had bought an estate from the Raja of Mandi. The Himalayan Research Institute they founded here was called 'Urusvati', from the Sanskrit 'Light of the Morning Star' whom the son George often called Helena. The Institute translated rare ancient books, collected the earliest art of the Asian peoples, studied Tibetan medicine, searched for cancer cures, often carrying out archaeological excavations, and gathered botanical and zoological specimens amongst many other enterprises.



'Krishna (Spring in Kulu)', 1933

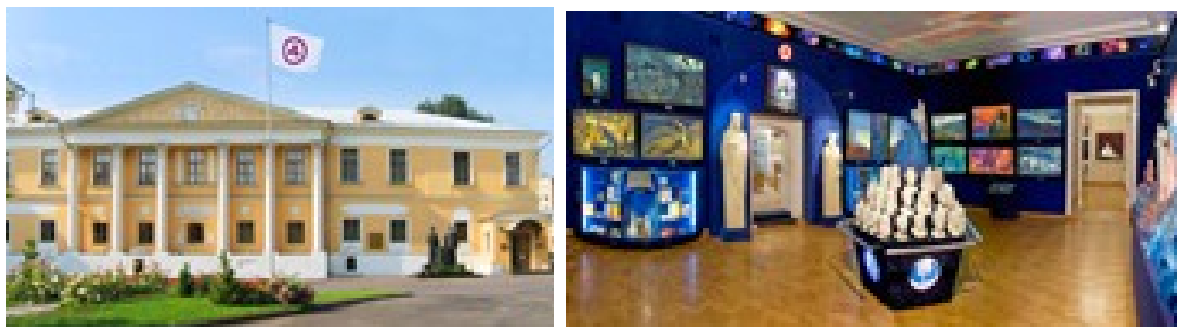
But it was not a region easily reached in those days; author Penelope Chetwode called it 'the end of the habitable world' and it involved crossing the plains of Haryana and Punjab, through steep hills outlying the Shivalik range, then winding one's way through gorges along the Sutlej and Beas rivers before reaching the narrow Kulu valley. Finally, a path led to the estate from Naggar's town centre to where a signpost read: ROERICH MARG, with stone statues of important deities. Definitely no place for the curious or idle, and not a retreat for rest and leisure but one for deep reflection on one hand and intense creativity on the other, where one is immediately aware of an atmosphere of the sacred. The background in the painting above is the view from Roerich's studio window.

In 1934-5 Nicholas and George organised a further expedition to Manchuria and China. Most of the family remained in Kulu until 1948, though the other son Svetoslav married the famous film star/producer Devika Rani and moved with her to a suburb of Bangalore. India was always a second homeland for the Roerichs and they were treated here with enormous respect. As the Secretary of

the Institute remarked: *“Roerich worked very conscientiously and methodically... I never saw him inactive, distracted or nervous.”* The people he met on walks through the valley called him ‘Maharishi’, ‘guru’ or ‘Gurudeva’, and he was deemed wise or a prophet. He continued to paint to his last days, always the mountains and holy places from his travels – monasteries, temples, deities, yogis, hermits and lamas. The family often dreamed of returning to Russia, impossible because of conditions in the Soviet Union, and Nicholas died in Kulu in 1947. On the spot of his funeral pyre, facing magnificent snowy peaks, a big rectangular stone was installed on which the following inscription was carved: *‘Here, on December 15th, 1947, the body of Maharishi Nicholas Roerich – a great Russian friend of India – was committed to fire. Let there be peace’.* His wife, and companion for almost 50 years, declared: *“he will come back in a better time, to a purified world, and will finish his sowing and service to all humanity.”* She would follow in 1955.

But that was not the end of the story. After the passing of Svetoslav in 1993 new groups began to appear claiming they were continuing the Roerichs’ mission by producing books on Agni Yoga, and saying that those written by Helena had become obsolete (the same thing happened, of course, with the works of Blavatsky and the earliest theosophical writers). One website creator also asserts that he is a reincarnation of Roerich living in Siberia (how many times have we heard of people alleging they are a reincarnation of Blavatsky?) There are also many spurious editions of the Agni Yoga books now available with enticing, attractive promises for the reader and teachings ‘from the highest source’. But we know that the Mahatmas have given out all that was permissible, though it is said there are manuscripts of Helena Roerich’s not yet published. But how can the Ageless Wisdom become obsolete? True, understanding of the Great Reality will grow in the coming centuries as we gradually advance towards that Divine ideal of truth, beauty and perfection... through spiritual development, creative ability and true brotherhood which are only achieved through many lifetimes.

Back in Russia the Soviets suppressed the Roerichs’ works because of the spiritual content (some people actually went to prison for owning them). But in the summer of 1989 things changed when Svetoslav proposed to the Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev, who had long been an admirer of the Roerichs, the creation of a Nicholas Roerich Centre and Museum in Moscow, together with a Foundation. When the building was finished Svetoslav presented the Russian people with paintings, family archives and his mother’s manuscripts to be put on display.



Courtesy of International Centre, Moscow (Museum by the Name of Roerich)

In Russia today, amidst great confusion, crime and corruption, there are many groups functioning from seeds sowed by the Roerichs, and I’ve been told there is no city without a Roerich study group, with thousands reading the books of Living Ethics, and others by Roerich and Blavatsky.

The devotional feeling is very intense and the Roerich groups create their own specific goals. 5,000 copies of Helena’s Russian translation of ‘The Secret Doctrine’ were printed by the Adyar Vasanta Press for distribution in Russia in 1991 and restoration work began at Isvara which now houses paintings, photographs, documents and Roerich’s archaeological finds in the neighbourhood.

Alongside the Roerich groups there was a recent First Congress of Russian theosophists in Novgorod, where Roerich did much of his early work, and before it the Second All-Russian Theosophical Conference in Moscow, with a hundred delegates from twelve Russian cities. Thus the work progresses, slowly and tirelessly; in Roerich's own words: *"The world is hastening towards reconstruction. Human hearts are tired of wrath. We pass here for mutual labour, for knowledge, for enlightenment. Let us then take hold of this Universal Light; let us achieve the transfiguration of the world, the pre-ordained, the pre-destined."*

'SHE WHO LEADS': THE INFLUENCE OF HELENA ROERICH

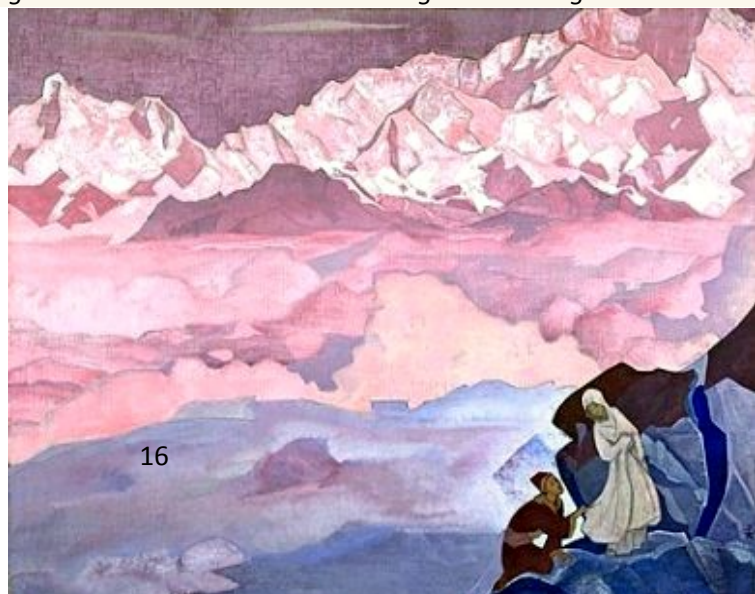


Elena Ivanovna Roerich, painted by Valentin Serov in 1909 (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)

In Roerich's iconography it is women who sustain universal culture and bring peace – an outlook which completely reflected Helena's own point of view. As she wrote to a friend in 1937: *'... Woman should realise that she herself contains all forces, and the moment she shakes off the age-old hypnosis of her seemingly lawful subjugation and mental inferiority and occupies herself with a manifold education, she will create in collaboration with man a new and better world... Cosmos affirms the greatness of woman's creative principle. Woman is a personification of nature, and it is nature that teaches man, not man nature. Therefore, may all women realise the grandeur of their origin, and may they strive for knowledge'* ('Letters of Helena Roerich', Vol. 2).

Many of Roerich's paintings resulted from her visionary ideas and intuition, depicted in the great female deities such as 'She Who Leads' (below), 'Madonna Oriflamma' and one of his most inspiring images, 'The Mother of the World' (see the following article). The union of Nicholas and Helena was a lifetime's collaboration, with mutual endeavours in the field of her Living Ethics, and she inspired him throughout his life. He dedicated his books to his *'wife, friend, travelling companion, inspirer! Together we worked, we studied, we broadened our consciousness.'*

But although her creative work in compiling the books on Living Ethics was so important, to help lead people to new heights of consciousness, she seemed very modest, a woman of feminine delicacy, charm and refinement, her features remaining young over the years. Yet she always displayed great courage in adversity. Whilst travelling on horseback during the expedition, suffering from frost and hunger, and with a weak heart, it was she who kept up the spirits of the others. As Roerich said: *"All difficulties and dangers were overcome under her vigilance and guidance. Her pulse was 140 but still she participated in settling all problems. Nobody ever saw a sign of low spirits or despair in her face... she was always ready to support, to cheer us up, to explain. You can't help wondering what gave her such strength, particularly bearing in mind her weak heart."* As their son Svetoslav recollected: *"Both in my father and mother there was the*



unique balance and harmony of two perfectly synchronized beings who realised the great ideal of life and lived their chosen path as a perfect example of dedication and fulfilment. Their radiant image always remains my greatest inspiration, my great source of happiness.”

Helena was not without her critics and detractors. In Kulu some locals believed that she was the sister of the last Russian Tsar, that she kept slaves and was the mother of a nest of spies for the Americans. A scathing Internet article calls her a false messenger of the Planetary Hierarchy, unable to convey knowledge, clarity of concepts or mental perspectives. But she wouldn't have let all this undermine her mission of conveying the Teachings in the 13 Agni Yoga books, the first one, 'Leaves of Morya's Garden', having been written in 1924 in America. Other books appeared using pseudonyms, showing her modesty, and the two volumes of Letters were written through the years to friends and aspirants all over the world. Many of these were concerned with the advancement of women, resulting in her often being labelled a feminist, but she was much more than this.

‘There exists a most ancient saying,’ she wrote, ‘Where women are revered and safeguarded, prosperity reigns and the gods rejoice. The New Epoch under the rays of Uranus will bring the renaissance of women. The Epoch of Maitreya is the Epoch of the Mother of the World...’ She said of herself: ‘I am fond of the word ‘warrior’ and admire every heroic and courageous deed... Every mother must bring up her children in the spirit of great deeds, heroism and self-denial for the General Good... Courage and fearlessness are the qualities which a disciple of the Masters of Light should develop... The approaching great Epoch is closely connected with the ascendancy of woman... to offer woman her rightful place alongside her fellow-traveller and co-worker... Remember that the grandeur of the Cosmos is built by the dual Origin... The woman who strives to knowledge and beauty, who realises her lofty responsibility, will greatly uplift the whole level of life and transmute the spiritual life of mankind...’

‘The mother, the life-giver, the life-protector – let her become also the Leader, the All-Giver, the All-Receiver. Where there is knowledge there is power. Ancient legends attribute to woman the role of the guardian of sacred knowledge. The Teaching says: “Woman, who gives life to people, has the right to govern their destiny. We want to see woman taking part in government, in the councils of ministers, in all constructive activity... It is woman’s intuition which should, again, as in the better periods of history, lead humanity on the path of progress... In the entire Cosmos there is no passive element. In the chain of creation each manifestation in its turn becomes relatively passive or active, giving or receiving. Cosmos affirms the greatness of woman’s creative principle.”’



Many of these pronouncements show that Helena was, indeed, a forerunner of the movement for female equality, though her brand of 'women's rights' was never associated with the more bizarre elements in the later 20th-century. She declared: *“The first task is to insist in all countries upon full rights and equal education... to develop thinking faculties and realise woman’s great destiny as a bearer of the higher energy. But she should not limit her self-sacrifice to the narrow concept of home life, but apply it on a world-scale.”*

It is interesting to note that the three main people who have conveyed the esoteric teachings were all women: H.P. Blavatsky, Alice A. Bailey and Helena Roerich, each with a common purpose – to end separation, create brotherhood in humanity and help develop the freedom necessary to pursue spiritual goals, in order to learn the necessary techniques needed to communicate with the Higher Forces in the Cosmos. The Roerich family, inspired and led by Helena, was a prototype of a family of

the future when the spiritualisation of everyday life will become an integral part of a *way of life*. Then a family will be able, like the Roerichs, to fulfil creative accomplishments and increase the level of consciousness in many people around them.

‘THE MOTHER OF THE WORLD’

Besides the Himalayas, a powerful concept influencing Roerich’s paintings relates to the idea of ‘The Mother of the World’, which in India is associated with Sita or Durga as *Jagatjanani*. ‘*The New Epoch,*’ said Helena, ‘*must manifest due respect to the Mother of the World, to the Feminine element. “The bird of the spirit of Humanity cannot fly with only one wing” – these are the words of Vivekananda, who meant to affirm the great significance of the Feminine Principle... The star of the Mother of the World is the planet Venus. In 1924 this planet for a short time came unusually near, pouring its rays on Earth and creating new powerful and sacred combinations to yield great results. Feminine movements were kindled by these powerful rays.*’

Many regard the World Mother as an exalted office in the Hierarchy, functioning at the planetary and cosmic levels and held in the past by a number of entities, such as the Egyptian goddess Isis. Thus The Mother is one of many archetypes through which the Divine Feminine has manifested, and she is described as expressing beauty, tenderness, grace, sacrifice, purity and joy. She is also involved in service to humanity and the natural world through her nurturing qualities, always inspiring people to undertake world service. Greater awareness of the Divine Feminine emerged with the appearance of H.P. Blavatsky, Mary Baker Eddy, Helena Roerich, Dion Fortune and Alice Ann Bailey – those at the forefront of the esoteric teachings. Helena Roerich in particular was influenced in her early years by the reverential tradition of Sophia, the expression of Divine Wisdom in the Russian Orthodox Church.



In the painting she is veiled, to conceal the mysteries as yet unrevealed to humanity, but now is the time for it to be lifted and for her to participate in human affairs this century. In 1928 Annie Besant declared March 24th (the Feast of the Annunciation) to be World Mother Day, whilst Geoffrey Hodson described her as an archangel, the embodiment on earth of the Feminine Aspect of the Deity and an Adept in the Inner Government of the World... womanhood and motherhood in their fullest perfection, whilst undertaking the role of the birth of Christ consciousness and a new World Order of environmental and social harmony. Now there are almost 80,000 Internet websites devoted to her. Roerich’s blues here are the tone of eternity, explained by the Byzantine Church Fathers as a yearning for heavenly joys, and the figure displays the light-bearing essence which radiates from within her. She is enclosed in a cloak embroidered with flora and fauna, highlighting her concern for the natural world, and she is cushioned on a semi-circular stone throne. The river of life flows beneath her and her hands are formed in prayer. Tiny

figures of light (golden bodhisattvas) twinkle like stars in the background and two females kneel in

adoration before her – one Western, the other Eastern as symbols of unity. As Roerich said: *“To both East and West, the image of the Great Mother is the bridge of ultimate unification.”*

ROERICH ON THE POWER OF ART



'Tibet', 1933

'Art will unify all humanity. Art is one – indivisible. Art has its many branches, yet all are one. Art is the manifestation of the coming synthesis, Art is for all. Everyone will enjoy true art. The Gates of the 'Sacred Source' must be wide open for everybody, and the light of art will influence numerous hearts with a new love. At first this feeling will be unconscious, but after all it will purify human consciousness. How many young hearts are searching for something real and beautiful! So, give it to them. Bring art to the people – where it belongs. We should have not only museums, theatres, universities, public libraries, railway stations, and hospitals, but even prisons decorated and beautified. Then we shall have no more prisons.

'The values of great art are victoriously traversing all storms of earthly commotions. Even the 'earthly' people already understand the vital importance of active beauty. And when we proclaim: Love, Beauty, and Action, we know verily that we pronounce the formula of the international language. And this formula, which now belongs to the museum and stage, must enter everyday life. The sign of beauty will open all sacred gates. Beneath the sign of beauty we walk joyfully. With beauty we conquer, through beauty we pray, in beauty we are united. And now we pronounce these words – not on the snowy heights, but amidst the turmoil of the city. And realising the path of true reality, we greet with a happy smile the future.'

– Nicholas Roerich

Over two thousand years ago, Plato gave us this message:

'From beautiful images we shall go to beautiful thoughts,

**from beautiful thoughts to a beautiful life,
and from a beautiful life to absolute beauty.'**

THEOSOPHY AND AGNI YOGA

by Natalia Kovaliova, PhD

This Russian author of numerous writings on Agni Yoga, Theosophy and Helena & Nicholas Roerich is also a member of the Russian Theosophical Society. This is a shortened version of her Website article.

About thirty-five years after the publication of 'The Secret Doctrine', the Roerich family set about recording the new teaching, which continues to explain the main themes of Theosophy, but in a rather different, more practical manner. This teaching became known as Agni Yoga or Living Ethics. Master M. transmitted the teaching to Helena Ivanovna Roerich, and it was recorded by her in 1924-1938. Subsequently, in letters to her followers, Helena Roerich wrote multi-volume comments and explanations on the Agni Yoga Teaching, which is now extremely popular in Russia.

The close link between Theosophy and Agni Yoga is beyond doubt: the same concepts and principles, the same methods, the same interpretation of the most important metaphysical laws. In the words of M.: "One may well ask what the connection is between our new Teaching and our previous Teaching that we handed down via Blavatsky. Tell everybody that every hundred years, after the emergence of a profound revelation, a final culmination is granted, which actually moves the world along a more human path. Thus our new teaching completes Blavatsky's 'Secret Doctrine'. This was the case when Christianity served as a culmination for the universal wisdom of the classical world, and the commandments of Moses served as a culmination for the wisdom of ancient Egypt and Babylon. It is only necessary to understand the significance of key teachings. The only thing we desire is that people should not only read our books, but that they should accept them immediately, since I am very concise regarding what has to be remembered." ('The Fiery World', Part 2, 79)

The connection can be seen from the themes highlighted in the two Teachings: Theosophy explains the theoretical basis of the Mahatmas' Teachings, ontology, cosmogony, philosophical anthropology and the teaching of evolution. The Agni Yoga Teaching examines the practical aspects of spiritual self-improvement; this Teaching is significantly devoted to ethics and psychology. Furthermore, if Theosophy, by virtue of its metaphysical depth and complexity, was originally geared towards society's intellectual élite, the Agni Yoga Teaching (with the exception, perhaps, of the complex book 'Infinity') is accessible to a wider section of society. The basic philosophical/ethical principles of this Teaching are described in a fashion reminiscent of the *Jataka* – a type of ancient Indian philosophical literature that refers to fables and parables that are accessible to people of any level of development (this type of teaching – i.e. speaking about complicated things in a simple way – was especially peculiar to Ramakrishna).

In the books there is no traditional classification of material in terms of specific problems or issues, and there are no chapters or sections. The books (with the exception of the two volumes of the first book of the Living Ethics – 'Leaves of Morya's Garden') are divided into paragraphs, each of which is devoted to one, two or three topics. Agni Yoga is characterised by a unique way of explaining material, which its authors describe as 'spiral'. The texts represent a series of specific themes and problems, which are examined from various viewpoints in separate paragraphs. Furthermore, with each new paragraph material that is devoted to some specific concept or theme subsequently becomes more complex and profound. It is obvious that the purpose of this textual structure is to strive to adapt rather complex philosophical material to the consciousness of a reader who does not

have any special training in the sphere of esoteric, Indo-Tibetan philosophy. The sequence of Teaching and the gradual complication of the structured material thus correspond to the universal principle of any teaching system – from the simple to the complex. Agni Yoga says the following about this system of explaining materials: *‘the spiral reading of books on the Teaching – when these books should be read one after the other in sequential order – is more productive, since in such instances the consciousness follows a pattern of growth and deepened understanding of the Teaching’* (‘Facets of Agni Yoga’). Furthermore, the sequence of specific themes and concepts in the texts creates a particular state of consciousness in the reader’s mind, which activates his/her spiritual intuition. One of the specific features that characterises the internal structure of the Agni Yoga texts is their semantic significance and – if we can put it this way – multi-layered structure. Each paragraph comprises a number of levels of understanding of the problems considered – from the most simple, superficial level to the most profound, which embodies a sacred, esoteric meaning. Accordingly, every reader is able to interpret the knowledge set out at the level which corresponds to his personal spiritual and intellectual development.

The reason for presenting the material in this way is to ensure that the most sacred aspects of the Teaching reveal themselves and become more accessible each time he/she re-reads the Agni Yoga books. In the foreword to the first book, ‘Leaves of Morya’s Garden: The Calling’, it says: *‘Dear reader, if you don’t understand, wait a while and then read again.’* Nevertheless, the information which has not been stored in the conscious mind is a property of the ‘super-conscious’ level of understanding. Moreover, the intuitive-spiritual origin of humankind, without our being aware of it, assimilates the received information and, thanks to this process, what the reader cannot understand at the first impression may become accessible with repeated readings. Then he/she may feel to be encountering the texts for the first time, or has somehow missed out some paragraph in the book during that initial reading.

It is said in the Living Ethics Teaching: *‘You can read this teaching many times, and as your consciousness expands, you can find ever newer thoughts in it: even if the consciousness has been able to expand to some degree since the last reading, something completely new will always be found. If the consciousness has not expanded, but remained at the same level, any subsequent reading will yield nothing, and it won’t be interesting to read it. Therefore, when your spirit is growing, every time you re-read the Teaching, it will provide you with ever-newer revelations’* (‘Facets of Agni Yoga’).

Though it focuses generally on ethics and psychology, the Agni Yoga Teaching nevertheless presents very diverse themes (as is the case with Theosophy). Among the themes that are particularly interesting and topical for the modern reader, one might mention changes to the human Race, the higher energy centres of consciousness, contacts (both conscious and unconscious) with the Subtle World, the psycho-energetic potential of consciousness, and the spiritual aspects of creativity. But probably the most fascinating topic described in detail in Agni Yoga is the spiritual activity of the White Brotherhood. In theosophical literature this theme has been hardly touched upon, since at that time the Mahatmas themselves did not reveal this topic. Even Blavatsky herself did not generally write about the supernatural abilities of the Adepts, but this topic, not revealed to a wide readership, was unexpectedly written about in detail in the Agni Yoga Teaching, in the two last and largest volumes (from the whole series – **The Brotherhood** and **Supermundane**, which were dedicated to that mysterious Retreat, Shambhala). The information contained in these two books is truly unique. If you wish to appreciate its merits, you have to read them yourself: simply to say that the information given is enthralling is to state nothing ...

One other theme – which is perhaps the most topical in a social sense – is the period of cosmic-planetary change, to which we will become witnesses in the near future. Since the theme of the

imminent Apocalypse has been discussed in society for many years, I would like to mention briefly the views of the Agni Yoga writers on this issue. According to the Teaching, the new cosmic period, which began at the turn of the third millennium, will be characterized by unusual astronomical phenomena that will, in turn, result in sudden changes to the natural environment. As far back as 1934, Elena Roerich wrote: *'Cosmic cataclysms occur as the result of a deviation to the earth's axis. Today, scientists are able to record with considerable accuracy this ever-continuing deviation, which still threatens to cause disasters'*. A number of modern astronomers and physicists consider that the effect on the earth of this so-called 'parade of the planets' began to make itself felt in the second half of 2003, and that future consequences of this phenomenon will be ever more severe. The result of the new astronomical position of the planets will be serious natural and cosmic changes, first of all a change to the tilt of the earth's axis. And in both ancient prophesies and in the forecasts of modern specialists, it is claimed that this process will result in the north and south poles changing position. The celestial map (i.e. the location of the constellations above the planet) will also change, and new celestial bodies will come closer to the Earth. As a result, the Earth's electro-magnetic field will become full of new, super-powerful cosmic forces, which will be a new phenomenon for the Earth's inhabitants.

How will the new energy affect people? It is claimed in the Agni Yoga teaching that its effect on each specific individual will be determined by the moral-spiritual level of his/her development. This conclusion may seem strange to many people, but according to esoteric doctrines of the East, everything in the world constitutes, first and foremost, various types of energy. Human consciousness is also a type of energy field, which may or may not correspond to energies reaching our planet from space. The thoughts and feelings of people are basically energy-bearing, and this Agni Yoga axiom has been confirmed by modern science. Such thoughts and feelings are not only weak electrical brain impulses, but also the result of powerful cosmic energies that accumulate in the human bio-field and in the aura of the whole planet. The qualitative nature of people's thought energies (and at the same time their impact on the whole environment) is determined by the moral content of their thinking. An altruistic frame of mind, a striving towards goodness, love and mutual assistance are liable to help people and all living things on the planet. Self-perfection and following high moral ideals engender in the human micro-cosmos high-vibrational and pure energy, like the type of energy reaching the Earth from space. On the other hand, base and selfish thoughts and feelings in a spiritual sense are at a low vibrational level, the diametric opposite of the new cosmic energies.

It is explained in Agni Yoga that new energies may be assimilated (i.e. taken in and processed in an individual's micro-cosmos) only by spiritually developed people, whose bodies and bio-poles have not been contaminated by negative psycho-energies. People whose consciousness radiates positive, high-vibrational thought-energy into their surroundings will be spiritually prepared to assimilate new cosmic influences. But individuals that have brought negative karma upon themselves, i.e. selfish and immoral people, risk becoming the victims of new illnesses that are unknown to medical science. The cause of these illnesses will be the elementary conflict between high-vibrational cosmic energy, which reaches this planet, and low-vibrational energies in the human aura. In the ancient prophesies the highest cosmic energy was called 'the Fire' (in Sanskrit 'Agni', which also gave the Agni Yoga teaching its name). Pneumonia, which has recently afflicted a number of countries and, as scientists have warned, will definitely return, is one type of particularly dangerous fiery illness that the authors of the Living Ethics warned humanity about. In Agni Yoga, this illness is called 'plague of the lungs' and has afflicted the planet on more than one occasion, thus preparing the consciousness for the possibility of a disaster. Strange types of cough that you've heard about are also similar to this illness. Everywhere the illness affects children, adults and even animals. But people do not want to pay heed to this preparatory manifestation of a terrible disaster. They superficially regard it as any

one of a number of diverse illnesses, rather than considering it as anything unusual, but it was mentioned in the Agni Yoga books as far back as 1933...

It is possible that the ancient tales of a purifying cosmic fire blazing down onto the Earth to destroy all evil and to free the Earth from depravity are not as naïve as they appear at first glance. It sometimes merely suffices to substitute the word 'energy' for 'fire' for the purpose of comprehending the ancient philosophical writings in scientific terms. So this very factor – the emergence of new cosmic energies in the planet's aura – will be the main reason for natural cataclysms, which will be inevitable during the change of cosmic eras. Most people don't even suspect that it's not just physical factors – i.e. global warming, climate change etc. – that play a very important role in upsetting the balance of nature: psycho-energy factors also play their part. The energy of negative thoughts and feelings, when radiated into space by human beings, de-stabilizes the Earth's aura, which in the end results in even more catastrophic ecological disasters... earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, regular floods, unusually powerful and frequent hurricanes, terrible forest fires, unprecedented variations in the climate, etc.

As explained in the Agni Yoga teaching, negative thoughts and feelings have led to a stifling accumulation of negative energy in the Earth's aura. The emergence in this aura of high-vibration cosmic energies which are not compatible with humanity's low-vibration psychic energies will result in an even greater upset to the balance of natural phenomena – mainly unprecedented seismic activity and, as a result, dangerous natural cataclysms. Therefore, the Authors of the Living Ethics think that the most 'striking feature' of the Apocalypse will not be natural changes in the environment, but rather the low level of spiritual development of the greater part of humanity, which may result in cataclysms and deaths of a huge number of people.

At the same time, as the writers of the Teaching emphasize, it would be a mistake only to see the negative aspect of the changes faced by our planet. The Living Ethics, unlike religious teachings, do not consider the period of transition from one Cosmic Era to another to be the 'end of the world'. The Mahatmas state that the emergence of a new energy in the Earth's aura will purge the planet of anti-evolutionary forces and bring about a new, progressive era in the development of both the planet and humanity. According to Agni Yoga, after the period of global, natural and social-spiritual changes that face society, the new bright epoch of Satya Yuga will come into being. To sum up, it must be stated clearly that, in bestowing their teaching on the world, the Mahatmas wanted, first and foremost, to warn humanity about impending natural changes and thereby to help people to survive a difficult time of transition from one Cosmic Era to another. For this very reason, Agni Yoga has a very clear, practical purpose and any new Teaching of the Mahatmas is intimately linked with Theosophy and needs to be assimilated by theosophists. (Courtesy of Urednik-Editor, see webmaster@teozofija.info)



'Maitreya', 1932

ROERICH'S 'THE BURNING OF DARKNESS'



This is one of many paintings in which a Casket is depicted. In a beautiful landscape of deep blues we see a ritual with three Mahatmas present – perhaps indicative of the Three Major Rays (of Will – Love – Wisdom). The figures have descended a row of steps leading down from the cave. In the sky we see the constellation of Orion. The scene itself is where the Star Sirius would be. This could be a hint that the ritual is taking place here because Sirius is connected with the spiritual Hierarchy of the White Lodge, according to H.P. Blavatsky and Alice Bailey. The casket contains treasures, the most obvious of which is the radiating light that illumines the darkness. The ancients linked the fire sign of Leo to the heart whilst the Tibetans associate the heart chakra to the element of Fire – or Agni in the Vedic tradition. In a Gnostic vein, within the 'cave of the heart' the Christ Child is born; that is, within the Heart Chakra the birth of the spiritual Light of Divine Love takes place, illuminating our own darkness alongside the darkness of the outer world.

The constellation of Orion is low down in the sky, which is the position where it was worshipped in Egypt as being the beginning of its cycle. Orion is also one of the two constellations that the Great Pyramid is oriented towards. The casket contains sacred gifts from another world that will doubtless assist in the burning of darkness (perhaps even this dark Kali Yuga Age) in order that there can be an entry point for these supermundane energies to enter into the consciousness of earth's humanity. The coming New World Teacher Maitreya, some say, also comes from Sirius.

One of the figures in the group has a beard, very similar to that of Roerich himself. Yet another looks distinctly feminine, possibly intimating that during their trans-Himalayan journey the Roerichs were present at such a profound ritual. The landscape and the night sky merge into one, which might be a subtle way of informing us that this event is either at one with the Cosmic Divine Will, or that visitors and spiritual vibrations from Sirius have manifested here on earth. The colour blue, meanwhile, awakens religious feelings whilst also conveying a beautiful deep peace of the spirit. The treasure valued by the creators of the casket is that of spiritual light... divine fire... agni, over and above material or worldly treasures. With the birth of the cosmic fire within our hearts, we may each act to broadcast the light from the spiritual realms and thus raise the vibrations of this dark planet. So mote it be. – Frank Perry

ROERICH'S PHILOSOPHY OF FIRE

The ancient Slavs conceived human origin as being from fire – with the sun, the mountain top and fire pictured as the cauldron from which has sprung the Slav Race. Roerich had a similar approach in his artworks, saying *“Create in flame as nature creates,”* which determined his thoughts and attitudes. *“Even the Lord of Shambhala is a Fiery Mover of Life and of the Fire of the Mother of the World,”* he declared. *“His Breath glows with flame and His Heart burns with the fire of the Silvery Lotus.”*



'Fiery Thoughts', 1930, courtesy of Chitra Art Gallery, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India

Every Eastern country shares the thought of fiery gods and heroes. The Persians had Mithras, the Egyptians their solar god Horus, the Greeks Apollo with his aureole of golden hair and whose chariot was the sun. Pythagoras said *‘The body of God is composed of the substance of light,’* whilst Vishnu was the Hindu sun god and the Armenians had a fire god named Mihr, with their hero King Vahagn said to have been born out of a flaming lake, his name coming from the Sanskrit Vah (to bring) and agni (fire). In the Rig-Veda the god Agni, with flaming hair and golden beard, is born from the rising sun to the accompaniment of thunder and lightning, and in the cults of Zoroaster there is represented the Chalice with a flame, the same flaming chalice that was engraved upon the ancient Hebrew silver shekels in the time of Solomon. In the book *‘Altai-Himalaya’* Roerich observed how Hindu excavations have revealed the same powerfully stylized image, with the Bodhisattvas seen holding the chalice blossoming with tongues of flame, reminding one of the Druid Chalice of

Life and the Holy Grail, all in the language of pure fire. This is not something abstract, living only in the mind and reason, but *in the heart* as something vital and life-bearing... *‘Agni Omniscient and all-ascending, all-penetrating, and before which human word is superfluous.’* (*‘Realm of Light’*, p. 2).

These legends and ancient philosophies were the inspiration for so many of Roerich's paintings, not imitating nature like the academic Western artists but taking the Eastern approach, seeing the reality behind the appearance and opening the soul to beauty, to become one with nature. He produced scenes that are recognisable but have become entirely new creations, beauty by suggestion. In a passage from an Essay, 'Nicholas Roerich', Garabed Paelian declares: *'One does not tire of the presence of such a painting, for its value increases with the owner's relative spiritual development... That which it expresses is limited to no race or country. Such vision can have no boundaries (and belongs) to humanity.'*

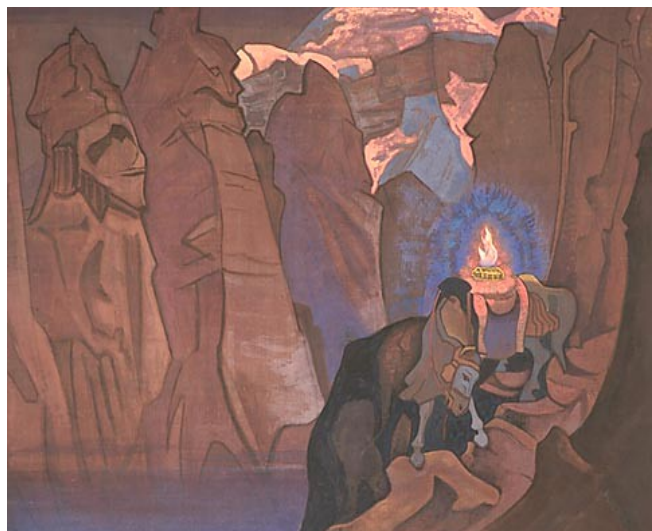
Dale Jordan, writing in 'Meditation Monthly International' in June 1994, had this to say about the Philosophy of Fire. *'Spiritually, the fiery forces of our being do reflect a minute portion of the transcendent radiance and ineffable luminosity of the central All-Consuming-Fire that God is said to be... since we are, in fact, such sparks in the Great Flame of life... Evolving artistic awareness can bestow receptivity to Beauty, which leads us to the higher worlds and adds fuel to our spiritual Fire... In the Teachings of Living Ethics, or Agni Yoga, it is written, 'the pledge of happiness for humanity lies in beauty. Hence, We assert Art to be the highest stimulus for the regeneration of the spirit.'* Art remains essentially spiritual. It can awaken our longing for Beauty, for the Highest. The greatest significance of Art is its ability to bring the human consciousness closer to the comprehension of Beauty'.

Agni stands for both creative and destructive spiritual fire, and the practice of Agni Yoga, or fiery yoga, is a method to bring spiritual fire into consciousness. It is also about the power of thought — that energy underlying all energy, the most powerful force in the Universe. The Fiery World, sometimes called the Highest World, is the world of the Spirit, the realm beyond the astral. Fiery energy is accumulated through striving toward perfection and devotion. The accumulation of

fiery, or spiritual energy, makes possible ascension into the higher spheres.

The practice of Agni Yoga brings spiritual consciousness into the moment. But there are no mantras, asanas, or meditations, and there is no teacher or Master. Helena Roerich wrote: *'Many are still convinced that it is permissible to approach the higher Sources through dead rituals and repetitions of senseless mantrams [whose] value lies only in rhythm. Nothing external, without the inner striving, can be of real value. Rituals, if they are beautiful, can assist in creating a certain exalted mood, but it is impossible to look upon them as an independent, self-sufficient condition for spiritual ascent.'*

'Burning of Darkness' (above) shows the sacred fire being carried from inside the mountain, and 'Treasure of the World – Chintamani' of 1924 similarly illustrates Roerich's belief in the Divine fire (Agni). We see a pony transporting the sacred stone Chintamani down a mountain pass, with the surroundings illuminated by the casket's brilliant blue flame. As the Tibetan legend declares, this is the preparation for the New Era when human consciousness will be illumined and the army of Rigden Djapo, Ruler of Shambhala, working under the Banner of Light, will defeat the forces of darkness. But the story behind this image



now takes a mysterious and fantastic turn, especially when Roerich was determined to carry this

stone, or 'wish-fulfilling jewel' (spoken of in both Hindu and Buddhist traditions) into the heart of Central Asia during the expedition, and he also believed it to be of extra-terrestrial origin.

When, in 1912, Roerich had presented 'A Kiss to the Earth' (with the large oak tree – see above) as the design for Act One's setting of 'The Rite' it was criticised by Diaghilev. So Roerich chose instead a background of the sacred stone of the elders with its large boulder... very similar to the one found in Mongolia known as 'The Silver Camel' or 'Saddle', showing that he had seen photographs of this large stone, generally identified as moldavite, a large meteorite that had fallen to earth many



centuries ago. So was the Chintamani Stone a fragment of a large meteorite? In Frank Perry's commentary on 'Burning of Darkness', the Star Sirius was mentioned and legend has it that emissaries from that system came to Earth many thousands of years ago and presented the Stone to the current Ruler of Shambhala, intent upon promoting a civilisation based on unity, love and equality.

With Helena's psychic guidance Roerich discovered a Sanskrit message engraved upon it, which was translated to read: *'Through the Stars I come. I bring the chalice covered with the shield. With it I bring a treasure, the gift of Orion.'* Roerich had heard from his guides on the expedition many stories about treasures from the dawn of history secreted in the mountain fastnesses, and the guides also believed that such a stone could increase a person's 'higher vibratory rate' to allow him or her to see into the past and the future. But wherever the truth lies, in order to separate fact from fantasy and legend, a further mystery remains: did Roerich reach Shambhala or only Shigatse's Tashilumpo Monastery, the headquarters of the Panchen Lama and the location where Blavatsky had studied with the Masters? Yet another legend states that there are many underground tunnels connecting the Monastery with Shambhala and the Great White Brotherhood, a legend depicted in other paintings by Roerich.

You may ask, quite rightly, how can we possibly pursue further lines of inquiry, when so much in the Teaching lies beyond the ordinary, everyday, mundane way of thinking? Meanwhile the stone given to Roerich in 1923 (possibly by a member of the League of Nations, with an interest in a united world free of hatred and warfare) appears to have travelled with them, perhaps acting as an inspiration or even an 'instrument' for Helena's psychic work during their travels, and to communicate with the Master Morya. Certainly Roerich had great belief in the talismanic powers of sacred stones in his life's work to aid humanity, believing this one to be charged with psychic force to increase spiritual vitality. He believed, too, when he heard the constant cries from monks encountered in Tibet and Mongolia: *"It is the time of Shambhala!"*, that Rigden Djapo would, with his forces, somehow bring about a transformative process to destroy evil, using the power emanating from Shambhala to further the evolution of all life on this planet, leading to the dawn of a New Age for mankind when the ethical ideas in the Teachings will be established and a new consciousness will come into being. Many people today are working with those ideas, so the paintings, as well as the Agni Yoga teachings, are there to inspire, uplift and help establish this transformation.

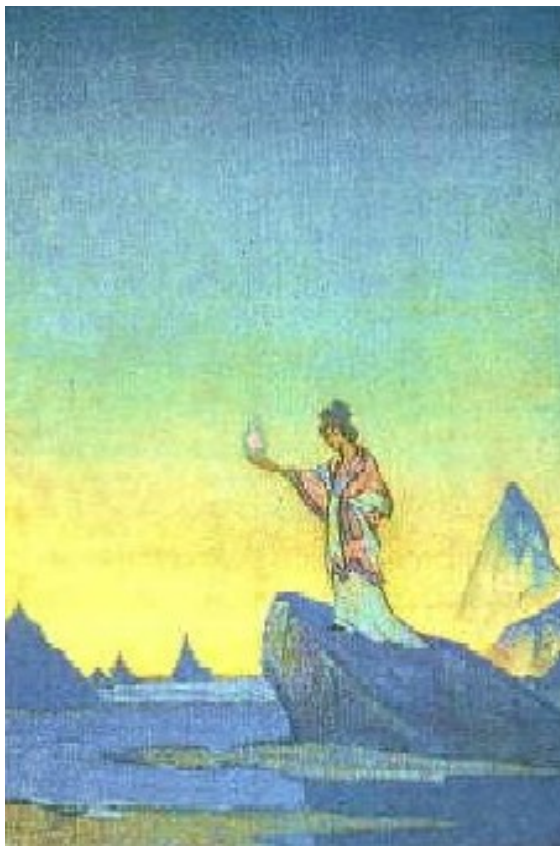


'Book of Wisdom', 1924

A TESTIMONIAL

Yet again we are turning the pages of the books of Agni Yoga. Like many times before, at significant moments in our personal lives or in the world around us, we are searching in these books for solace, encouragement and wisdom. And we are finding all we searched for and much more. This Yoga operates with the finest fiery energy of the universe, Agni (see Roerich's 1929 painting below).

Agni Yoga is a teaching of spiritual philosophy, of a synthesis that embraces science, ethics, art and culture, as Oriental as Western from the point of view of esoteric knowledge. It gives a multi-faceted



view of life on Earth as in different places and dimensions of the universe, and it lights up many aspects of universal Truth. The very goal of Agni Yoga is to show us the way of inner transformation and evolution into the higher states of spirituality. Just open any of the books and find advice on your spiritual path, on health and spiritual practice, on a possible psychological problem with explanations on how it is connected with the current world condition, and much more.

Agni Yoga doesn't feed us with niceties, but we can find answers to a lot of our questions. It is a rigorous teaching of selflessness, courage, compassion and sacrifice, also of collaboration and co-creation, of collective action and personal heroism, of scientific discoveries and self-discovery, of aspiration and achievement. *'Understand the*

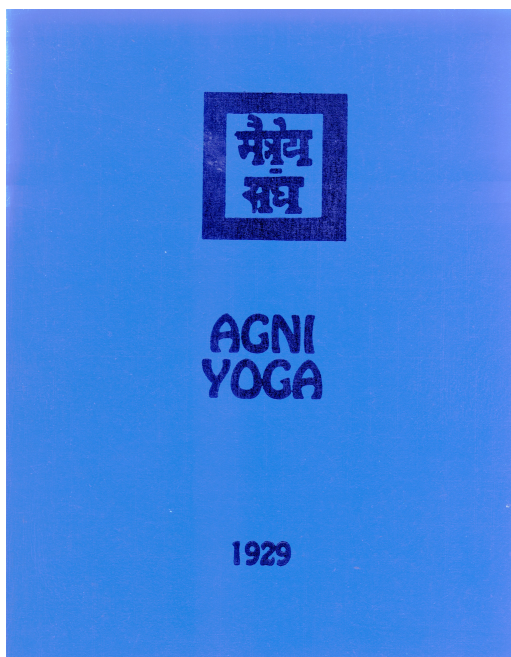
beneficence of fiery joy. It expands the consciousness, and draws all the best accumulations toward itself, as a fiery magnet. The essence of man is transformed and his outworn nature is burned away ('Supermundane' IV).

This is a teaching of esoteric science, with its strict laws and mechanisms, with the abundance of treasures of wisdom here and there. And the Heart Chalice behind the physical heart, full of Love energy, is proclaimed as the source of everything a human being is able to achieve. Agni Yoga also gives us some glimpses into the future of humanity, and it is of particular interest because the Master is speaking from the strata of existence where time is different than here in our solid world and it allows him to see the future much more clearly than us, though we also have the potential to become conscious observers and co-creators of the future. However, *'only devotion and understanding of the wisdom of the Plan insure the reality of the pictures of the future'* ('Leaves of Morya's Garden, Illumination'). Understanding of the Plan helps us to become aware of the wholeness and meaningfulness of our life in its past, present and future.

It is impossible to review all aspects of Agni Yoga, but there is a possibility for everyone to read and enjoy it in its fullness, either as a hard copy or by downloading it from the webpage of the Agni Yoga Society (www.agniyoga.org). We highly recommend these books for anyone interested in understanding the working of the world.

— Roza and Margarita Riaikenen

MAITREYA SANGHA



On the book covers of all the Agni Yoga books you will find this inscription, Maitreya Sangha, which is no mere decorative ornament and appeared for the first time in the fourth book, 'Agni Yoga' of 1929. Helena Roerich, in a 1934 letter, wrote of how Gautama Buddha, speaking to Ananda, his disciple, said: *"I am neither the first Buddha to come on the Earth nor will I be the last... At the right time another Buddha, an incomparable leader of mankind, a ruler over heaven and earth... will put his law into force. His disciples will number many thousands. He will be known as Maitreya."*

So already Buddha announced the future Maitreya and all over the world we find myths, doctrines and prophecies with the same theme – all talking of a hidden kingdom from which a god-like redeemer will come forth in a dark period when discord and destruction have brought about an unbearable state in the world. Many of Roerich's paintings and writings

point the way to this event... how the Hindus await Kalki Avatara, an incarnation of Vishnu, who, on a white horse, will destroy the wicked with a flaming sword and restore Dharma; how the Tibetans and Mongolians are awaiting Gesar, the future hero and deliverer associated with Shambhala.

The Vishnu Purana describes the drastic state of affairs, identified as the Kali Yuga or end times, and one can easily recognise our present time and the alarming circumstances all over the world being spoken of here: *'Prosperity and devoutness will decrease day by day until the world has been completely ruined. Possessions alone will decide rank. Only riches can ensure devotion. Passion will*

be the only link between the sexes, falsity the only way to success. Women will be degraded to objects of lust.’ But the teaching tells us that ‘when the practices taught by the Vedas and the institutes of law shall have nearly ceased, an aspect of that Divine Being who exists in the character of Brahma shall descend upon the earth. By his irresistible might he will destroy... all whose minds are devoted to iniquity. He will then re-establish righteousness and the minds of those who live at the end of the Kali Age shall be awakened, and shall be as pellucid as crystal.’

Maitreya, ‘The Loving One’, is expected as the final earthly Buddha. When will that be? ‘The Secret Doctrine’ says: *‘This belief and this expectation are widely spread throughout the East. But a new saviour will never appear in Kali Yuga, our present terribly materialistic age of darkness, the black age.’* So opinions differ but the Living Ethics speak of the Age of Maitreya, the Age of the Struggle, and that no other name will evoke as many attacks as that of Maitreya because it is associated with the future. On many effigies his feet are on the ground, indicating his readiness to appear as the coming Teacher of the World.

So what does ‘Maitreya Sangha’ mean? Literally translated in the Hindu tradition Sangha means *crowd* or *throng*; that is, a group gathering around a Master to attain spiritual knowledge and realization of the highest truth. In Buddhism Sangha stands for the Buddhist community to which both monks and nuns, as well as novices and lay followers, belong so that Maitreya Sangha means ‘Maitreya’s Community’. The present teaching emphasizes the importance of fellowship and community to accelerate the evolution of the planet and the conquest of matter. *‘The basis of community is scientifically confirmed, and each principle expressed by a community will be activated by conformity with the World Community... One must reorganise all human undertakings in order that the consciousness may approach the Community of the World... Only a broadened consciousness can give an invincible formula for community. When the world is convulsed, the sign of Maitreya is given as an antidote. When the foundation of Our Works has been laid, the forces of the spirit have been strengthened. Thus the sign of Maitreya has been affirmed... Wisdom in all, co-operation in all shall accompany the Age of Maitreya... Brotherhood, once established, is inviolable... During all existences Brothers will meet together and affirm labour in common. One should rejoice at such a possibility, which will not be exhausted throughout the ages.’*

Thus Maitreya Sangha means that people who today walk the path of the Living Ethics, and in this life meet one another on the Path, must have met many times before in other lives and *will* meet again and again – as groups united in the Brotherhood of Maitreya. But they are often not aware of it. In the rarest of cases they recognize one another or they have a faint idea of realising a close connection to a particular person. It is surely one of the greatest moments in an individual’s life when, in an instant, he or she recognizes someone from another life and sees the unbreakable bond joining the two of them.

Therefore let us recognize one another in the conviction that Light conquers Darkness. The struggle, the Armageddon is already underway and only appears to be a struggle for material predominance, but in reality is a struggle against the power of fanaticism and the ego, in order to create that sense of community, true brotherhood and spiritual supremacy. A huge network stretches around the world creating points of encounter, co-operation, responsibility and knowledge. No-one who knows can escape this responsibility and the emissaries of Light have become countless.



'Mount of Five Treasures', 1933

THE ROERICH MUSEUM, NEW YORK

I cannot claim, like so many people I've met, that I came to New York on a pilgrimage to spend some time at the Museum, though before this visit I *had* devoted almost a lifetime to a study of Roerich's works alongside those of H.P. Blavatsky. But I was invited to this city to lecture at the Theosophical Centre on Theosophy, and imagine my surprise when no one I spoke to had actually been to the Museum at 319 West 107th Street, just as most New Yorkers seem completely unaware of its existence. But that address was indelibly woven into my consciousness and I was delighted when a lovely black lady-member of the Centre, who also had never visited it, volunteered to take me there. It wasn't a quick journey by car through the endless stop-and-start traffic, and we were unsure if it would still be open when we finally arrived, but the Roerich flag fluttering outside allayed any fears.

This building was constructed in 1898 and is very narrow due to a high tax being imposed on the front of buildings facing the street at that time. That's why most of them are restricted in width but stretch a long way back. If a house in this area *does* have normal proportions, it is evidence of the wealth of the first owner. Today's tall, sky-high buildings, characteristic everywhere in New York (and not very beautiful), were also impossible to erect here because the buildings were declared important landmarks.

The inside of the Museum definitely shows the need of some renovation, but we were not interested in the décor, statues of the Buddha or red velvet chairs – only the wonderful colours bursting from the 150 paintings on all three floors. As we gazed in wonder at the Himalayan vistas that seemed to echo the messages contained in Roerich's writings, we were hardly aware of the music coming from a grand piano, a Brahms Sonata being played in the middle of one gallery by a

concert pianist, to add yet another dimension to the viewing experience. But why wasn't he playing some Skryabin, Roerich's Russian contemporary who was also a student of Theosophy?



What a wonderful place to spend a couple of hours, only a few blocks from Riverside Park and easy to reach by subway. There is no admission charge but a suggested donation is \$5 and, as you can see, there are postcards, prints and books to buy there. My companion came away with many of these, determined to pay more than one visit with her fellow theosophists. Her enthusiasm suggested that she will have no trouble persuading them, and my daughter, who has studied most of Roerich's works, says: *"My only reason for going to New York would be to visit the Roerich Museum."*

– Alan Senior

'THE MASTER'S COMMAND'

In Blavatsky's 'Collected Writings', Vol. III, p. 40, we read of recluses in the Himalayas who dwell at heights of 15,000 feet or more. These icy and inaccessible places are said to harbour *'men of venerable presence, permanently engaged in sacred pursuits... quite unknown to the world.'* Preparative yogic training allows them to reside there *'without serious discomfort.'*

In Roerich's painting below, 'The Master's (or Teacher's) Command', a great white bird is seen flying towards one such recluse who is meditating in the lotus position atop an isolated peak. Fragment 1:22 in 'The Voice of the Silence' seems to illustrate this scene when the Teacher tells us: *'In order to become the KNOWER of ALL SELF... you have to give up Self to Non-Self, Being to Non-Being, and then you can repose between the wings of the GREAT BIRD.'*

What is the meaning of this Great Bird and why should the bhikshu repose between its wings? One feels that Roerich was well aware of that quotation when he produced this, his last (unfinished) painting, in 1947. H.P. Blavatsky has three references to Self – ALL SELF, which is the Cosmic or Universal Self, Self which is the Higher Self, and self, the ordinary or non-permanent lower consciousness. In the painting we observe the sannyāsin in serene, rapt meditation on the heights, functioning at the level of the Higher Self which will take him *'between the wings of that which is not born, nor dies, but is inexpressible LIFE throughout eternal ages.'*

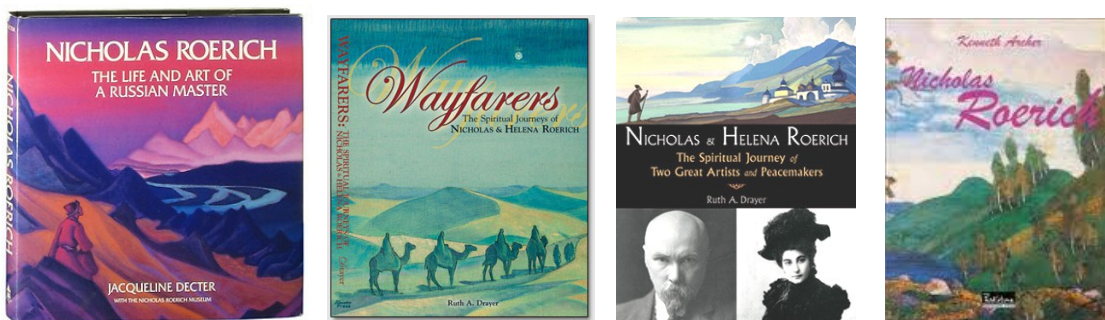
In other words he resides beyond duality and separateness, indifferent to pleasure or pain. He has truly become 'one who knows' (jñāni). The Great Bird is Kāla Hamsa, symbolizing the manifested Cosmos, the life force or Cosmic Breath. But it also stands for OM, the indissoluble union between

Man and the Universe, meaning 'I am that I am... I am in you and you are in me.' Thus the bhikshu dwells in spiritual affinity with the forces of the Cosmos; any self-centred egotism has been completely transcended. Before him lies the great vista of towering peaks, which seem to stretch on forever as the new day dawns. It also suggests that the true Self will explore new realms in an endless voyage, illumined by full spiritual consciousness acquired through many lives dedicated to the service of humanity.

And what of the title, 'The Master's Command'? At this evolutionary stage the Master, or Teacher, is no longer a gurudeva but the Master within, the Higher Self in operation. So the command comes from deep within himself as he prepares to 'fly' bestride the Bird of Life, which will take him beyond time and space, from the alone to the ALONE. There, the light of pure awareness shines ever brightly, there lies bliss beyond description...



SOME IMPORTANT BOOKS ON ROERICH



Of the four works displayed here, the most lavishly-presented in full colour is the first one by Jacqueline Decter, 'Nicholas Roerich: The Life and Art of a Russian Master' (with the Nicholas Roerich Museum), first published in the USA in 1989 by Park Street Press, Rochester, Vermont, then the same year in Great Britain by Thames & Hudson. It has proved to be the most popular one, having been reprinted in America in paperback under the title 'Messenger of Beauty: The Life and Visionary Art of Nicholas Roerich' (Park Street Press, 1997).

Ruth A. Drayer's 'Wayfarers: The Spiritual Journeys of Nicholas & Helena Roerich' (Bluwaters Press, 2004) is the result of a 15-year study and contains the same substance as the Decter, plus material from interviews with Svetoslav in India, travel diaries and scrapbooks in the Roerich Museum, and

reports previously held in British Secret Files, the Library of Congress and National Archives. The travels are well-documented with photographs and there are interesting quotations from Roerich's own works and the Agni Yoga series.* Ruth Drayer has since produced a new edition, the third one here, 'Nicholas & Helena Roerich: The Spiritual Journey of Two Great Artists and Peacemakers' (Quest Books, Wheaton, Illinois 2007) which outlines the couple's arrival and work in the USA after being caught in the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, before focusing on the Agni Yoga writings, the Roerichs' connection with Tibetan Buddhism, and their travels in remote parts. (There is also a DVD available, with rumours of a movie to be made from this account of their lives).

Lastly, 'Nicholas Roerich' (Parkstone Press, 1999) by Kenneth Archer, an author who has, as already stated, devoted the greater part of his life to furthering the history, art and philosophy of the Roerichs, and he will shortly be publishing, with dance historian Millicent Hodson, a book on 'The Rite of Spring' and Roerich's theatrical designs for that Ballet. Archer and Ruth Drayer have also contributed to an important new book of essays, beautifully illustrated: 'Nicholas Roerich: A Quest and a Legacy', ed. Manju Kak (Nyogi Books, 2013) where Archer gives a detailed account of the Roerich Peace Pact whilst she writes about the crossing of the Gobi Desert. Roerich's own 1930 book, 'Shambhala', also speaks about the journey through Central Asia and Tibet in terms of a spiritual quest, with details of visits to monasteries, meetings with lamas, dramatic episodes of snow blindness, floods and electrical phenomena. It also contains legends, parables and notes that perceive what the people he encountered thought – their hopes and beliefs. The frontispiece to the 1978 edition (Nicholas Roerich Museum, New York) has the portrait of Roerich by his son Svetoslav (see below) showing him in Tibetan costume, holding the Casket associated with the Chintamani Stone, and the Museum has many more Roerich works for sale.

* In John Algeo's review of this book ('The Theosophist', Nov. 2004) he clears up the question of the Roerichs' membership of the Theosophical Society, stating that they were admitted to membership of the American Section in June 1921, and were also members of the English Section. But they became inactive (i.e. lapsed) in June 1924 after leaving for Asia on the first of their quests for Shambhala.

'THE MESSENGER'

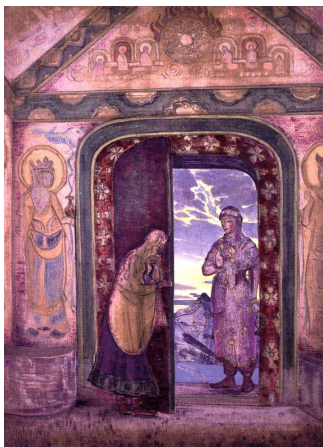
Finally, a few words about the picture on Page 1. From the 16th to the 18th of January, 1925 Nicholas and Helena Roerich visited Adyar to present the Society with this painting, and they were hosted by James Cousins, a leading administrator and lecturer there. The work depicts a woman (perhaps H.P. Blavatsky herself whom Roerich greatly admired) in a Buddhist monastery opening the door to admit 'The Messenger', probably the Master who, through her, brought the Teachings to dispel spiritual darkness. In the words of Helena Roerich: *"It is said by the Great Teacher (M.), 'Only Blavatsky knew', and it is our duty to rehabilitate the memory of this great woman martyr."*

The face of the woman is concealed as she bows reverently before the visitor. The expression of the Messenger is veiled too – a deliberately ambiguous scene for the viewer to interpret in his or her own way. Roerich dedicated the painting to Blavatsky's memory. In a short speech before the unveiling, amidst a group of Adyar residents, he said: *"In this Home of Light, let me present this picture, dedicated to Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, as the nucleus of a future Blavatsky Museum of Art, whose motto shall be: Beauty is the garment of Truth."*

Earlier, in a letter to Annie Besant, he had written: *'The great Foundress of the Theosophical Society, H.P. Blavatsky, in her last article pointed out the importance of Art. She foresaw the future significance of this great creative force which will help to build the coming world, as Art is the nearest bridge between different nations... and the simplest way to keep it always in mind would be to found at Adyar a Museum of Art, dedicated to her name...'* The painting is still there, and in the

1930s Cousins visited the Roerichs in New York, where he was the president of a committee for distributing the Roerich Banner of Peace around the world.

In the year of the presentation Adyar published a small book, 'The Messenger (Roerich's Paintings)' containing a black-and-white reproduction of the painting and seven articles previously appearing in journals published in New York, London, California, Calcutta and Adyar, including 'The Theosophist' and 'The Herald of the Star'. Some of these articles pointed out how Roerich was a direct descendant of the Viking house of RURIK, from which had originated one of the oldest Russian ruling dynasties at the invitation of the Slavs. Others contained quotations which are often used in books and articles on Roerich, such as N. Jarintzov's *'Everything in Roerich's works, viewed from the ordinary standpoint, looks fantastic; yet all meets the eye of the onlooker as if it had always existed in the depths of his own vision... He is above theory, above tendency, even above style as such... But he devotedly follows his own path, linking up... humanity with the spirit of the Cosmos. One without the other is impossible for him.'*



'The Messenger'



Portraits of Nicholas and Helena Roerich by Svetoslav Roerich

BOOK REVIEW

NICHOLAS ROERICH: *A Quest & a Legacy*, edited Manju Kak, Nyogi Books, New Delhi, 2013, pp. 258, colour + 130 photographs.

Amongst these essays by 22 contributors there are chapters devoted to all the phases in Roerich's varied life – the Russian archaeological and 'theatrical' period, the Central Asian Expedition, the Roerich Peace Pact and Banner of Peace for the protection of cultural treasures, Agni Yoga (or Living Ethics), the search for Shambhala, the crossing of the Gobi Desert and the work at *Urusvati*, the Himālayan Research Institute he founded in 1929.

Roerich's art and literary work after 1915 are seen by some contributors as an expression of his Agni Yoga practice, transcendental visions attempting to realign humankind with some higher truth in the expansion of human consciousness, a sacred art within the Eastern tradition and fostering utopian hopes. Mention is made of the Roerich family's 'closest collaboration with the Cosmic Hierarchy' with reference to three canvases, but we are made aware (not usually the case with books on Roerich) of their Russian detractors, some of whom projected him as a pitiful political adventurer trying to create an independent state in Central Asia, whilst Helena Roerich's Living Ethics was described by some critics as 'mediocre esoteric writing.'

But the coverage here is mostly sympathetic to writings received from the Master Morya, recognising in Roerich's art the luminosity of the artist's mind and liberation from worldly bondage and suffering. This being an Indian publication, emphasis is often given to what he felt about India, where he dwelt for much of his life and which, alongside Asia, failed to live up to the family's idealised expectations. The chapter on 'diamond of consciousness' is particularly valuable for theosophists in the quest for self-realisation and finding one's place in the universe whilst transcending the world of Māyā, and the many references to the spiritual centre Shambhala show it to have alternative meanings with links to the Vajrayāna school of Buddhism – a necessary practice, according to the present Dalai Lama, for those aspiring to reach this haven of peace without obstacles.

This is a book to be approached and studied many times, particularly, as one writer observes, when we learn to cultivate an internal attitude of attention to the subtle and invisible aspects and meanings of everything that happens on the physical level, in a commitment towards the building of a new world in obedience to the Higher Laws. With regard to Roerich's 7,000 paintings (where sometimes not the best examples have been selected) one writer states: 'The paintings... are mystical in the sense that they lead us from the seen to the unseen... (a) tremendous civilising influence against dogmas, absolutism and consequent violence... It is a spiritual journey from the world of space and time to the timeless omnipresence of cosmic consciousness.' An intriguing book, then, which explores Roerich's multi-faceted personality, with many quotations, especially from diaries during the mountain expeditions. One wonders if the last word has been said on Roerich; yet, with so many paintings in collections all over the world, there is scope for further analysis of little-known or unknown works. Nevertheless it is difficult to see this work being superseded.

– Alan Senior