

The Path of The Mystic

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Quiet Spot by Waikirikiri

Photo Kevin Gallagher

In April 2020, New Zealand went into lockdown for a whole month due to Covid. I was living in Whitecliffs in the foothills of the southern alps, in the South Island of NZ. The weather was glorious, and every day was spacious. A regular rhythm of prayer, meditation, silence and emersion in the natural environment punctuated the 'lockdown routine.' Along with many others, I really appreciated the slowed-down pace of a hermit-style life. The Waikirikiri river is a short walk away, and I soon found this quiet secluded spot (Figure 1) that punctuated my daily favourite. Sometimes I just sat by the river, which lulled me into a daze of wonder. At other times I contemplated, with open eyes, the simple beauty of the river, the rocks, the trees and the toetoe-kākaho in full bloom. I was being drawn by a pervasive presence luring me as surely as fishing tackle to being seen and seeing in response. I became aware of a divine presence in this place—a mystical divine presence like the atmosphere and resonating with an innermost centre of stillness within.

One of Pierre Teilhard De Chardin's essays written in 1917 is titled 'The Mystical Milieu'. He describes the essay as: *'I'll put into 30 or 40 pages what I could spend my whole life talking about.'*¹ In the essay, Pierre Teilhard presents his experience of the path of the Mystic as passing through five concentric circles or stages of an ever-ascending Journey into Matter: Presence, Consistence, Energy, Spirit and Person. The first circle is a dim and unique awareness of *Presence* gradually brought into awareness through a faculty Teilhard describes as a faculty to perceive, *'... the indefinite fringe of reality surrounding the totality of all created things,'*² To perceive is to see the world revealing itself to us and drawing us into the circle of light that surrounds it. Teilhard writes; *'Happy above all is the seer who hears the cry of beings singly and together calling out: What you saw gliding past, like a world, behind the song and behind the colour and behind the eye's glance does not exist just here or there but is a presence existing equally everywhere.'*³

¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Making of a Mind* p 199

² Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Writings in a time of War* (Collins, St James Place, London 1968)

³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Writings in a time of War* (Collins, St James Place, London 1968) 120

For Pierre Teilhard, the Path of the Mystic has natural roots being grounded in the earth and all creation; *The Mystic is the one who is born to give first place in his experience to this Aureole (Aura of Light surrounding creation)*.⁴ He also clearly offers the caution for the one wholly taken up in the demands of everyday living and the outward appearance of things. *They seldom gain more than a glimpse of this phase of perception*.⁵

As I write, we celebrate Matariki as it heralds in the New Year for Maori in Aotearoa, New Zealand. This group of stars, Matariki, rises in the north-east and has informed the indigenous people of Aotearoa NZ for more than a thousand years.



Matariki image. iStock 505134686 Kevin

Today, June 24 2022, is the first time Matariki is being celebrated as a national holiday here, honouring the traditions and spirituality of Maori. Matariki translated means *eyes of God*. The eyes of God looking at us, seeking us, drawing us into mystery, reminding us we are all mystics. The star cluster is more widely known as *Pleiades* or *the Seven Sisters*.

It is cold tonight, below freezing, and close to the shortest day here on the South Island of New Zealand. On this frosty clear night, the stars appear to sparkle more brightly; Matariki sparkles as it rises, inviting us all to gather around a fire under its gaze and reflect on the past year. It also summons us to let go of burdens and remember those who have died. It is a time also to celebrate the present with Whanau (family and community) and look forward to the following year with hope of abundance. Matariki is a time for everyone, a time to celebrate our unity in our diversity.

Pierre Teilhard continues along the circles of the path of the mystic. As he was in contact with some particularly loved object, in it, he sees something shining, which he experienced as light and transparency where; *"I experienced an unbelievable relief in feeling that Another existed, and through him all things existed, deep down within me"*.⁶ A consistent, experienced presence. The circle of *consistence* for Teilhard is; *the real, the Absolute, the fundamental attribute of being* and, as the Mystic follows the light he is given, *consistence* is perceived in all things.

The path now leads the mystic to ask, *'Now that I have found the transparent consistence in which we are all held, I realise that the mystical effort to see must give way to the effort to feel and*

⁴ Ibid 119

⁵ Ibid p119

⁶ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Writings in a time of War* (Collins, St James Place, London 1968)

surrender myself.'⁷ An invitation to deepen communion and union, humbly accepting this process of transformation.

As his heart desires more, Teilhard asks the Divine Milieu, *'to show yourself to me as the focus of all energies'*. Confirming with science, he declares; *'See the universe is ablaze See how the starry depths expand in an ever-vaster magazine of assembled suns.'*⁸

These insights resonate with the wisdom of ages found in our indigenous peoples of Aotearoa NZ as they discern the messages of Matariki. Their respect for the universal energy we find ourselves emersed in is palpable in our land.

The mystic's journeying perceives more of an ever-deepening ocean of *energy* from which she draws an undiluted Joy. A joy leading Teilhard to declare: *'In very truth, it is God and God alone whose Spirit stirs up the whole mass of the universe in ferment.'*⁹

The circle of Spirit is for the mystic, an expression of creativity realised as cooperating in an unfinished universe. An evolving universe. The mystic's desire to co-create in this process of becoming invigorates and inspires in her a zest for life, love and action in this Universal Milieu - bringing into being a kingdom in process of becoming. The mystic now enters a process of transformation where the only thing our human activity can do is to humbly make ourselves ready and accept. It is to accept being assimilated into the very nature of this universal presence.

The concluding development in Teilhard's path of the mystic is the circle of *person*. Here the person possesses the virtue of each of the lower circles. Everything in the universe has become divinised. Everything in the Universe has come to a centre *'on a single point, on a person: your person: Jesus!'*¹⁰

*'Since first Lord you said, 'This is my body,' not only the bread of the alter but to some degree everything in the universe that nourishes the soul for the life of the Spirit and Grace has become yours and has become divine - it is divinised, divinising, and divinisable. Every presence makes me feel that you are near me; every touch is a touch of your hand; every necessity transmits to me a pulsation of your will. And so true is this that everything around me that is essential and enduring has become for me the dominance, and in some way the substance of your heart: Jesus!'*¹¹

(Editor's note: Can we hold something of this journey of the mystic as we sit in our CEN contemplation together and help breathe the atmosphere of each of these circles into the wider world?)

⁷ Ibid 128

⁸ Ibid 129

⁹ Ibid 130

¹⁰ Ibid 145

¹¹ Ibid 146