

*A Master of Wisdom on  
the Music of the Spheres*



## The Music of the Spheres

From *Mahātma Letter 13* (44), pp. 73-74; 3<sup>rd</sup> Combined ed.<sup>1</sup>

*Lead the life necessary for the acquisition of such knowledge and powers, and Wisdom will come to you naturally. Whenever you are able to attune your consciousness to any of the seven chords of ‘Universal Consciousness,’ those chords that run along the sounding-board of Kosmos, vibrating from one Eternity to another; when you have studied thoroughly ‘the music of the Spheres,’ then only will you become quite free to share your knowledge with those with whom it is safe to do so. Meanwhile, be prudent. Do not give out the great Truths that are the inheritance of the future Races, to our present generation. Do not attempt to unveil the secret of being and non-being to those unable to see the hidden meaning of Apollo’s HEPTACHORD — the lyre of the radiant god, in each of the seven strings of which dwelleth the Spirit, Soul and Astral body of the Kosmos, whose shell only has now fallen into the hands of Modern Science. . . . Be prudent, we say, prudent and wise, and above all take care what those who learn from you believe in; lest by deceiving themselves they deceive others . . . for such is the fate of every truth with which men are, as yet, unfamiliar. . . . Let rather the planetary chains and other super- and sub-cosmic mysteries remain a dream-land for those who can neither see, nor yet believe that others can. . . .*<sup>2</sup>

Now think: the *Nag*<sup>3</sup> awakes. He heaves a heavy breath and the latter is sent like an electric shock all along the wire encircling *Space*. Go to your pianoforte and execute upon the lower register of keys the *seven* notes of the lower octave — up and down. Begin *pianissimo*, *crescendo* from the first key, and having struck *fortissimo* on the last *lower* note go back *diminuendo*, getting out of your last note a hardly perceptible sound — “*morendo pianissimo*” . . . The first and the last notes will represent to you the first and last spheres in the cycle of evolution — the highest! the one you strike *once* is our planet. Remember you have to reverse the order on the pianoforte: begin with the seventh note, not with the first. The seven vowels chanted by the Egyptian

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<sup>1</sup> Frontispiece by BumwardoImortal.

<sup>2</sup> *Secret Doctrine*, I p. 167; [quoting a Master of Wisdom.]

<sup>3</sup> *i.e.*, “the ‘one and only’ element or principle in the universe and that *androgynous*; the seven-headed serpent *Ananta* of Vishnu, the *Nag* around Buddha — the great dragon eternity biting with its *active* head its *passive* tail, from the emanations of which spring worlds, beings and things. You will comprehend the reason why the first philosopher proclaimed ALL — *Māyā* — but that one principle which rests during the *mahā-pralayas* only — the ‘nights of Brahm.’” *ibid.*

priests to the seven rays of the rising sun to which Memnon responded, meant but that. The one *Life-principle* when in action runs in *circuits* even as known in physical science. It runs the round in human body, where the head represents and is to the Microcosmos (the physical world of matter) what the summit of the cycle is to the Macrocosmos (the world of universal spiritual Forces); and so with the formation of worlds and the great descending and ascending “circle of necessity.” All is one Law. Man has his seven principles, the germs of which he brings with him at his birth. So has a planet or a world. From first to last every sphere has its world of effects, the passing through which will afford a place of final rest to each of the human principles — the seventh principle excepted. The world No. A is born; and with it, clinging like barnacles to the bottom of a ship in motion, evolve from its first breath of life the living beings of its atmosphere, from the germs hitherto inert, now awakening to life with the first motion of the sphere. With sphere A begins the mineral kingdom and runs the round of mineral evolution. By the time it is completed sphere B comes into objectivity and draws to itself the *life* which has completed its round on sphere A, and has become a surplus, (the fount of life being inexhaustible, for it is the true Arachne doomed to spin out its web eternally — save the periods of *pralaya*). Then comes vegetable life on sphere A, and the same process takes place. On its downward course “life” becomes with every state coarser, more material; on its upward more shadowy. No — there is [not], nor can there be any responsibility until the time when matter and spirit are properly equilibrated. Up to *man* “life” has no responsibility in whatever form; no more than has the foetus who in his mother’s womb passes through all the forms of life — as a mineral, a vegetable, an animal to become finally *Man*.<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> [Fellow Theosophists may also wish to look up “Who can mend the broken Society?” in our Theosophy and Theosophists Series. — ED. PHIL.]

## Addendum by Thomas Taylor, the English Platonist

Being annotations 4 and 5 from Thomas Taylor's 1792 translation of Orpheus' Hymn to Apollo.  
Full text in our Hellenic and Hellenistic Papers — ED. PHIL.

### ④ Harmonising lyre.

Gesner<sup>1</sup> well observes, in his notes on this hymn, that the comparison and conjunction of the musical and astronomical elements are most ancient; being derived from Orpheus and Pythagoras to Plato. The lyre of Apollo, however, is not only indicative of the harmony of the universe, of which this divinity is the source, but particularly adumbrates according to the Orphic and Pythagoric doctrine, the celestial harmony, or the melody caused by the revolutions of the celestial spheres. This harmony of the spheres is admirably unfolded by Simplicius in his Commentary on the second book of Aristotle's *Treatise on the Heavens*, as follows:

The Pythagoreans said, that an harmonic sound is produced from the motion of the celestial bodies; and they scientifically collected this from the analogy of their intervals; since not only the ratios of the intervals of the sun and moon, and Venus and Mercury, but also of the other stars, were discovered by them.

Simplicius<sup>2</sup> adds,

Perhaps the objection of Aristotle to this assertion of the Pythagoreans may be solved as follows, according to the philosophy of those men: all things are not commensurate with each other, nor is everything sensible commensurate to everything, even in the sublunary region. This is evident from dogs, who scent animals at a great distance, and which are not smelt by men. How much more, therefore, in things which are separated by so great an interval as those which are incorruptible from the corruptible, and celestial from terrestrial natures, is it true to say that the sound of divine bodies is not audible by terrestrial ears? But if any one, like Pythagoras, who is reported to have heard this harmony, should have his terrestrial body exempt from him, and his luminous and celestial vehicle, and the senses which it contains, purified, either through a good allotment, or through probity of life, or through a perfection arising from sacred operations, such a one will perceive things invisible to others, and will hear things inaudible by others. With respect to divine and immaterial bodies, however, if any sound is produced by them, it is neither percussive nor destructive, but it excites the powers and energies of sublunary sounds, and perfects the sense which is coordinate with them. It has also a certain analogy to the sound which concurs with the motion of terrestrial bodies. But the sound which is with us, in consequence of the sonorous nature of the air, is a certain energy of

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<sup>1</sup> [Conrad Gessner, or Konrad Gesner, 1516–65, Swiss naturalist, bibliographer, botanist, physician, and classical linguist.]

<sup>2</sup> [Σιμπλικίος of Cilicia, c. 490–560, disciple of Ammonius Hermiae and Damascius, and one of the last Neo-Platonists. He was among the pagan philosophers persecuted by Justinian in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century, and was forced for a time to seek refuge in the Persian court, before being allowed back into the empire. He wrote extensively on the works of Aristotle. Although his writings are all commentaries on Aristotle and other authors, rather than original compositions, his intelligent and prodigious learning makes him the last great philosopher of pagan antiquity. His works have preserved much information about earlier philosophers which would have otherwise been lost.]

the motion of their impassive sound. If then, air is not passive there, it is evident that neither will the sound which is there be passive. Pythagoras, however, seems to have said that he heard the celestial harmony, as understanding the harmonic proportions in numbers, of the heavenly bodies, and that which is audible in them. Someone, however, may very properly doubt why the stars are seen by our visive sense, but the sound of them is not heard by our ears? To this we reply, that neither do we see the stars themselves; for we do not see their magnitudes, or their figures, or their surpassing beauty. Neither do we see the motion through which the sound is produced; but we see, as it were, such an illumination of them as that of the light of the sun about the earth, the sun himself not being seen by us. Perhaps too, neither will it be wonderful, that the visive sense, as being more immaterial, subsisting rather according to energy than according to passion, and very much transcending the other senses, should be thought worthy to receive the splendour and illumination of the celestial bodies, but that the other senses should not be adapted for this purpose.

### ⑤ The last string thou tunest to sweet accord.

The following quotations from Nicomachus (*Harm.*, lib. i, p. 6)<sup>1</sup> illustrates the meaning of the hypate and nete, or the highest and lowest string, in the lyre of Apollo. Says he:

From the motion of Saturn the most remote of the planets, the appellation of the gravest sound, hypate, is derived; but from the lunar motion, which is the lowest of ail, the most acute sound is called nete, or the lowest.

But Gesner observes, that a more ancient, and as it were archetypal, appellation is derived from the ancient triangular lyre, a copy of which was found among the pictures lately dug out of the ruins of Herculaneum; in which the highest chord next to the chin of the musician is the longest, and consequently (says he) the sound is the most grave. Gesner proceeds in observing, that three seasons of the year are so compared together in a musical ratio, that hypate signifies the Winter, nete the Summer, and the Dorian measure represents the intermediate seasons, Spring and Autumn. Now the reason why the Dorian melody is assigned to the Spring, is because that measure wholly consists in temperament and moderation, as we learn from Plutarch in his Treatise *De Musica*. Hence it is with great propriety attributed to the Spring, considered as placed between Winter and Summer; and gratefully tempering the fervent heat of the one, and the intense cold of the other.



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<sup>1</sup> [Νικόμαχος of Gerasa, 60–120, important mathematician and neo-Pythagorean of the ancient world, best known for his works *Introduction to Arithmetic* and *Manual of Harmonics in Greek*. See translation of the latter in our Hellenic and Hellenistic Papers. — ED. PHIL.]