

A Path to Hope from a Mysterious Ancient Text:

Gems within the *Secret Revelation of John*

Shirley Paulson

We think we're so smart. I really wasn't worried when the pandemic broke out, because after all, we had medical technology the world had never known before. We had the science, the money, the infrastructure. We would get this taken care of in a few weeks and be on our way.

It didn't work out that way.

In our scramble to figure out a whole new way of living and thinking during a pandemic, certainly the last place many of us would look for new knowledge is in some little-known ancient Christian text. Haven't we developed a far more sophisticated knowledge of anthropology and of the natural world? Haven't we learned that the ancients' knowledge of the universe was way off base? And haven't modern theologians gained a deeper knowledge of God and human experience?

I will argue that we have good reason to take a careful look at an ancient text that appeared with the collection of manuscripts discovered near the Egyptian town of Nag Hammadi in the middle of the twentieth century. There's something about the *Secret Revelation of John* (SRJ) that still rings true and brings profound hope. It also challenges us in any age.

Scholars usually refer to it as the Apocryphon^a of John, but I use its common name because I want to use everyday language to demonstrate that this book is highly relevant for the world today. It should not be considered an obscure museum artifact.

I have to confess that it's not an easy read, though. Lengthwise, it's about two thousand words short of the Gospel of Mark, but references to demons, *aeons*, and various types of saviors are foreign to us now. And yet there are some precious gems worth polishing. They have enduring

value and could even bring important wisdom to our handling of contemporary world troubles.

Relevance Then and Now

The biggest reason SRJ can still speak to us today is that its author tackled the heavy issues of his^b day which led to the same questions confronting every age: Where does evil come from? Is divine help available when we're at the end of our resources? Is there a way to heal people who suffer? What happens at the end?

Nobody knows who the author was, but there are clues for when and where he wrote SRJ. It was probably one of the numerous manuscripts written by and for Christ people that appeared somewhere during the 100s (that's the second century for you historians). It fits the cultural setting of the period and points to a backdrop in Alexandria, Egypt. After all, the great Alexandrian Museum complex was there, and this is where writers, thinkers, philosophers, and religious leaders from the wider Mediterranean region came to live and study.

A large community of Jews settled there too, especially after the destruction of their temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE forced their evacuation. Alexandria was not much better for the refugees, however. Despite Rome's power base being over a thousand miles away, its intolerant oppressive powers exceeded the breaking point for thousands of Alexandrian Jews who fought back in a desperate and debilitating rebellion, now known as the Rebellion of the Exile of 115–117. From the soul of diminished Jewish and Christ-following communities fighting for survival, the author of SRJ wrote words of comfort, hope, and spiritual strength.

Second-century philosophers such as Stoics and Platonists, scientists such as Ptolemy, and religious

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a. *Apocryphon* is a Greek term for something that is secret.

b. It is a reasonable assumption that the author is male, since very few women of this period were privileged enough to read and write.

leaders had become his conversation partners, but he always turned back to the teachings of Jesus as his model for hope. No one had written like this before. Times had changed since Jesus lived and taught in Judea, yet the author of SRJ recognized that the powerful Christ message was still of paramount importance in his age more than a century later. His call for awakening and transformation spoke to the hearts of his own generation throughout the Mediterranean area.

When I picked it up to read it early in the twenty-first century, I was reading an English translation that came from broken and brittle papyri written in Coptic. And that was probably an ancient translation from an original manuscript written in Greek, which is now lost. But the language and fragile paper were not the only forms of separation between the author of two thousand years ago and me. The author writes of demons and *aeons*^c I knew nothing about. Furthermore, it had no relationship to familiar Western church doctrine, traditions, or authority, since the ecclesial establishment of the Christian church I'm familiar with occurred long after the writing of the book. This ancient text came from a world almost unfathomable to me, and yet it grabbed me as a new voice speaking Christian depth that startled me.

Many of its ideas are abundantly available in other texts in the Bible and elsewhere, but the author of SRJ presents them with a certain order and logic that inspire a reconsideration of their meaning. His message arose not from the couch of a comfortable philosopher, but in response to urgent cries for help. Pain, physical punishment, war, threats of war, and poverty resulting from exceedingly heavy taxes by the oppressive Roman rulers begged for a true savior, not a theory. The revelation for John became the reality of healing and salvation and remained a secret to the oppressors.

Structure

The book is organized in three main parts, each building on the premise that healing and salvation are real possibilities to those who listen and learn. It begins and ends with a story about Jesus' disciple John. All the second-century readers of the book knew that the story about John was fiction, since Jesus and his disciples had been gone probably over a century. But the scene sets the stage for second-century (as well as twenty-first-century) readers to relate to their own points of pain and sorrow and to seek healing and help.

c. The Greek term *aeon* is difficult to translate into English, since the idea is foreign to the modern English-speaking world. It can be understood as an emanation of power from the supreme deity, but its operation is not limited to time or space.

John was grieving over the loss of his master, Jesus, when Jesus appeared to him in a vision to comfort him. The rest of the book consists of the vision intended to console and guide him—and all future readers of SRJ.

The three-part vision teaches that:

1. God is both loving and omnipotent goodness.
2. Evil is an impotent counterfeit, or fraud.
3. The experience of healing is an essential element of full salvation for everyone who wants it.

Theologians have debated all three of these statements for two millennia, but the author of SRJ presents them with consistent logic. Admittedly, this message is a hidden *secret* for those who do not grasp the truth behind these statements. But for those who do grapple with them and cling to them, these are inspiring, liberating, and healing thoughts sent directly from the Savior (Christ). They disclose a hidden wisdom that transcends both ancient practices and modern technological advances.

Each one is like a rough gemstone before it has been tumbled. We hardly notice them in their rugged exteriors, but with patience we discover their depth and beauty.

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The First Gem: God is Both Loving and All-powerful Goodness

That God is both loving and all-powerful goodness seems pretty simple. Whoever has worshipped God may not find it difficult to envision the love and power of goodness. But as theologians have pointed out, especially after the twentieth-century Holocaust, the idea of a loving God is hard to reconcile with an almighty God. What loving God would have allowed that to happen?

SRJ's defense of a God of omnipotent goodness is not mere theory. It abides in the context of a violent world. In fact, the argument in favor of God's weakness or unwillingness to love the world was so prevalent at the time that this author devotes almost a third of his book to a contradictory and detailed account of God's solid and powerful goodness. Here is a summary of his case in favor of the all-powerful goodness of this God:

It [God] is the immeasurable light, which is pure, holy, and unpolluted. It is ineffable being perfect in incorruptibility. It does not exist in perfection, blessedness, or divinity but It is far superior to these. . . . It is an aeon giving aeon, life giving life, a blessed one giving blessedness, a knowledge giving understanding, a good one giving goodness. It is mercy giving mercy and salvation. (King, 4:20–23, 37–38)¹

To make clear that this goodness is not remote or only a figment of imagination, the author explains in further detail that all true creation comes directly from this Mother-Father God. It is a creation greater than what the human mind can conceive. Readers are forewarned that in order to grasp the nature of God's power of goodness, they must admit that the knowledge of God's nature will not come from the finite human senses, experience, or education. It appears only in thought derived from the Father (God).

Thought, or *gnosis*, is a critical aspect of this first gem. *Gnosis* is a Greek word not easily translated into English, but we know where *gnosis* comes from and what it does. It's the knowledge that comes from God (Mind), and it brings about a satisfying awareness of where we have come from and where we're going. *Gnosis* is often translated as "knowledge," but that misses its uplifting and healing connotations. *Gnosis* is not a mark of superiority, but a gift from God for anyone who claims it.

And what happens to those who do claim it? The most prized reward that comes only to the most pure and uplifted may not be what modern Westerners would seek after, but for the first centuries in the Common Era, this was the true gift. People who want it can become a member of the unshakable generation! In modern parlance we might call it a kind of spiritual calm. This privilege comes to anyone who gains the profound realization of our origin.

John, the one who receives the secret revelation, heard from his Savior, Jesus, that what he was about to learn was something he was going to convey to those "who are from the unshakable generation of the perfect human" (Meyer, 108). This positive idea of stillness or the "unshakable generation" circulated through a much wider audience than any specific religious community.

As far back as the book of Psalms, we find examples of this virtuous state: the "king trusts in the Lord, and through the steadfast love of the Most High he *shall not be moved*" (Ps 21:7, NRSV). New Testament writers such as the pseudonymous author of 2 Thessalonians also affirmed this desirous state, urging his readers "not to be quickly *shaken* in mind or alarmed either by spirit or by word or by letter" (2 Thess 2:2, NRSV). And even the third-century philosopher Plotinus described the "stability which accompanies conformity to the condition of the intelligible realm."²

People from all walks of life had good reason to seek peace and stability because demons were lurking around every corner, ready to stir up passions and emotional agitation. Jews, Greeks, Christ-followers, rich, and poor all knew that demons were the enemies of humanity, because passions resulted in disease and destruction in all forms.

While we may not use the language of the "unshakable generation" today, it's easy to recognize our own quest for peace. Graphic images of war and violence all around the world pull on us. Mental illness stalks the homeless, imprisoned, and ordinary people. Even skilled athletes who master high-speed action attain their precision through mental stillness. It's a little recognized form of mastery so urgently needed in antiquity and today.

The Ideal State of Timelessness

According to the author of SRJ, this ideal state of stillness is neither a miraculous happening nor a humanly devised state of being.

What shall I tell you about it? Its eternal realm is incorruptible, at peace, dwelling in silence, at rest, before everything. (Meyer, 109)

Its eternal element rules out time, a concept almost inconceivable today. But here is the reasoning: The Oneness of Being

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is in itself, it is not a part of the aeons or time. For whatever is part of a realm was once prepared by another. Time was not allotted to it, since it receives nothing from anyone: what would be received would be on loan. (Meyer, 109)

This author is urging us to think in the eternal now, rather than dreaming of a past or future that is not here. A

New York Times article titled "What if Age is Nothing but a Mind-set?" pushes us to think about the timeless nature of being in the twenty-first century too. It told of an experiment in which men made a psychological attempt to *be* (not merely think about) the person they were twenty-two years ago. "Their bodies went along for the ride. . . . The results were almost too good."³

SRJ is concerned with more than the problem of aging, though. We are standing at the threshold of reality. Without time, when and how does creation occur? It happens in eternal consciousness, not in temporal measurements of life. For example,

He (Mind/God) reflects on his image everywhere, sees it in the spring of the Spirit, and becomes enamored of his luminous water for his image is in the spring of pure luminous water surrounding him. *His thought became a reality.* (Meyer, 110)

That last phrase commands our attention. According to the author of SRJ, consciousness is the birthplace of existence, not the "miracle" of biological sperm-and-egg coincidence. This thought-produced creation is us—human beings!

From this conscious state of existence, we recognize the unshakable generation. This is the original

harmonious way of life. A little further into the text we discover that the means of healing enables a return to this original unshakable harmony. But the English language doesn't permit us to say this correctly because the "return" does not take place in time or space. It functions more like a realization or an awakening to the constancy of the unshakable way of life.

When It Gets Complicated

There is a certain logic to the idea of creation in consciousness, but it does stretch our imagination. Even with the simplicity of "his thought becoming a reality," the explanation for the multiplicity of life makes everything quite complicated. Frankly, this is where many first-time readers of SRJ tend to check out. But I think it makes sense to consider what appear to be various levels of creation as valuable states of consciousness. These are not states of matter defined by physical traits. Some key phrases from the text can help us visualize the heavenly order:

The Father gazed into Barbelō, with the pure light surrounding the Invisible Spirit, . . .
Barbelō conceived from him, and he produced a spark of light. . .
This is the only Child of the Mother-Father that had come forth. (Meyer, 111)

The Child asked to be given Mind as a companion to work with. . .
The Four Luminaries that derive from the divine Self-Generated [the Child] gazed out. . .
Grace dwells in the eternal realm of the luminary Harmozel, who is the first angel. . .
The second luminary is Oroiael, [including]. . .insight, perception, memory.
The third luminary is Daveithai, [including]. . .understanding, love, idea.
The fourth eternal realm has been set up for the fourth luminary, Eleleth, [including]. . .perfection, peace, sophia [i.e., wisdom]. (Meyer, 112)

To paraphrase, I suggest the following scenario: the male creator God enacted creation by uniting *in thought* with the female mother (Barbelō) in a pure light that's available to all creation, just as Spirit is available everywhere and for everyone. The resulting offspring of the unity of male and female manifests this light and wants to expand the depth and meaning of creation intelligently. Various states of consciousness—insight, perception, memory, understanding, love, idea, perfection, peace, and wisdom—are illuminated and become capable of working together in harmony.

Within this harmonious realm of being, the unshakable generation lives in consciously engaged peace, a

peace that is not a state of relaxation but rather a conscious engagement in peace-making.

Why Didn't They Live Happily Ever After?

From the promise of harmony and perfection, every religion on earth has had to search for explanations for the appearance of evil in the world. The answer from the author of SRJ is profound and provides a practical basis for resolution and healing.

Wisdom is ready with a solution. Conveniently, wisdom (or *sophia* in Greek) is well known in Hebrew scriptures and culture. In a personalized form, Sophia may be known as far back as the Hebrew Wisdom writings, where wisdom (*chokmah* in Hebrew) appears in Proverbs. Speaking in the first person, she^d proclaims: "I, Wisdom . . . know where to discover knowledge and discernment" (Prov 8:12).

She met the need particularly well for Jews who had returned from Babylonian exile and had been searching for answers to the injustice and chaos in the world. Wisdom, according to Jewish writing, was present when God created the order of the world,^e and she is able to reassure humanity of the continuity of this order. Now the author of SRJ picks up the story of Wisdom's saving characteristics where she was present in the divine order and will play a role in reassuring humanity when disaster strikes.

In a clever blending of the Hebrew Adam-in-the-Garden, the personified Wisdom of Hebrew writings, and Jesus the Savior, Sophia in SRJ also descends to earth, takes on the role of a disobedient sinner, and then acts as a savior for the world. It becomes clear that Wisdom's divine origin is what enables her to make the link between the world of pain and sorrow and the unshakable generation.

Paul had made a similar move expounding on Jesus' capacity to maintain his original divine character even while he took on the sorrows of the world.^f Likewise, the author of SRJ first establishes Sophia's dwelling place in the divine realm followed by her taking on the form of human sin. Both authors imply that the divine origin of these saviors enables them to ultimately overcome the sins of the world.

Sophia's entanglement with the world highlights the nature of sin itself, fully exposing its evil motives, acts, and ultimate powerlessness. It begins with willfulness. Sophia willed something that did not originate in the will of the Infinite Spirit (God). In the divine order of things, there is a male and female cohort that work together as one, but in

d. In both Hebrew and Greek the word for wisdom is a feminine noun.

e. See, for example, Prov 8:22–31.

f. "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross." (Phil 2:5–8)

this case *she* (Sophia) willed to create when *he* (Spirit) did not want to.

The origin of evil, then, derives from willfulness, a contradiction to the divine pattern of unity of male and female. Its offspring becomes a cruel mockery of the divine will and divine wisdom. Sophia gives birth to a grotesque creature with the figure of a snake, the face of a lion, and eyes flashing with bolts of lightning. She names him *Yaldabaoth*.^g

In a parody of the union of Spirit and Wisdom, male and female, Yaldabaoth proceeds to unite with his partner, Mindlessness,^h to produce the world. His dizzying array of powers and realms competes with the layers of realms established for the unshakable generation. But since the original realms (called “aeons”) are states of consciousness, and Yaldabaoth collaborates with mindlessness, his multiple layers of existence include built-in self-destruction.

He [Yaldabaoth] named the powers one after another, beginning with the highest. . . . For these are those who have a firmament corresponding to each aeon. These were named according to the glory of those who belong to heaven for the destruction of the powers. . . . The names which were given to them . . . are for them *destruction and powerlessness*.” (King, 13:8, 16, 17, 18, 19. Italics added)

This arrogant creator god, burning with jealousy, reveals his fraudulent claims for power and greatness through the self-destructive nature of his whole creation. He behaves like a self-extinguishing fireball.

At this point, the genius of Sophia begins to appear. Conscious of the horrifying effects of the willfulness that produced a world of pain and sorrow, she models for humans the way back to the unshakable generation. Exemplifying for humans the wise pathway out of the intentional victimization by Yaldabaoth, she repents. With great regret, she turns from the way of disobedience and claims her original home in the “Fullness,” another name for the realm of the unshakable generation.

The Second Gem: The Fraudulent Nature of Evil

Yaldabaoth presents a choice that becomes a pivotal one for the author of SRJ. The fulcrum of this choice is known as the “psychical” part of humanity, where humans tend toward the seductive powers of Yaldabaoth or toward their original state of spiritual goodness. Yaldabaoth in his arrogance tries desperately to claim all the power and

g. The name appears to be Hebrew but scholars do not know what it means, or if it means anything at all.

h. Marvin Meyer’s translation of this word as “mindlessness” conveys the emptiness or nothingness of Yaldabaoth’s threats. Karen King’s translation of the same word as “Madness” is also useful, as it also conveys the destructive nature of this type of consciousness.

glory of the true Invisible Spirit. But his true nature is evil and destructive, and his only power derives from generating fear of him. He has no inherent power except to suggest acts of self-inflicted destruction to his victims.

We may now be more familiar with the “psychic powers” of telepathy or clairvoyance. But in antiquity the *psychic* referred to the natural state of humanity. For instance, Paul distinguishes between three kinds of people: the spiritual, the *psychic*, and the fleshly (see 1 Cor 2:13–31). What was understood in antiquity as the psychic state of being is familiar to us now when we make choices between either the spiritual and pure or its opposite debased forms of (fleshly) materialism. This state of ambiguity is the natural state of our humanhood in which we can always choose between good and evil.

Sophia guides human thought toward the inherent consciousness of the Fullness, whereas Yaldabaoth seduces human thought toward mindless materialism. The psyche stands in the middle, able to be influenced by either persuasion. Although the work of the Savior in SRJ can be expressed through the acts of Sophia, the Savior takes on quite a number of other forms too. His/her gender migrates back and forth between male and female, and sometimes the Savior is known as Jesus or simply “Lord” or

Sophia gives birth to a grotesque creature with the figure of a snake, the face of a lion, and eyes flashing with bolts of lightning. She names him Yaldabaoth.

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“Savior.” At other times, feminine names such as Epinoia (Light), or Pronoia (Foreknowledge) are used.

Despite the power of the Savior to rescue humans from their suffering, the seductive device used by Yaldabaoth is his control over human passions through the demons. Indeed, as Chief Ruler, he exploits demonic powers causing people to think that their passion-induced feelings are more real than their awareness (gnosis) of their origins.

Whoever has gotten over anger, regretted some kind of selfish act, or stopped rehearsing self-justification can see the significance of this teaching. We feel like our true selves again when our passion abates. The author of SRJ explains how it works. The “psyche” serves as a battlefield between feelings of passion and awareness of the Fullness, and the “Savior” awakens us from the manipulation of passions that distort our innate goodness. Yaldabaoth, or any evil influence, will always try to destroy us by tricking us into believing something untrue about ourselves.

SRJ explains in great detail the precise connection between the demonic control over every part of one’s body and mind. The longer of the two versions of the textⁱ names each specific demon associated with each body part. To the world of modern Western medicine, the thought of demons controlling body parts is superstitious nonsense. But there is a healing message worth considering in this.

Although the belief in demonic control over passions and the body was common in antiquity, the placebo effect,^j as well as other spiritually based and well documented mind/Mind^k cures in the modern age also attest to a mental connection to at least some physical ailments. Knowledge of the demon’s name gave the healer authority to cast it out. Similarly, a medical diagnosis gives a modern healer authority to treat diseases today.

Understanding Yaldabaoth unlocks the meaning of healing in much of the ancient world. After commanding the demons to create another form of humankind, Yaldabaoth discovers that the psychic body he creates is inanimate! It cannot function without Sophia’s spirit (offering still further evidence of the nothingness of Yaldabaoth’s power). Sophia recognizes the opportunity in

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Yaldabaoth’s anguish. She and the divine powers trick him into blowing his spirit (originally from her) into his psychological creation, and with that, Yaldabaoth discovers that the spirit derived from his mother has gone out of him. Now his “adam” is luminous, smarter, and greater than Yaldabaoth himself! Now more jealous and angry than ever, he pours all of his energy and effort into *destroying* this humankind that he had wanted to create and control.

This picture of two separate creations may appear to be dualistic but throughout SRJ we learn that Yaldabaoth is a monstrous counterfeit with no real power to create. A counterfeit dollar bill never acquires the value of a genuine dollar. Yaldabaoth *tries* to create, only to discover that his “man” is animate only through the Invisible Spirit, the source of all real being. In his rage and jealousy, he attacks with every imaginable plan. But even his power to harm works only when the human forgets his (or her) origin.

What makes Yaldabaoth an especially helpful character for deciphering the process of healing is that all of his tactics become evident to those who have been seduced or in some way come under his influence. The Savior (whether in the form of Sophia, Epinoia, or Jesus) knows exactly how Yaldabaoth operates and is able to save his victims

from falling prey to his cruel methods.

Although the characters are mythical, they represent recognizable thought patterns of any age. The “psyches” or souls (of humans) are capable of following either deceitful voices of seduction or the purity of good. Yaldabaoth demonstrates that destruction can take place either in the form of an attack on the body or a Roman ruler’s threats to rape and kill. Jealousy seeks to destroy, and love comes to the rescue.

Repeatedly, Yaldabaoth exposes both his anger and his fraudulent claim to power. He tries to rape Eve (based on the story in Genesis), but he cannot grasp her innocence. He tries to destroy *all* of humanity by sending a flood (also based on the story in Genesis), but Noah is guided to provide a space big enough to protect everyone, not merely a representative family. Yaldabaoth tries to tempt women to become full of lust, but they don’t fall for his trickery.

The Third Gem: The Promise of Healing and Salvation

After learning of the fraudulence of evil, the disciple John asks Jesus (or, his “Lord”) if there were any exceptions to his message of salvation. For example,

Will all the souls be led safely into pure light? (Meyer, 128)

Lord, will the souls of those upon whom the power of the Spirit of Life descended but who did not do these works be excluded? (King, 23:13)

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i. Modern archaeologists have discovered four manuscripts of SRJ. Although they are mostly the same, two include longer sections with greatly detailed information about the relationship of demons and body parts.

j. The placebo effect is the beneficial effect of a treatment due not to the chemicals or procedure of the treatment itself, but to a patient’s *belief* in the treatment.

k. Whereas some modern holistic methods of healing rely on the relationship between the human body, emotions, mind, and spirit, other more clearly defined religious practices of metaphysical religions, such as Christian Science, rely on an understanding of God as the divine Mind that heals.

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The Lord's decisive reply surprises modern-day Christians, for he explains that the power of the Spirit of Life "will descend upon *every* human being—for without it, no one is able to stand upright" (King, 23:14,15). But for those foolish people who have been given all they need and still consciously reject it, Jesus says,

They will be admitted into that place where the angels of poverty go, the place where repentance does not occur. And they will guard them until that day when those who have blasphemed against the Spirit will be tortured. And they will be punished with an eternal punishment. (King, 23:38–40)

The Savior offers healing and salvation for *everyone!* At the same time, he issues a fair warning. Speaking to the *psychic* element of humanity (the consciousness of choice between the Spirit and the flesh), the Savior clarifies that if anyone makes the bad decision to reject the light of the Spirit, there will never be an escape from punishment and torture until he or she changes course.

In case there is any doubt concerning the Savior's ability to rescue anyone who *wants* to be saved, the penultimate scene in SRJ reveals the wisdom and method of the Savior. She now identifies herself as "Forethought," and speaking in the first person, she describes how she "went down every path. I am the abundance of light, I am the remembrance of Fullness" (Meyer, 131). At first, these people, lost in the delusion of life apart from the unshakable generation, don't recognize her because the evil powers had made them forget their divine right to the light. So, Forethought descends again, bringing with her the remembering they needed in their imprisonment. However, the foundations of chaos shake so violently that she fears the collapse will destroy them before she can rescue them. She returns for a third time and recalls, "I said, 'Let whoever hears arise from deep sleep.'" What comforting words these must be to anyone who has lost hope.

A person wept and shed tears. Bitter tears the person wiped away, and said, "Who is calling my name? From where has my hope come as I dwell in the bondage of prison?" (Meyer, 131)

"Arise," she calls out, "remember that you have heard and trace your root, which is I, the compassionate." (Meyer, 131–32)

The remarkable gift of this third gem is the hope it engenders for people in all ages. Unlike traditional beliefs about salvation promised only to certain people after death, this savior calls to anyone lost in the depths of despair. At any stage of life before death, the "compassionate one" calls

them, awakens them to their rights as God-originated, and lights the path to the joy of life.

Conclusion

The *secret* has now been revealed. At the end of the book, the Savior (now probably Jesus) assures John,

I have told you everything for you to record and communicate secretly to your spiritual friends. This is the mystery of the unshakable generation. (Meyer, p. 132)

The three gems have been polished and made visible to those who are willing to look. Healing and rescue are essential parts of salvation because it is the work of the Savior to awaken us from the harmful powers. We are free to choose: the path of the counterfeit who deceives and entraps us in painful dreams of material limitations, or the path of the saving powers of the heavenly realm. Evil has no inherent power to destroy because it is an impotent counterfeit. The Savior tells us the truth, empowering us to see through the wiles of the demonic suggestions. All this is possible for humanity because the first gem is no longer hidden in its encrusted layers of doubt and fear: God is both loving and all-powerful goodness. **AR**

Endnotes

1. I use two translations of SRJ interchangeably throughout this article, choosing the one that best seems to clarify the point I am making. These translations are: Marvin Meyer, ed. *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The Revised and Updated Translation of Sacred Gnostic Texts*, The International Edition ed. (Harper Collins, 2007) and Karen L. King, *The Secret Revelation of John* (Harvard University Press, 2006). References to Meyer are indicated by page number, and to King by chapter and verse.
2. Michael A. Williams, *The Immovable Race: A Gnostic Designation and the Theme of Stability in Late Antiquity*, Nag Hammadi studies 29 (Brill, 1985).
3. Grierson, "What if Age is Nothing but a Mind-Set?," *New York Times*, October 22, 2014.



Shirley Paulson (PhD, University of Birmingham, England) is the principal producer of *Early Christian Texts: The Bible and Beyond*. Shirley's academic work focuses on early Christian texts, especially those relating to healing practices and theology. She contributed a chapter in Westar's forthcoming *After Jesus Before Christianity*. She currently serves on the Westar Board of Directors. Shirley served as the first Head of Ecumenical Affairs for the global headquarters of the Christian Science Church and served on the Board of the North American Academy of Ecumenists.