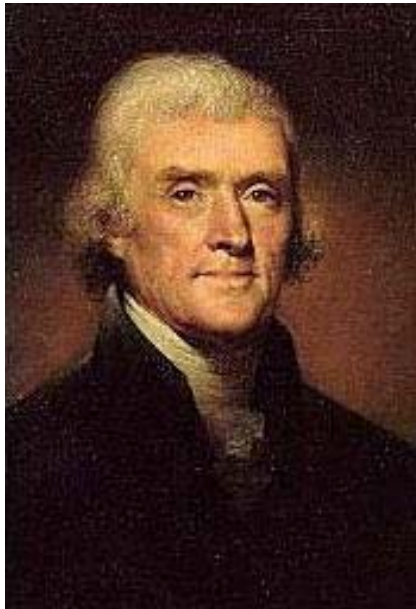




Kundalini Awareness



THOMAS JEFFERSON

by

Eileen Holland

“Give up money, give up fame, give up science, give up the earth itself and all it contains, rather than do an immoral act . . .”

—Thomas Jefferson Letter to Peter Carr

Exhibiting the distinctive stamp of the true genius, while at the same time eschewing the path of mysticism, Thomas Jefferson has bequeathed a legacy of idealism and common sense unparalleled in modern history. His lofty philosophy combined with his deep love of the simple things of this earth paint a portrait of a most remarkable life. The list of his accomplishments have filled numerous volumes. His biographers, after years of walking in his shoes, stand in awe and love of this revolutionary giant whose greatest joy was planting a new seed in his garden. His love for humanity was only slightly overshadowed by his deep devotion to his family. Jefferson has been called the “Champion of the Free Mind,” his life dedicated to the cause of religious freedom. Dumas Malone, his most prolific biographer, felt that “some of the stories about his magnanimity are almost too good to be true . . . loyalty to old friends was one of his most notable characteristics.”

Jefferson was the third President of the United States, the author of its Declaration of Independence, the mastermind behind the historic expeditions of Lewis and Clark, the architect and founder of a great university, the master of a sprawling estate, president of the American Philosophical Society for an unprecedented tenure and yet his happiest role was that of husband, father and grandfather.

He was born into one of the most expansive periods in recorded history. The population of North America, whose lives were centered on the Atlantic coast and tied to England, went from one million to ten million between 1743 and 1826. These ten million broke their ties with England, established a constitutional federal republic and began to expand a virgin continent which appeared to have inexhaustible resources—all in one man’s lifetime. If, as some of Jefferson’s critics have judged, he sacrificed self-reflective philosophy for action, it seems readily understandable.

In his early years, encouraged by his father, Thomas developed a love for nature that was to become the central focus of his life. At his beloved Monticello, of which he was the architect—buildings, gardens and landscape—he would spend his days experimenting with new crops and exchanging seeds with European friends who were amazed at his horticultural expertise. “Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God,” he wrote in his Notes on Virginia. He had many in his employ to oversee his multi-acre estate, but he personally kept close watch and meticulous records of all that was harvested there. His writings indicate he was an eminently qualified naturalist familiar with the flora and fauna, mountains, rivers, population, laws, native peoples and manufacturers of his home state of Virginia. “There is not a blade of grass that shoots uninteresting to me,” he declared.

Jefferson was an accomplished musician whose knowledge of the classical repertoire was extensive. He played the violin, often joining in concert with friends at social gatherings. Tradition has it that he won the heart

of his lady and quickly dispatched any rivals for her affection with his ability on the “fiddle”. It would seem more likely, however, that Martha Wayles Skelton’s superior mind, keen business sense, graceful carriage, wide education and her own musical accomplishments, were the qualities that led Thomas into a marriage of profound love and congenial companionship. A high profile statesman who has left more written words than any before or since, Jefferson’s desire for privacy in his personal life bordered on the idiosyncratic and it is believed he burned all correspondence to his wife after her death. It is also of interest to note that, at her death, Jefferson’s display of grief was so intense that his friends and family feared he would go insane. His bursts of grief were “violent” according to his daughter who attended him, and he was unable to take up any of his responsibilities for several weeks. He also displayed a deep need for solitude throughout much of his life and it is on record that while serving as the American Minister to France he stayed often at a Carthusian monastery.

Jefferson developed an extraordinarily balanced set of interests during his lifetime. In addition to being a naturalist and musician, he could converse expertly on art, science, religion, physics, astronomy, law, literature, and architecture. He invented a variety of mechanical tools to aid in his household chores. He spoke several languages and could read the classics in the original Greek and Latin. In the study of law, his ability to concentrate was considered outstanding and his contemporaries praised him as unusually “equipped” in the knowledge of his profession.

But it is in his personal ethics that we find the heart of his real genius and his exalted place in the history of man. When he was but 20 years old he wrote these words to his friend John Page,

“Perfect happiness, I believe, was never intended by the Deity to be the lot of his creatures in this world; but that He has very much put in our power the nearness of our approach to it, is what I have steadfastly believed. The most fortunate of us, on our journey through life, frequently meet with calamities and misfortunes which may greatly affect us; and to fortify our minds against attacks of these calamities and misfortunes should be one of the principal studies and endeavors of our lives. The only method of doing this is to assume a perfect resignation to the Divine will, that to consider that, whatever does happen, must happen . . . Such, dear Page, will be the language of a man who considers this situation in life and such should be the language of every man who would wish to render that situation as easy as the nature of it will admit. Few things will disturb him at all; nothing will disturb him much.”

Jefferson’s capacity for compassion extended beyond his family and close circle of friends. In a letter to Patrick Henry, protesting the treatment of English prisoners of war, he said, “Is an enemy so execrable that, though in captivity his wishes and comforts are to be disregarded and even crossed? I think not. It is for the benefit of mankind to mitigate the horrors of war as much as possible. The practice, therefore, of modern nations, of treating captive enemies with politeness and generosity, is not only delightful in contemplation, but really interesting to all the world, friends, foes and neutrals.” When the British commander, William Phillips, responded with thanks, Jefferson wrote him, “The great cause which divides our countries is not to be decided by individual animosities. The harmony of private societies cannot weaken national efforts. To contribute by neighborly intercourse and attention to make others happy is the shortest and surest way of being happy ourselves. As these sentiments seem to have directed your conduct, we should be unwise and illiberal were we not to preserve the same temper of mind.”

Jefferson has been criticized for the keeping of slaves. In his own mind he knew it was an abhorrent system but felt that the wholesale release of a people unprepared for freedom in that particular society was equally irresponsible. He made his position clear with this statement, “The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submission on the other . . . Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that His justice cannot sleep forever . . . But if something is not done, and soon done, we shall be the murderers of our own children . . .” This was the author of the words, “all men are created equal”. Is it any wonder that the issue of slavery was to be an agonizing conflict for Jefferson all of his life? He was born into a family of privilege and a society where the holding of slaves was commonplace. He knew that the public at large would not allow slaves to live as free men, but he sincerely believed that they should be free. He drew up a Bill in his native Virginia to prevent the further importation of slaves which was passed and this was, at least, a first step to the eventual emancipation which was to come in future generations.

As a politician and a statesman, Jefferson was a student of human behavior and his experience in human affairs, coupled with his sensitivity and keen intuition, made him a natural leader. He had little admiration for pomp and nobility and blamed royalty along with the priests for many social evils. Charles B. Sanford in his *Religious Life of Thomas Jefferson* says, “It is clear from his writings that Jefferson combined a somewhat

skeptical view of human nature with an optimistic belief in the future of human society. From his study of Enlightenment philosophy and scientific progress he drew hope for human development, but his study of history and the ancient classics taught him caution about individual virtue. As well as recognizing individual weaknesses and evils, he thought special problems arose when populations were crowded together in cities.”

Jefferson was especially admired by some for his tolerance, always preferring to use reason rather than might. This quality was never more in evidence than in his handling of the famous Embargo Act of 1807. Britain had been arbitrarily taking United States’ citizens off ships and putting them in service to fight France. Jefferson employed economic sanctions in an attempt to influence the power philosophies of England and France. “For years,” say the authors of *The Growth of the American Republic*, “he had been wanting an opportunity to try commercial exclusion as a substitute for war . . . The President urged, ‘Let us see whether having taught so many useful lessons to Europe, we may not add that of showing them that there are peaceable means of repressing injustice, by making it to the interest of the aggressor to do what is just.’” The failure of the embargo due to financial losses by the U.S. does not diminish the idealism of this greatest of Presidents. The author of the Declaration of Independence may not, as some of his enemies suggested, have come up with an original thought or theory for the government of his beloved country, but he was the first to propose democracy as a real way of life and that was revolutionary for his time.

As a champion of human rights, he knew “of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise control with a wholesome discretion the remedy is not to take it away from them but to inform their discretion through education. This is the true corrective of abuse of constitutional power.” And he believed that man could live up to this responsibility. In a letter to his nephew, Peter Carr, Jefferson told him, “Man was destined for society. His morality, therefore, was to be formed merely relative to this. This sense is as much a part of his nature as the sense of hearing, seeing, feeling . . . This moral sense, or conscience, is as much a part of man as a leg or arm.” Jefferson was not naively seeking Utopia but observing from his deep knowledge of history when he said, “Experience has shown that, even under the best forms, those entrusted with power have, in time and by slow operations, perverted it into tyranny, and it is believed that the effective means of preventing this would be to illuminate, as far as practical, the minds of the people at large, and more especially to give them knowledge of those facts which history exhibited.”

Only 33 years of age when he drafted the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson showed a trait then that would always be a part of his character. He attempted to have George Mason elected as a delegate to the Continental Congress in his place preferring to remain in the background as advisor. Personal ambition was not a motivating factor at any time of his life.

In his biography of Jefferson, Phillips Russell gives us this picture,

“Lewis and Clark’s success was overshadowed by other events of the period, but their expedition remains one of American history’s great achievements. Jefferson fathered the conception, planned its details, and clung resolutely to it until it was fully carried out. By means of this expedition as linked to the Louisiana Purchase, he gave the United States, once cooped up in a narrow ribbon on the Atlantic coast, an empire that leaped the great Mississippi, ascended the Missouri and reached the Pacific coast. Because of it the American nation was able to keep many generations busy, peaceful and comparatively harmless to their neighbors. The whole enterprise was engraved with characteristic Jefferson markings. It was typical of Jefferson’s way of doing good by stealth and indirection. He would never lead an enterprise himself if he could find competent agents to do it. That Jefferson could thus mingle politics, secret diplomacy and natural history was testimony to the veiled methods that so many times convinced his enemies that he was up to the most sinister deviltry when actually he was laboring in some cause much larger than himself. He never claimed credit for the Lewis and Clark expedition and never mentioned it among the enterprises in which he took pride; and strange to say, he omitted it altogether from the list of achievements which he wished inscribed upon his tomb.”

This epitaph also omits his U.S. Presidency and includes only these three things—the Declaration of Independence, the Ordinance for the Establishment of Religious Freedom in Virginia (of which he was most proud), and Founder of the University of Virginia—all achievements which directly improved society.

Thomas Jefferson’s religious beliefs were and continue to be the most debated issue of his entire character. His firm belief in God as the Creator found its way into the Declaration of Independence, the Religious Freedom Bill and is the topic of much of his personal correspondence. His deep conviction that men should answer to their own God—a God they had reasoned out personally, led him to write this in a letter to his nephew,

“Question with boldness even the existence of a god; because if there be one he must more approve of the homage of reason than that of blindfolded fear . . . if it ends in a belief that there is no god, you will find incitements to virtue in the comfort and pleasantness you feel in its exercise and the love of others which it will procure for you. If you find reason to believe there is a god, a consciousness that you are acting under his eye and that he approves you will be a vast incitement.”

Jefferson appears not to have had an intense or sudden spiritual experience but from his youngest days expressed a serene sense of an indwelling, loving and just God from whom all blessings flowed. He, in fact, seemed to feel that one should not delve too deeply into the realms of the spiritual as expressed in this correspondence to Isaac Story, a Massachusetts minister, “It is not for me to pronounce on the hypothesis you present of a transmigration of souls from one body to another in certain cases. The laws of nature have withheld from us the means of physical knowledge of the country of spirits, and revelation has, for reasons unknown to us, chosen to leave us in the dark as we were. When I was young I was fond of the speculations which seemed to promise some insight into the hidden country, but observing at length that they left me in the same ignorance in which they found me, I have for very many years ceased to read or think concerning them, and have reposed my head on that pillow of ignorance which a benevolent Creator has made so soft for us . . .”

He disliked priests because of what he felt were their dogmatic distortions of Christ’s teachings. He was branded an atheist among other things and although he rarely defended himself from critical attacks he felt compelled to write to a friend,

“To the corruptions of Christianity I am indeed opposed, but not to the genuine precepts of Jesus himself. I am a Christian, but I am a Christian in the only sense in which I believe Jesus wished anyone to be, sincerely attached to his doctrine in preference to all others, ascribing to him all human excellence, and believing that he never claimed any other.”

Jefferson’s religious philosophy can also be compared to the ancient precepts of Yoga. He believed happiness was the aim of life and that virtue, that is, the overcoming of desire and fear, was the foundation of that happiness. Far from employing a passive philosophy, Jefferson constantly strove to achieve this happiness through selfless action, encouraging all around him to do the same.

Norman Cousins, in a brilliant summary of Jefferson’s religious views offers this reflection,

“Jefferson, in particular, sought to rescue religious belief from the kind of state sponsorship or entanglement that frequently led to injustice and discrimination. His argument was not against faith, but against monopoly and political power under religious auspices. Indeed, he believed that faith could best survive when it was relieved of the burden of governing through enforced belief. And since he felt that the more men knew about science, the greater their respect for the Deity, he was undisturbed because evolving science did not verify all religious theory about the universe. To him, the universe was far more mysterious and grandiose than was claimed in the fundamental view and therefore a perpetual source of stimulation to spiritual man.”

Much has been written, too, of Jefferson’s physical attributes. In his youth, the red-haired lawyer cut quite a social figure and was not the least opposed to feminine companionship. After the death of his wife and while Minister to France, he continued to have close relationships with women and these have been well chronicled over the years. He was considered a connoisseur and gourmet, his guests always treated to the finest wines and good food. He himself enjoyed human pleasure but balanced this at all times with self-mastery. His charm and manner did not appear to diminish with age. Described by Margaret Bayard Smith at the age of 66, “. . . His tall and slender figure is not impaired by age, though bent by care and labor. His white locks announce an age his activity, strength, health, enthusiasm, ardor and gaiety contradict. His face owes all its charm to its expression and intelligence, his features not good and his complexion bad, but his countenance is so full of soul and beams with so much benignity that when the eye rests upon the face it is too busy perusing its expression to think of its features or complexion . . . But his manners—how gentle, how humble, how kind.”

Jefferson remained active until shortly before his death at 83, writing, riding through his cherished countryside and responding to the endless stream of correspondence delivered to Monticello. Phillips Russell writes “. . . One of Jefferson’s distinctions was that increasing age found him neither cynical nor conservative. During a long life he remained an inquirer and student.”

The written records of Thomas Jefferson’s extraordinary and often controversial life are voluminous and could provide a lifetime pursuit for the interested investigator. The question we are trying to answer here is, did he bear the unmistakable characteristics of the authentic genius? His exceptional abilities, his profound faith

and morality, his revolutionary ideas, his compassion, his sensitivity and intense emotion for his loved ones, his generosity of spirit, his ceaseless efforts for social reform, his healthy sexuality, his progression to a serene old age are all certain signs that he was. Was he prophetic as well? Phillips Russell thinks so, “. . . it is arresting to any reader of Jefferson’s writings to discover how often he pointed a finger directly at the evils, upheavals and disasters that later came upon the American people in consequence of violation of economic balance, political justice and social fair-dealing.” Has Jefferson left an indelible mark upon society? Daniel J. Boorstin believes he has, “. . . the Jeffersonian tradition has played and should continue to play a vital and valuable role in American history: it has provided our principal check on the demands of irresponsible power. If we can improve our definitions of the original Jeffersonian world of ideas, we will have gone a long way towards achieving a self-consciousness in American culture, towards discovering the perils of the way of thought which we have inherited from the Jeffersonians and hence towards strengthening the philosophical foundations of a moral society in our day.”

This short journey through the world of Thomas Jefferson cannot begin to disclose all that he contributed to history, and we will leave it to Dumas Malone, his most devoted biographer, to express the essence of the man; “I regard his faith as the most admirable thing about him and his enduring legacy—his faith in human beings and in the human mind. To those who exalt force and condone deception he will ever be a visionary, to be ignored or silenced. But to all who cherish freedom and abhor tyranny in any form he is an abiding symbol of the hope that springs eternal.”

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