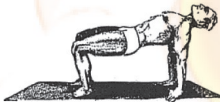
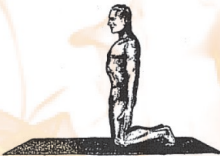




JOHN MICHAEL GREER



THE SECRET OF THE FIVE RITES

In Search of a Lost
Western Tradition of
Inner Alchemy

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Tradition of Inner Alchemy

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INTRODUCTION

In 1939, the Mid-Day Press, a small publishing firm in Los Angeles, issued a thirty-two-page booklet by Peter Kelder titled *The Eye of Revelation*. It taught a simple but effective set of five exercises for health and longevity, the Five Rites. The author claimed that he had learned these from an Englishman he called by the pseudonym of Colonel Bradford, who studied them while staying in a lamasery somewhere in southern Asia, and who had been rejuvenated to a dramatic degree by practicing them.

Certain dietary rules and lifestyle principles accompanied the Rites, so did a Sixth Rite that worked the diaphragm muscles and redirected sexual energies, and so did a set of teachings about seven energy centers or vortices in the body, which are not the same as the well-known seven chakras along the spine. These vortices are among the most distinctive things about the system and are found in only a scattered handful of sources elsewhere. It is by awakening the vortices to their normal rate of spin, the book claims, that the Rites achieve their effects.

Kelder's central claim was that daily practice of the Five Rites would restore health and vigor to the old and maintain these things

in the young. He also hinted that the Rites formed the foundation for a set of practices that could open the way to supernormal states of awareness, by means of the redirection of the sexual energies just mentioned. The pamphlet made only brief references to these deeper dimensions, however, and focused primarily on rejuvenation.

The Eye of Revelation was one of many publications on exercise and spirituality that saw print that year. Plenty of those other books first saw print in California, too. By the time Kelder's booklet was published, the Golden State had been a hotbed of alternative culture and esoteric spirituality for more than two decades. Health food stores and occult-themed bookstores in California and elsewhere put the booklet on the shelves alongside competing volumes. At the time, it apparently didn't sell enough copies to merit a second printing.

In 1946, the Mid-Day Press issued an expanded edition with two further chapters. This had no more of an impact on the world than the original edition. Today both editions are rarities: only two copies of the 1939 edition and only one copy of the 1946 edition are known to exist. In the bustling and highly competitive world of American alternative spirituality, they were apparently one more flash in the pan.

That began to change in 1975 when Borderland Sciences Research Foundation—a California-based network of researchers interested in the places where science and spirituality overlap—issued an inexpensive reprint of the 1939 edition. Thereafter the Five Rites began to show up in other publications, notably Donald Michael Kraig's bestselling 1985 occult textbook *Modern Magick*. By the turn of the millennium, as interest in the exercises spread, the Rites were being practiced by individuals and taught by exercise teachers all over the world. Since then the same process has only accelerated.

All this interest inevitably stirred up questions about the origins of the Five Rites and the teachings that framed them. The book's claim that the Rites originated in a lamasery somewhere near India sparked many attempts to trace the origins of the exercises to a Tibetan source, without any noticeable success. Various other theories were floated without ever settling the matter, and in the usual way of things, the controversies stirred up tempests in an assortment of online teapots. One difficulty that none of these theories were able to cope with was the simple fact that the Five Rites do not appear to have been taught anywhere in the Indian subcontinent or the Himalayan regions before Kelder published his book.

All the theories of the Five Rites' origins, as far as I know, looked east to the healing arts and mystical traditions of Asia. All the while, the solution to the riddle was waiting unnoticed in a very different place.

The Western world has its own healing arts and mystical traditions, its own systems of energy centers and exercises for awakening them, but it has also a very complex and conflicted relationship with these arts, traditions, and systems. It therefore became fashionable in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to claim Eastern origins for Western traditions. Since it was equally fashionable during these same years for Western mystics and occultists to draw on Eastern sources when they could, a great deal of confusion inevitably resulted. The origins of the Five Rites were among the things that got caught up in that confusion. Despite the story Peter Kelder told in *The Eye of Revelation*, the Rites originated in the West, not in the East; they drew some of their inspiration from material about Indian spiritual practices available in the American occult community in the 1930s, but they are a Western creation, and more specifically an American creation.

It needs to be remembered that today's sensitivities about cultural appropriation did not yet exist in 1939. At that time, and for decades before and after, references to Asian countries were used constantly to add the exotic cachet of distant lands to homegrown American products. Stores that carried "spiritual supplies" in the African-American neighborhoods of greater Los Angeles in the year *The Eye of Revelation* was first published, for example, sold bottles of Hindu Grass Oil and Chinese Wash—two widely used ingredients in urban folk magic that had no connection to India or China except the names.

In that same year, visitors to Laguna Beach could take in lectures from an occult society called the Royal Order of Tibet, which had no more to do with Tibet than it did with royalty. (Its head was George Adamski, who would become much more famous a decade later as the most successful of the first generation of UFO contactees.) The lamasery that played a central role in the origin story of the Five Rites, as we will see, was one more example of the same custom: a piece of vivid fiction meant to give the Five Rites an air of Oriental romance in order to encourage potential students to take them seriously.

The value of the Five Rites, however, does not depend on the accuracy of the origin story in Peter Kelder's booklet. Over the eight decades since that book was published, the Rites have proven their worth as a source of health and vitality for people of all ages. What lies behind the

facade of Asian wisdom, furthermore, is a story at least as fascinating as any yarn the pseudonymous Colonel Bradford could tell—a story of secret traditions and forgotten lore from many sources that flowed together in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe and America, and gave rise to a system of inner transformation in which the Five Rites were central.

In the chapters to come, my first task will be to untangle the various threads that were spun together to create the Five Rites as they appear in Kelder's booklet. My second task will be to follow each of those threads back as far as possible, to reveal something of the landscape of ideas and practices that gave rise to these remarkable exercises. Once those tasks are complete, the final stage of my exploration will be to spin the threads back together, putting the Five Rites in as much of their original context as I can, and describing in detail the practice of the broader system in which the Rites have their place—a system of inner alchemy meant to awaken certain subtle powers of the human body and mind.

The process of tracing a lost occult tradition requires many of the same mental skills that private investigators and police detectives use in their work. The tradition, like the identity or whereabouts of the perpetrator of a crime, is deliberately hidden and has to be reconstructed from whatever fragmentary clues come to hand. A fingerprint here, a scuff mark there, a bit of carpet fiber adhering to the grip of a revolver or the clothing on a corpse: these are the scraps of evidence that allow a detective to focus in on a single suspect. In the same way, a distinctive phrase here, a curious detail of teaching there, a connection between two teachers or schools, can allow the investigator of occult traditions to get past the barriers of secrecy and recover a system of theory and practice that has been lost for decades or centuries.

One of the most important clues in the present case is also one of the most obvious. Kelder titled his work *The Eye of Revelation* and ended his text with a vivid sentence: "Truly, I thought to myself, The Eye of Revelation is upon the world." Nowhere in his booklet does he explain what that Eye is or how it relates to the Five Rites. The Eye of Revelation, as I will show, is a specific anatomical structure in the human brain, and its stimulation through the Rites and certain other practices detailed in the following chapters has potent psychophysical effects on human consciousness and health. The awakening of that Eye was the central secret taught by a number of esoteric societies in late nineteenth and

early twentieth century America and Europe. The Five Rites, while they are valid on their own as an exercise system for health, vitality, and longevity, take on a further importance as keys to that awakening. Full instructions for the process are given in this book.

A few words of thanks are in order before we proceed. I am indebted to James Borges, director of the Borderland Sciences Research Association, for access to several important source documents, notably Emile Raux's *Hindu Secrets of Virility and Rejuvenation*, which filled in several crucial details in the history of the Five Rites. I also owe a great deal to two online archives, www.archive.org and www.iapsop.org, which have made an astonishing wealth of classic out-of-copyright occult texts available in PDF formats for free download; without the labor of the individuals who have contributed time and money to both these resources, this book would never have been possible.

The Eye of Revelation began with a narrative, and this book will do the same. We will start searching for the secret of the Five Rites in a setting at least as exotic as any Himalayan lamasery: the Los Angeles occult scene between the two world wars.

An investigation of *The Eye of Revelation*, a system of inner alchemy meant to awaken the subtle powers of the human body and mind

Examining a short book first published in 1939, John Michael Greer explores the teaching surrounding a simple yet effective set of five exercises for health and longevity: the Five Rites (sometimes called the Five Tibetans). Certain dietary rules and lifestyle principles accompanied the Rites, as well a set of teachings about seven energy centres or vortices in the body. It is by awakening the vortices to their normal rate of spin, the book claims, that the Rites achieve their full effects.

Following each of these threads back in time, *The Secret of the Five Rites* illuminates the landscape of ideas and practices that gave rise to these remarkable exercises. Spinning the threads back together, Greer puts the Five Rites in as much of their original context as he can, describing in detail the practice of the broader system in which the Rites have their place, a system of inner alchemy meant to awaken certain subtle powers of the human body and mind.

The Secret of the Five Rites also includes the complete original text of *The Eye of Revelation*.

John Michael Greer is the award-winning author of more than fifty books, including *The New Encyclopaedia of the Occult*, *The Druidry Handbook*, *The Celtic Golden Dawn*, and *Circles of Power: An Introduction to Hermetic Magic*. An initiate in Freemasonry, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, Greer served as the Grand Archdruid of the Ancient Order of Druids in America (AODA) for twelve years. He lives in Rhode Island with his wife Sara. Greer is also the author of seventeen fantasy and science fiction novels and ten nonfiction books on peak oil and the future of industrial society. He blogs weekly on politics, magic, and the future at www.ecosophia.net.

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