

# Editorial: Of Time and Knowledge

By M. Ali Lakhani

‘Although there is but one Center, most men live in centers of their own.’

*Heraclitus*

‘O wonder, all is wonder! how one flees Him from Whom there can be no separation, to pursue that which can have no duration.’

*Ibn Ata’illah*

‘...whenever we return to the center, we know that it is as if we are returning to *Wakan-Tanka*, who is the center of everything; and although we may think that we are going away from Him, sooner or later we and all things must return to Him.’

*Black Elk*

It is said that the Sufi is ‘*Ibn al Waqt*’, child of the eternal moment, one who has penetrated cursive time by transcending it. From this vantage of metaphysical time, change is perceived as illusory. The ephemeral is, in Hindu terminology, an expression of ‘*lila*’ or divine play conducted in the contingent realm of evanescence. By standing ‘above’ time, yet ‘within’ it, the enlightened perceive the world as a cosmic dream, or, in Shakespeare’s terms, an ‘insubstantial pageant’, a stage upon which we are merely players. While the ‘divine play’ possesses an aspect of reality for the ‘outer self’, the ‘inner self’ is impervious to its contingent effects. The Upanishads tell the story of two birds who are ‘eternal companions’. One bird, representing the ‘outer self’, is attached to life and gorges upon its fruits, while the other bird, representing the ‘inner self’, merely looks

on. The *Paramatmanic* soul is beyond the world's illusion (*maya*). From the perspective of metaphysical time, and detached from the effects of the temporal flux, the transcendent soul, or Spirit, is identified with the immortal Self, who 'is unborn, eternal, unchanging, and primordial.' (Bhagavad Gita, 2:20: '...When the body is destroyed, the Self is not destroyed.'). In the sanctum of the still heart, the immortal Self lives in 'Eternity's sunrise' (Blake), in the space of sacralized time, the 'eternal now' (*nunc aeternum*) which T.S. Eliot refers to as the 'always present.' This spiritual Center, where the Self abides, is the expanse of light and lightness, of wholeness and holiness, of lovingness and loveliness, of sublimation and the sublime — beyond the darkness, restlessness, dispersion, and compression of time. Its refuge is that 'Moment in each day that Satan cannot find' (Blake). Here, the soul can rest in the purity, clarity, and stillness of the Spirit, and is freed from the psychic knots of time.

Although 'our soul may never have rest in things that are beneath itself' (Julian of Norwich), it tends to be forgetful of this and so it lives in 'repining restlessness' (Herbert). Drawn to the ephemeral world and its vanities, it flees from the sanctuary of the liberating Spirit. It is not merely the outward glitter of the world — more alluring in these 'end times' than in prior ages — that veils the soul from the Spirit, but the delusion of the soul's own egoic propensities — more prideful, deviant, and profane, than ever before. In the words of the Holy Qur'an, 'For verily, it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts within the breast that grow blind.' (Surat Al-Haj, 22:46) To counter this forgetfulness of one's true inner nature, all faith traditions prescribe the reintegration of the soul into the spiritual Center through prayer and virtue — prayer, which polishes the mirror of the heart, and virtue, which conforms the soul to beauty.

To be spiritually centered is not to escape from reality but to engage more fully with it. Because 'both earth and heaven must fit within your own soul' (Attar), one must be *in* the world, but not *of* it. One must achieve 'presence without absence' (Hujwiri). Far from constituting an escape from the world, the state of spiritual centering deepens our experience of reality: prayer draws the soul into 'contemplation' of its Self-identity, its wholeness, and virtue expands the soul through 'sacrifice', its compassionate response to the sacredness of life. By 'contemplation' is meant 'recollection' (its Platonic meaning), interpreting

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