

Festival of Wesak, London, May 2019

The Great Tone of Wesak

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Good afternoon everyone, and welcome to our celebration of the great Festival of Wesak, the high point of the spiritual year. Welcome too to all who are joining us through the medium of electrified sound, via the internet. And we should bear in mind that for millions of Buddhists around the world, this is also their holiest festival, and our meditative work blends with theirs in one great invocative spiritual event.

GOD SPOKE, and the worlds were made.

Or to put it in more detail, “God meditated, visualized, **spoke**, and the worlds were made.” (*Light of the Soul* p.353, **emph. added**) In this way, the Tibetan outlines the magical form-building power of sound. Elsewhere, He notes that the original sound or word sets in vibration the matter of which all forms are made and initiates that activity which characterizes even the atom of substance. Therefore sound is both creative and dynamic, shaping forms and driving them forward along the path of evolution. Dane Rudhyar makes a similar point in his work *The Magic of Tone*, when he says, “...Sound should be understood as the power of the divine will, which sets in motion the proto-matter of chaos (Genesis’s ‘dark waters of space,’ the medieval alchemists’ *prima materia*). This creative Sound makes matter spin into vortices of motion.”

The sound which Rudhyar refers to in this passage is not the ordinary sound we hear. He says, “In ancient India, sound was believed to exist in two forms. Physically perceptible sound vibrations were termed *ahatta*. An inaudible, spiritual kind of Sound, to which in special conditions the nonphysical aspects of the human consciousness could resonate, was called *anahatta*.” It is this *anahatta* Sound which is the power of the divine will. Yet we should not underestimate the power of its outer counterpart. Great speeches can stir multitudes and focus their collective will. And on this occasion of Wesak, we celebrate an event where the power of sound, both audible and inaudible, is evident.

Most of us are probably familiar with the description given by Alice Bailey of the importance of Wesak. She notes that every year, in a valley in the Himalayas, “at the time of the full moon, a solemn ritual is performed” (*The Wesak Festival: A Technique of Spiritual Contact*, p.7)

“As the hour of the full moon approaches, a stillness settles down upon the crowd,... Certain ritualistic movements take place, in which the grouped Masters and Their disciples of all ranks take up symbolic positions, and form on the floor of the valley such significant symbols as the five-pointed star, with the Christ standing at the highest point; or a triangle, with the Christ at the apex; or a cross, and other well known formations, all of which have a deep and potent meaning. **This is all done to the sound of certain chanted words and esoteric phrases, called mantrams.**” (*Op. cit.*, p.9, **emph. added**) The magical power of sound in its physical aspect is therefore central to the celebration.

The passage continues: “The expectancy in the waiting, onlooking crowds becomes very great, and the tension is real and increasing. **Through the entire body of people there seems to be felt a stimulation or potent vibration which has the effect of awakening the souls of those present, fusing and blending the group into**

one united whole, and lifting all into a great act of spiritual demand, readiness, and expectancy.” (*Ibid.*, **emph. added**) This reference to a subjective uniting vibration is suggestive of a response to *anahatta*, spiritual sound.

Finally, there is this significant statement: “**a great mantram**, used only once a year, at the Festival, is intoned by the Christ, and the entire group of people in the valley fall upon their faces. This Invocation **sets up a great vibration** or thought current which is of such potency that it reaches up from the group of aspirants, disciples or initiates who employ it, to God Himself.” (*Ibid.*, **emph. added**)

So we would be justified in saying that this Wesak ritual is the most significant use of sound for spiritual purposes in the whole year. It exemplifies the fundamental pattern of call and response, of a sound source and that which responds or reverberates to that source, which is intimately woven into many religious ceremonies and acts of worship.

Before we continue, let's pause for a few moments of listening silence, and then intone together the Great Invocation.

From the point of Light within the Mind of God
Let light stream forth into the minds of men.
Let Light descend on Earth.

From the point of Love within the Heart of God
Let love stream forth into the hearts of men.
May Christ return to Earth.

From the centre where the Will of God is known
Let purpose guide the little wills of men –
The purpose which the Masters know and serve.

From the centre which we call the race of men
Let the Plan of Love and Light work out
And may it seal the door where evil dwells.

Let Light and Love and Power restore the Plan on Earth.

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In the last passage, it was said that the Christ “intoned” a mantram – this is the creation of a living organism of sound, a **tone**. As its title suggests, Rudhyar's *The Magic of Tone* ponders this idea. Rudhyar was both a practicing esotericist and a musical composer.

He states, “[a] tone is a sound that has conveyed (or can convey) significant information to the consciousness of the hearer because it is charged with and transmits (or can transmit) the special nature and character of the source of the sound. Thus a tone is a meaning-carrying sound. A tone has meaning in itself, as a single phenomenon experienceable by a living being endowed with some degree of consciousness. A musical note, on the other hand, has no meaning in itself. It has meaning only in relation to other notes.

The tones of archaic music were... intimately and indissolubly associated with gods, nature spirits, cosmic elements, biopsychic states in animals and human beings, and very often a particular season or time of the day. Such a mythological and vitalistic association gave each tone a communicable meaning, and made of the tone an entity with a specific character or quality of being. In addition to their specific natures and individual qualities, the tones were given a **functional** character as participants in an organism of sounds, called *grama* in Sanskrit.

Grama originally meant a village; the whole of the ancient life and culture of India was based on the village community, the basic unit of social organization. Within the village community each human being and family performed a definite function. There were castes and sub-castes (originally or theoretically nonhereditary), each representing a biopsychic function reflecting a basic aspect of the order of the cosmos. Similarly, every tone of the *grama* — probably at first five, then seven — fulfilled a specific function in this prototypal musical whole, a microcosm of the universe... The *grama* was a whole of vibratory energies, just as the village was a whole of homes and families. Among both a circulation of effective activities was always operating.”

Later on, Rudhyar expands this picture, speaking of “the possibility of experiencing Sound as a continuous current of creative and transformative power. In this continuum, single tones arise and fade away as temporary focal points around which fields of sonic energy are formed and interpenetrate. Similarly, distances between these focalizing tones, instead of being considered precisely measured intervals, may be experienced as the many differentiated aspects of a fullness of vibrating space. This space can be experienced as a pleroma of interpenetrating and interacting tones, an immense and multitudinous resonance of the orchestra of cosmic existence to the creative, then form-maintaining, transforming, and, disintegrative will of God, the One source of manifested being.” I’m going to repeat the last sentence, and let’s just pause briefly in silence to reflect upon this beautiful image.

[PAUSE]

When we experience physical sound, the tones that are produced by the things which surround us are usually quite complex. This is in contrast with what we might call the atom of sound, the kind of tone that is produced by a tuning fork. When this is displayed on an oscilloscope, what is revealed is a waveform called a sine wave. If any of you remember your high school maths, you might recall that sines were something to do with triangles. And they also crop up in sound, for the human ear recognizes single sine waves as pure single notes of one frequency. Thus, for example, middle C is 261.6 Hertz, 261.6 vibrations per second. What is particularly significant about sine waves is that any sound whatsoever, from a pure single note to the most clangorous din, can be thought of as the sum of one or more sine waves, through a mathematical process called Fourier analysis. So we could say that the various tones that we hear are molecules and complex compounds of sound, built up from that basic shape.

In *The Trumpeted Sound: A Formula for Transfiguration*, a talk given at the 2017 London Arcane School conference, Laurence Newey considers the connection between sound and the electrical building activity of the deva kingdom. As he notes, physical sound is translated in the ear into electrical signals, passed through to the brain, and there give rise to the conscious experience of sound. The talk includes the following prediction: “Exoteric science will progressively develop technological procedures to work with the Listening and Building devas.” Perhaps one aspect of this is the increasing power to manipulate sound using electricity, in computers and electronic instruments,

for creating sine waves in electrical circuits is also relatively simple, as is adding and subtracting sine waves of different frequencies, in order to synthesise tones of increasing complexity.

It is interesting to note that Rudhyar anticipated an increased use of electronic instruments. He was familiar with the theremin, and also the ondes martenot, an instrument used by the French composer Messiaen in a number of his works. Rudhyar speaks about “instruments that will allow one or a small group of persons directly to manipulate an immense variety of tone combinations”, a prediction that is gradually coming true as musicians are mastering these new tools. One recent example is Jacob Collier, who combines a profound understanding of musical harmony with multi-instrumental skills and a willingness to compose songs that combine a huge number of individual parts or tracks. Even in live performance, he, and other current artists, are able to use looping techniques to accompany themselves on multiple instruments. Another aspect of this revolution is the ability to convincingly sample whole orchestras and incorporate their sounds via computers into musical compositions.

This increasing power of individuals and groups to manipulate sound opens up greater opportunities for service, as suggested further on in *The Trumpeted Sound*: “...as more initiates come into incarnation, more teaching will be disseminated on how esoteric science uses the inherent electrical energy of the human being to shape deva substance in line with the Plan. While this may be the advanced work of the white magician, it is something that all who are undergoing training in meditation are working towards. It is also a process that takes place automatically to a lesser degree when anyone meditates selflessly in service of the Plan. And when many minds and hearts come together as one to perform such service, the results are profound.” Thus our work in meditation today is a potent means of serving through the reception and transmission of spiritual and physical sound.

Some of the more profound mysteries concerning the creative and dynamic power of sound are hinted at in the teachings. For example, the Tibetan refers to the Words of Power, which extend from the Great Word sounded by the Solar Logos, through Words entrusted to the three principal Planetary Logoi, to seven Great Words which create the seven planes of our system, and on downwards through various grades to the Words “built up upon the Great Word of our Planetary Logos” which are “committed to the Departmental Heads, who in turn pass them on in permutated order to the graded initiates.” (*Initiation, Human and Solar*, pp.154-5). There is also reference to the mystery of Sanat Kumara’s name, (which is presumably in some way connected with the Great Word of the Planetary Logos). It is said that “[t]he name Sanat Kumara is not His true name; it is only the first letter of that name which is known only to the Masters, whilst the second letter is known only to the Chohans. The first syllable of His name is known in the Council Chamber at Shamballa, but the rest of His name remains unknown as yet.” (*The Rays and the Initiations*, p.273)

The Tibetan also tells us that Sound is connected with the seventh aspect of the sevenfold purpose of Sanat Kumara. He notes, “the ceremonial ritual of the daily life of Sanat Kumara, implemented by music and sound and carried on the waves of colour which break upon the shores of the three worlds of human evolution, reveal—in the clearest notes and tones and shades—the deepest secret behind His purpose... I am *not* here writing in symbols, but am making an exact statement of fact. As beauty in any of its greater forms breaks upon the human consciousness, a dim sense is thereby conveyed of the ritual of Sanat Kumara's daily living.” (*The Rays and the Initiations*, pp.246-7) We may guess that since the Wesak Festival is the most important annual alignment

between Shamballa, the Hierarchy and Humanity, that this mysterious aspect of Logoic purpose, conveyed through sound, forms a part of the great Tone of Wesak.

In conclusion, as we approach the time of the full moon, which is this evening at eleven minutes past ten, we can recall the important suggestion that the day of Wesak should be regarded as a “day of **silence** – a **subjective silence**... that can be preserved unbroken though we may at the same time be serving with our speech and our active interest in others.” (*The Wesak Festival: A Technique of Spiritual Contact*, p.14, **emph. added**) This inner attitude of intense listening may enable us to catch the faintest and most subtle reverberations of the great Tone of Wesak. It is then our joyful responsibility to pass this on, as spiritual resonators, to all the lower kingdoms. So let us now enter into the silence of meditation, in preparation for becoming a mighty chorus of blessing for the world. Our seed thought is, “I see and when the Eye is opened, all is light.”