

Hyperborea & the Quest for Mystical Enlightenment

By **JASON JEFFREY**

Far north, somewhere near the icy regions of the North Pole, legend speaks of an ancient and mostly forgotten civilisation. Mythical in character, the Hyperborean civilisation is said to have flourished in the northernmost region of planet Earth at a time when the area was suitable for human habitation.

According to certain esoteric systems and spiritual traditions, Hyperborea was the terrestrial and celestial beginning of civilisation. The home of original Man. Some theories postulate Hyperborea was the original Garden of Eden, the point where the earthly and heavenly planes meet. And it is said Man transgressed Divine Law in this Golden Age civilisation, the ultimate price being his banishment to the outside world. Man ventured into other regions of Earth, establishing new civilisations, bringing to an end this great and glorious Golden Age.

The Golden Age is central to manifold ancient traditions and myths. Significantly, the Golden Age appears most frequent in the traditions of cultures stretching from India to Northern Europe — the area directly beneath the Polar regions. Joscelyn Godwin, in *Arktos, The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism and Nazi Survival*, says:

The memory or imagination of a Golden Age seems to be a particularity of the cultures that cover the area from India to Northern Europe... But in the ancient Middle East there is an obvious relic of the Golden Age in Genesis, as the Garden of Eden where humanity walked with the gods before the Fall. The Egyptians spoke of past epochs ruled by god-kings. Babylonian mythology... had a scheme of three ages, each lasting while the vernal [Spring] equinox precessed through four signs of the zodiac; the first of these, under the dominion of Anu, as a Golden Age, ended by the Flood. The Iranian Avesta texts tell of the thousand-year Golden Reign of Yima, the first man and the first king, under whose rule cold and heat, old age, death and sickness were unknown.¹

The most fully developed theory of this kind, and probably the oldest one, is the Hindu doctrine of the Four Yugas. The four ages in this system are the Krita or Satya Yuga (four units), Treta Yuga (three), Dvapara Yuga (two), and Kali Yuga (one), the whole tenfold period making up one Mayayuga. The Krita Yuga corresponds to the Golden Age, the Kali Yuga to the current period of time.

Every description of the Golden Age period relates how the 'gods' walked with men in a perfect and harmonious environment balanced between the terrestrial and celestial. Humanity suffered no sickness and no aging in this timeless paradise. After the Fall, man 'fell' into Time and suffering, forfeiting the gift of immortality.

Madame Blavatsky, the founder of Theosophical Society, claimed the 'second root race' originated in Hyperborea, before the later races of Lemuria and Atlantis. The Russian metaphysician Alexandre Dugin says that it was the home of the "solar people", connected to what is now northern Russia. "Solar people," Alexandre Dugin explains, are a "cultural-spiritual type" who are creative, energetic and spiritual. They are the opposite of "lunar people", a psycho-spiritual type who are materialistic, conservative and wary of change.

The ancient Greeks had a legend of Hyperborea, a land of perpetual sun beyond the "north wind". Hecataeus (circa 500 BC) says that the holy place of the Hyperboreans, which was built "after the pattern of the spheres", lay "in the regions beyond the land of the Celts" on "an island in the ocean." According to popular accounts, the God Apollo's temple at Delphi was founded by individuals from Hyperborea. The Greek lyric poet Alcaeus (600 BC) sang of the actual or mystical journey of Apollo to the land of the Hyperboreans:

O King Apollo, son of great Zeus, whom thy father did furnish forth at thy birth with golden headband and lyre of shell, and giving thee moreover a swan-drawn chariot to drive, would have thee go to Delphi... But nevertheless, once mounted, thou badest thy swans fly to the land of the Hyperboreans.

The wearing of a star-embroidered robe by the King and 'Ruler of the World' — the heavenly sphere serving as a symbol of the earthly one — is a custom that can be traced to the Hyperboreans. Embroidered in gold on blue silk were the figures of the sun, moon and stars. Such robes were worn by the kings of Ancient Rome and Julius Ceasar, as well as Augustus and the Roman Emperors.

Earthenware statuettes found in a grave in Yugoslavia show the 'Hyperborean Apollo' in a chariot drawn by swans. The god wears, on his neck and breast, yellow figures of the sun and stars; on his head is a rayed crown with a headband that has a zigzag pattern. His robe, which reaches to the ground, is dark blue with yellow designs.

Collapse of Hyperborea

One of the most popular theories for the collapse of Hyperborea was a physical inclination (catastrophe) of the Earth's axis. Man's transgression of Divine Law caused a shift in the metaphysical balance, the effect of which was catastrophic on the Earth plane. Julius Evola, the noted Italian metaphysician, explains that at this point the first cycle of history closed, and that of the second, the Atlantean, began:

The memory of this Arctic seat is the patrimony of the traditions of many people, in the form either of real geographic allusions, or of symbols of its function and original significance, often transferred to a super-historical significance, or else applied to other centres that may be considered as copies of the original one... Above all, one will notice the interplay of the Arctic theme with the Atlantic theme... It is known that the astrophysical phenomenon of the inclination of the earth's axis causes a change of climate from one epoch to another. Moreover, as tradition tells, this inclination took place at a given moment, and in fact through the alignment of a physical and a metaphysical fact, as if a disorder in nature were reflecting a certain situation of a spiritual order... At any rate, it was only at a certain moment that ice and eternal night descended on the polar region. Then, with the enforced emigration from that seat, the first cycle closed and the second opened, initiating the second great era, the Atlantean Cycle.²

The memory of a Golden Age, although rendered in an archetypal or mythological form, serves a super-historical purpose. This is why the remembrance of the ancient civilisation of Atlantis is sometimes enmeshed with that of Hyperborea. We cannot expect to 'prove' the physical existence of these civilisations. All myths are known to have a historical basis. Transmitted primarily by oral tradition, they are wrapped in a

catchy and simple tale that ensures their survival and transmittal down through the ages. Myth serves an extremely vital function — a recollection of our beginnings, a knowledge of where we are heading, and what we are supposed to do. It is only now in the Kali Yuga that we have disconnected from tradition, losing the ability to correctly interpret and understand myths with historical kernels of truth.

Hyperborea Revived

The legend of Hyperborea revived during the 18th and 19th centuries when a flurry of books were published dealing with the idea that civilisation had first appeared not in the Middle East, but somewhere else.

The popular theory of the day postulated that the so-called 'Aryans' (Europeans) were superior and more intelligent than Semites (Middle East peoples). Therefore, logically, civilisation could not have originated in the Middle East and Hebrew was probably not the first language.

The Frenchmen of the Enlightenment were in no doubt that "Eden" was situated on higher ground. The Germans similarly, who were looking for their Aufklärung, also sought to be free of a history tied to the Mediterranean and Middle East regions. British and German scholars studied ancient Indian (Vedic) civilisation and learnt the Sanskrit language. Many believed Sanskrit the original language of the 'Aryans'.

With new sources of knowledge from ancient Egypt, Chaldea, China and India, researchers were treading on dangerous ground as far as questioning Man's origins. Biblical history was still strictly upheld and moving too far from this historical boundary could have you silenced.

Writers such as Jean-Sylvain Bailly (1736-1793), the Rev. Dr. William Warren (1800s), Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1929) and H.S. Spencer (1900s), developed out theories, often borrowing from earlier sources, attempting to prove man's origins in the Polar region.

Tilak's book **Arctic Home** (published 1903) begins by stating the well known fact that warm weather remains in the Arctic regions, which shows the climate was far different during the interglacial period. According to Tilak, scientists do concede the existence, in the past, of a warm circumpolar continent, and the circumstances there would not have been nearly unfavourable as imagined.

Tilak was convinced the ancient Indian Vedic texts point unmistakably to a "realm of the gods" where the sun rises and sets once a year, showing that their writers could understand the astronomical conditions at the North Pole.

Tilak, who had a perfect mastery of Vedic language, placed the original Arctic home existing around circa 10,000 BC, just prior to its destruction and the beginning of the last Ice Age.

His book had little impact in the West but was popular in India. When the learned Zoroastrian H.S. Spencer wrote his book **The Aryan Ecliptic Cycle** (1965), a development of Tilak's work, he was able to obtain endorsements from Sir S. Radhakrishna, then President of India. As well as from dignitaries of the Theosophical Society in Adyar and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondichary.

Spencer's approach commenced not with the Vedic but the Zoroastrian scriptures,

going further than Tilak in tracing the progress of the 'Aryans' from the North to their new homes, and the schisms that beset them on the way.

Spencer's 'Aryans' made their presence felt after they travelled far and wide. They moulded the religions and cultures of Egypt, Sumeria, Babylon, and of the Semites, hitherto worshippers of feminine lunar deities.

However, the search for a terrestrial 'Hyperborea' by many researchers and the movement of an original 'race' has been extremely difficult and presumptuous. Proving human habitation possible at the North Pole somewhere between 8000 and 10,000 BC is no mean feat, particularly if you were living in the 18th century. The numerous theories posited offering contradictory or tendentious 'evidence' has served only to discredit the whole notion of Hyperborea. The same could be said of theories attempting to prove the existence of the 'lost continent of Atlantis'. The drive to prove the actuality of a terrestrial Hyperborea has overshadowed its occult and symbolic importance.

The Spiritual Pole

In the quest to discover the 'physical' location of Hyperborea, most writers overlooked the possibility that the mythology served a special symbolic and spiritual purpose. What if the truth behind the legend was esoteric, and not exoteric as some even today still maintain?

Many traditions speak of a supreme spiritual centre or 'supreme country'. The 'supreme country' that does not necessarily lay at a specific earthly point, but exists in a primordial state, unaffected by terrestrial cataclysms.

The 'supreme country', commonly regarded as 'polar' in orientation, symbolically is always represented as being at the 'Axis of the world' — and in most cases is referred to as a 'Sacred Mountain'. Rene Guenon in his book **The Lord of the World** says:

Almost every tradition has its name for this mountain, such as the Hindu Meru, the Persian Alborj, and the Montsalvat of Western Grail legend. There is also the Arab mountain Qaf and the Greek Olympus, which has in many ways the same significance. This consists of a region that, like the Terrestrial Paradise, has become inaccessible to ordinary humanity, and that is beyond the reach of those cataclysms which upset the human world at the end of certain cyclic periods. This region is the authentic 'supreme country' which, according to certain Vedic and Avestan texts, was originally sited towards the North Pole, even in the literal sense of the word. Although it may change its localisation according to the different phases of human history, it still remains polar in a symbolic sense because essentially it represents the fixed axis around which everything revolves.³

The Vedic texts say the 'supreme country' is known as Paradesha, also called the 'Heart of the World'. It is the word from which the Chaldeans formed Pardes, and Westerners Paradise.

There is notably another name for it probably even older than Paradesha. This name is Tula, called by the Greeks Thule. Common to regions from Russia to Central America, Tula represented the primordial state from which spiritual power emanated.

It is known that the Mexican Tula owes its origin to the Toltecs who came, it is said,

from Aztlan, the 'land in the middle of the water', which is evidently Atlantis. They brought the name Tula from their country of origin and gave it to a centre which consequently must have replaced, to a certain extent, that of the lost continent. On the other hand, the Atlantean Tula must be distinguished from the Hyperborean Tula, which latter represents the first and supreme centre....4

In this case — Tula — representing a centre of spiritual authority — does not remain fixed in a geographical location. Guenon states that the Atlantean cycle, successor to the Hyperborean cycle, is associated with Tula. The Atlantean Tula is an image of the original primordial state situated in a northern or Polar location. As world cycles progress onward, the supreme seat of spiritual power regresses further and further into hiding and obscurity. This, of course, is deliberate and predictable as humanity descends into the end of the age (Kali Yuga), progressively enmeshing itself in the material plane until the reversal of established world order is imposed.

It should be emphasised here that Tula, or the centre of spiritual authority, constitutes the fixed point known symbolically to all traditions as the 'pole' or axis around which the world rotates. Metaphysically speaking, the world rotates around this seat of power even if it's not geographically North or South.

In the Buddhist tradition 'Chakravarti' literally means "He who makes the wheel turn", which is to say the one who, being at the centre of all things, directs all movement without himself participating, or who is, to use Aristotle's words, the "unmoving mover".

The turning of the world, the 'Pole' and axis, combine to depict a wheel in the Celtic, Chaldean and Hindu traditions. Such is the true significance of the swastika, seen worldwide from the Far East to the Far West, which is intrinsically the 'sign of the Pole'.

The Pole and Mystical Enlightenment

It is in medieval Iran that we find extant literature on the Spiritual Pole and the experience of mystical ascent to it. The Iranian Sufis, drawing not only on Islam but on the Mazdean, Manichean, Hermetic, Gnostic and Platonic traditions, blended a sacred knowledge said to be 'scientific', mystical and philosophically practical.

Esoterically... the Persian theosophers situated their "Orient" neither to the East, nor to the South, wither they faced in prayer towards the Ka'ba. "The Orient sought by the mystic, the Orient that cannot be located on our maps, is in the direction of the north, beyond the north." [The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism by Henry Corbin, 1978] About this Pole reigns a perpetual Darkness, says the Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan, one of the visionary recitals of Avicenna (Ibn Sina). "Each year the rising sun shines upon it at a fixed time. He who confronts that Darkness and does not hesitate to plunge into it for fear of difficulties will come to a vast space, boundless and filled with light." [Ibid] This Darkness, says Corbin, is the ignorance of the natural man. "To pass through it is a terrifying and painful experience, for it ruins and destroys all the patencies and norms on which the natural man lived and depended..." [Ibid] But it must be faced consciously before one can acquire the saving gnosis of the light beyond.

The Darkness around the Pole, annually pierced by the sun's rays, is at once terrestrial and symbolic. On the one hand, this is the situation at the North Pole, where there are six months of night and six of day. It is

characteristic of esoteric tradition that the same image is valid on two or more levels. But as Corbin and Guenon never tired of pointing out, the symbolic level is not a fanciful construct on the basis of hard terrestrial fact: it is quite the other way round. In the present case, the mystical experience of penetrating the Darkness at the Pole is the fundamental reality and the authentic experience of the individual. The fact that the set-up of the material world reflects the celestial geography is what is contingent. In brief, in this teaching as in Platonism, it is the supersensible realm that is real, and the material realm that is a shadow of it.⁵

The seeker, through deep meditation on spiritual matters, succeeds in entering a world of mystical experience, and makes a pilgrimage to Hyperborea that can not be discovered from maps. Aristeas, the Greek poet, in shamanic rapture, is said to have travelled to Hyperborea while "possessed by Apollo". Mystical soul-travel to Hyperborea is common in ancient Greek literature.

The journey to this Pole is sometimes illustrated as the ascent of a column of light, extending from the depths of hell to the lucid paradise in the cosmic North.

As previously mentioned, the Pole is also a Mountain, called Mount Qaf in Islamic tradition, whose ascent, like Dante's climbing of the Mountain of Purgatory, represents the pilgrims progress through spiritual states.

Guenon, in **Lord of the World**, explains "the idea evoking the representation under discussion is essentially one of 'stability', that is itself a characteristic of the Pole." The Mountain, referred to as an 'Island', "remains imm-ovable amidst the ceaseless agitation of the waves, a disturbance that reflects that of the external world. Accordingly, it is necessary to cross the 'sea of passions' in order to reach the 'Mount of Salvation', the 'Sanctuary of Peace'."

Our search for Hyperborea is our desire to return to Paradesha or Paradise — the primordial spring of Man's original existence. The importance of knowing the terrestrial location of a lost civilisation at the northern regions is thus overshadowed by its symbolic relevance.

To seek Hyperborea is to quest for spiritual enlightenment. The Mountain, the Island, the immovable Rock, fixed in a Polar orientation, relays a symbolic representation of our search for Ultimate Reality. Its immovability anchors us to this important task.

Footnotes:

1. Arktos, The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism and Nazi Survival by Joscelyn Godwin, p. 16.
2. Quoted in Arktos, The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism and Nazi Survival, p. 58-9, original source Revolt Against the Modern World by Julius Evola, 1951.
3. The Lord of the World by Rene Guenon, p. 50.
4. Ibid, p. 56
5. Arktos, The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism and Nazi Survival by Joscelyn Godwin, p. 167-8.

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