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"Post 120 Annos Patebo"

Light in the Bridal Chamber

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"If anyone becomes a child of the bridal chamber, he will receive the light. If anyone does not receive it while he is here, he will not be able to receive it in the other place. He who will receive that light will not be seen, nor can he be detained. And none shall be able to torment a person like this, even while he dwells in the world. And again when he leaves the world, he has already received the truth in the images. The world has become the Aeon (eternal realm), for the Aeon is fullness for him. This is the way it is: it is revealed to him alone, not hidden in the darkness and the night, but hidden in a perfect day and a holy light."

This quotation is taken from the edition of *The Gospel According to Philip*, edited by James M. Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, revised edition (HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1990). What follows are my comments on this passage.

To me, this passage sounds like many others in the mystical tradition speaking to the reality of inner visions of Light. The Jewish and Christian forms of gnosis believed that God is a God of Light, and that Children of the Light are destined to reconnect with this divine or heavenly Light again. I know of many Gnostic, Sufi, and Christian mystics who describe reaching a level in contemplative prayer where the Divine Light becomes visible to them. They conceive of the soul as being the "bride," and God as being the "Bridegroom." When the two become one in the bridal chamber of mystical union, the Light appears, then soul and oversoul are truly one in the Mystery of Light.

Orthodox mysticism, to this day, views contemplation of the divine Light as a way to experience union with God. They call it "Theosis." Sufis also say that: "By the Light of Allah I see Allah." By seeing God's Light, the soul is drawn like a magnet back to the Place of the light.

This paragraph from Philip also speaks of divine protection as a result of seeing

the Light of heaven. One is protected from the forces that seek to keep the soul confined to the lower planes. These would be the archons (rulers), principalities and powers, the Demiurge (false god), the hierarchy of negative or dark spirits that, in the gnostic system, try to prevent the soul from ascending through the heavens. In the East, these would be the forces of Maya or illusion, Yama (the god of death), and the Kal Nirranjan (Lord of Time). The Kal is the eastern name for the very same gnostic Demiurge, the universal mind-god who wanted his own realm to rule over.

To contemplate the divine Light during this life is preparation for the afterlife, and like other schools of mysticism, the community that wrote Philip advocated **seeing the light now**, in order for one to be assured that one would go to the place of the Light in the next life. St. Symeon the New Theologian of the Orthodox tradition expressed the same idea as found in the Gospel of Philip. This is a point that both Gnostics and the Eastern Orthodox Christians agreed upon.

The Gnostics who wrote and studied the books of the Nag Hammadi Library very much saw heaven as a present tense reality for the mystic-the veil between "this life" and "the next life" was much thinner in their view than it is today in conventional Christianity of the West where that veil seems to be almost completely impenetrable, made of concrete. Not so for the ancients however, who thought that it was possible for living human beings to see God, see visions of Light, converse with angels, and travel in spirit to the heavenly realms **while alive** in the human body.

Heaven is also for the living, in fact one must, in some Gnostic systems, have access to the heavens now, making journeys of mystical ascent while alive, in order to assure safe passage in the afterlife. Thus, the gnostic writings focus upon the journey of the soul ascending through several different heavenly realms on the way back to the Supreme Being. This concept of souls travelling through several heavens on the way back to the One is not confined only to gnostic literature, it's also found in the New Testament, books of Enoch, Dead Sea Scrolls, and, in fact, many of the apocryphal books that didn't make into the fourth century bible canon presented the view that there are several heavens and that human beings: Enoch, Isaiah, Baruch, Moses, Paul, Thomas, James, Peter, Mary, John, other Children of Light (you and me) can experience this as well. "But when I came, I opened the way and taught them, the chosen and the solitary, the passage by which they will pass-those who know the Father..." (Dialogue of the Savior, Nag Hammadi Library).

As to their methods-**how Gnostics did it**-that information, for the most part, is not written down. Books like Pistis Sophia and the Gospel of Thomas speak of the "Mysteries of the Kingdom of God," alluding to things "taught to the disciples in private." "Jesus said, 'I disclose my mysteries to those who are worthy of my mysteries.'" (Gospel of Thomas, saying 62)

The writings of Dionysius the Areopagite and other mystical Jewish, Christian, Gnostic, and Sufi texts, suggest a need for spiritual Knowledge to be transmitted from teacher to student via a process of initiation. Then, like now in the schools of spirituality, the view was that this Knowledge is only something that a few people are interested in, so is meant only for those who are ready for it. Something like the familiar axiom: "When the student is ready, the Master will appear."

I suspect these mystics wanted to keep their contemplative practices quiet as they would seem way too "sci-fi," to "far-out" to most people. Some parts of the Gnostic and Mandaean scriptures resemble the near-death experiences that people report these days: Light, tunnel of Light, Being of Light, life-review, revelations, visions of the heavens, souls as sparks of Light or pure energy, angels, beautiful heavenly music, and upon being returned to the waking state, a major repentance or changing of one's life takes place, with the visionary being transformed into a loving and compassionate soul as a result of these kinds of encounters in the worlds of Light.