

The Inner Web

A Communion of Aspirations

by Alan Harris

QUICKENED ACCESS TO A COMMUNION of human ideas, aspirations, and information--a communion that I call the "Inner Web"--is at the heart of a cybernetic tool known as the World Wide Web. The Inner Web is an emerging siblinghood of the spirit, a trust that eases humans from fearful separateness toward fully-sensed unity. Known also as brotherhood, this spirit has been growing and maturing through the centuries like an indestructibly delicate flower.

Plato, Rumi, Abraham Lincoln, H. P. Blavatsky, Gustav Mahler, and Ralph Waldo Emerson all saw and extolled unity and brotherhood, each from within a unique mission.

No less than these torchbearers, anyone at any moment has open access to the Inner Web, through outer communications and inner communion. The Inner Web that we all share has recently seen the introduction of new tools. Now, by means of the World Wide Web and Internet e-mail, millions are enabled to communicate quickly and informally with others who may share similar enthusiasms or griefs. Friendships blossom as easily between continents as between neighborhoods. Just enough anonymity may prevail in these e-mail relationships to allow for personal confessions, the sharing of which seems to matter more than knowing full names.

A few denizens of the wired-world have destructive or selfish motives and have regrettably been empowered for harm by our new electronic environment. The wary are reluctant to "jump onto" the Internet for fear that they will fall prey to some dastardly scheme or dangerous personality. Be that as it may, the Internet may be found to be safer than most streets, provided that one isn't prone to being cheated through one's own deviousness, "losing the farm" through a quest for easy wealth, or letting romantic fantasies ruin one's personal integrity (like it or not, any of these can happen).

Web-published writings of many flavors are reaching appreciative audiences now without the traditional midwifery of profit-based print publishers and their editors. Web readers can locate original writings easily and enjoy them, or if not, just surf on. The democratic pulse of humanity's Inner Web can be felt within much that is offered on the World Wide Web. Writers are enjoying their new access to readers, even though some college professors and critics openly scorn the work of fameless Web authors who are neither published in journals nor enshrined within English 102 anthologies. In fact, a few years ago I was amused to hear a poetry professor at the University of Iowa refer to Web poetry as "swill." How aristocratic he must have felt. But there are plenty of readers who actually prefer this alleged swill to the sheeplike literary hero-worship that isn't difficult to find in academia. Those with cultivated tastes might wonder how surfers could possibly enjoy literature that is less than the finest. Well, perhaps these surfers need exactly swill at this moment in their life's walk, rather than the elegant elegies listed in a college syllabus.

Let's observe that millions of very fine human beings have no need for the hallowed lines of Shakespeare or T.S. Eliot. In a more democratic vein, Edgar Guest's poetry, much satirized by America's correctly-credentialed literary pundits, has spoken genuinely to multitudes in the simple rhythms and rhymes they find attractive. Probing further into democracy, we find that many of today's Web poets misspell words or corrupt meter or reach for awful rhymes. And yet, the inner experience imparted by these writings can often be engaging. Gold can be found in ugly mines.

Equipped with the World Wide Web, citizens of the Inner Web are empowered to journey broadly and (if so inclined) deeply--while sitting at home. Search engines allow quick sifting through the unwanted to find the wanted. In the commercial milieu, the purchase and sale of scarce items is now more efficient than before, and corporations of all sizes have new opportunities to primp their pretty plumage before the public. Blossoming e-mail relationships have cut through traditional social boundaries to link individuals and bond families. Even the apparent harm that some would blame e-mail for might be seen more positively as a quickening of personal cause-and-effect, leading to solid lessons and a stronger character.

The Inner Web is not the same as the Internet, although the latter is one avenue into the former. The Internet as a tool or medium facilitates the transcendence of separateness that springs from barriers--i.e., oceans, languages, mountains, ignorance, prejudice, and disparate beliefs. Separateness usually manifests as hostility or fear or ego, but at root it appears to be an apartness from one's own inner life--treatable out of the inexhaustible pharmacy of unity and compassion found within the Inner Web.

The Internet is neither a panacea nor a scourge as within its flow of electrons we learn to "touch into" the Inner Web. Perhaps with it (or something better) we can eventually realize unity in a separative world--especially if, as sparks, we will awaken to that Flame we have in common which warms us, feeds us, is us.

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