

# Bryn Beorse: In Search of Mystic Balance

By Niel Klotz

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*Therefore, O Ananda, be a lamp unto yourself.*

*Rely on yourself and do not rely on external help, holding fast to the truth as a lamp.*

*Seek salvation alone in the truth, and do not look for assistance to anyone besides yourself.*

—from the Buddha's farewell address to his disciples

It was India, 1959, and Bryn Beorse was sixty-three years old. He had spent the better part of his life as a man of the world, as an engineer and economist working on solar energy and full employment, as an advisor to foreign governments and the United Nations, as a traveller living in sixty-seven countries, as a member of the Norwegian Underground in World War II, as the author of eight books, and at the same time as a spiritual disciple of the sufi mystic Inayat Khan.

Beorse was somewhat discouraged at the time, because he had been fighting for twenty years to interest governments in a technology that would tap the massive solar energy resources in the sea. But it was 1959, and the nuclear power chimera

of "atoms for peace" had taken the energy community by storm.

"I had had an experience," says Beorse, "where I was talking to Prime Minister Nehru and a room full of scientists, whom I felt were listening and were interested, but that nothing would come of it. So I felt I might just as well go on retreat."

Bryn Beorse headed for the Himalayas, followed the pilgrim trail toward Badrinath, and, at the last station, Josimath, rushed up a mountain trail, along a stream.

"I drank from the stream from time to time," he recalls, "and it became more beautiful and more life-giving for every mile that I ascended, until at last I had the feeling that I just flew up with no hindrance. And I began to think that this was the place where I should spend the rest of my life. Then, just as I was thinking this, I saw a cave, cut right into a steep wall of rock.

"It was one of those caves where you'd expect a saint to be looking out from the opening. So I said to myself, 'Oh, this is exactly where I should stay. Perhaps I could sit there meditating for the rest of my life. But how am I to get in?'"

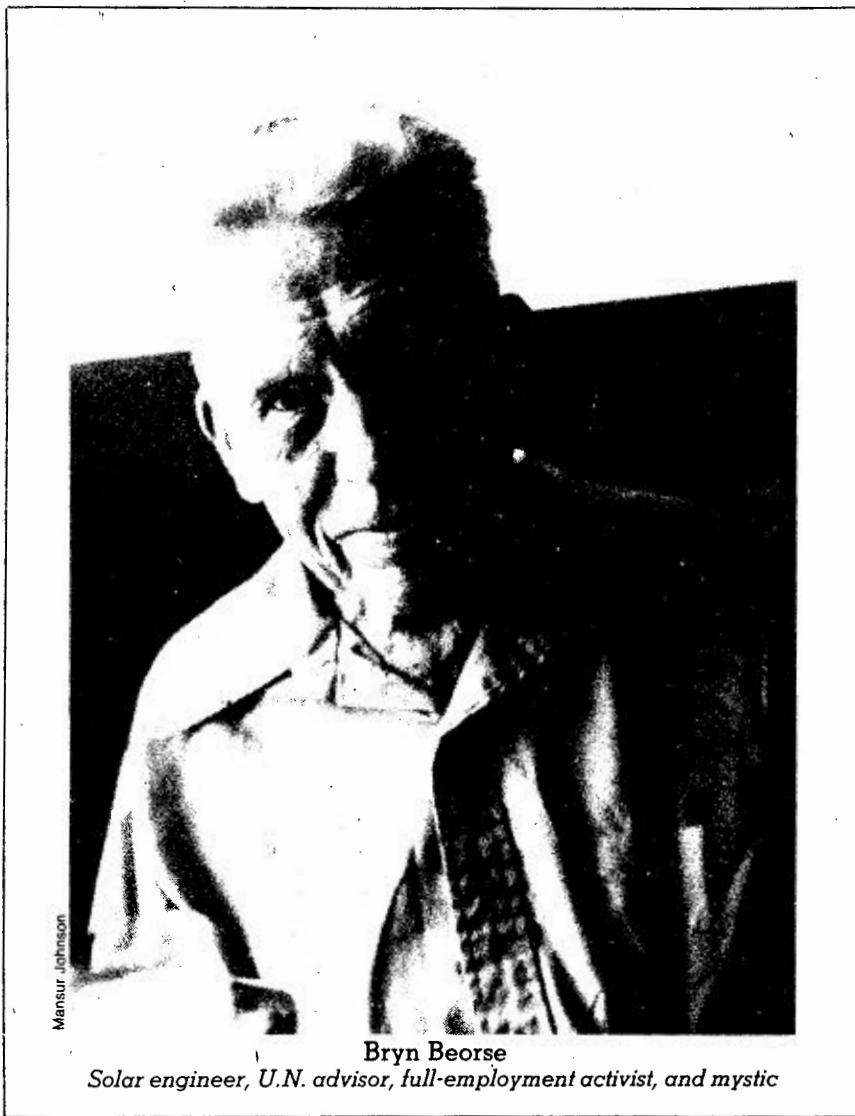
"Then I discovered, by climbing higher, that there was a way of getting in, a shaft down into the cave. At the bottom it was really dark. And as I was feeling around, I felt something furry that went BRROOOOM and then I felt again and it went BRRRROOOOOOOOOOOO-MMMMM. And I thought, 'I better get out of here.' So a Himalayan bear, which I think now was pushed by Inayat Khan, told me to get out of there, go back, work on yourself, work on solar energy, work in the world. So here I am back in the world."

And, at eighty-one, Bryn Beorse is still here, still fighting for clean energy, full employment, and the work in the world which he says is necessary for mystic balance.

Much of this balance, he says, lies in working with the one's point of view. Beorse expresses his own point of view with a good deal of vigor, but apparently without any attempt to have others follow him.

"I express what I feel because I have been asked to, and one may or may not listen to that as they wish," he says.

In fact, he says, taking someone else's point of view is much of what the sufi



Mansur Johnson

**Bryn Beorse**

*Solar engineer, U.N. advisor, full-employment activist, and mystic*

training is about, although the word *sufi* has been widely misunderstood to refer to a sect of Islam or some other religion.

"A sufi," he recalls his teacher saying, "has two points of view, his own and that of the other. And who is this other? Everybody in the world. In other words, he has at least three billion points of view, because he has to have that of himself and any other being."

One of the things sufis themselves have different points of view about is the matter of titles and ranks. Although Beorse is the oldest living disciple of Inayat Khan—the man who founded the Sufi Order in the West in 1910—and has been accorded the title of *murshid*, or "teacher," he abjures all titles and will be the first to correct, gently but firmly, anyone who uses one on him. He will point, instead, to Buddha's farewell advice to his disciples: "Be a lamp unto yourself."

"Some believe in the hierarchy as a means to help the pupil, and maybe in

some instances that is good," he says. "Personally, I am against it. I don't think that it does any good, and I've always asked that no one use the title I have been accorded in the sufi effort. I certainly don't feel that I deserve any title."

Titles are only one of the things that can get in the way of someone's spiritual development these days, said Beorse. With his "tongue of flame" (the meaning of his sufi name *Shamcher*), Beorse will good-humoredly disassemble any particular concept of the spiritual path one cares to bring up—all in the name of the search for balance.

► *On spiritual teachers:* "Teachers should not tell you what to do. If they do tell you what to do, then they are not teachers. A teacher is one who helps you evolve and awaken your own latent powers of judgment and decision.

"A lot of people need no teacher at all. Rabindranath Tagore said in one of his poems that people told him that he had to

go through this gate or that gate or follow this leader to become close to God, but then God had grace on him and led him to Himself without any guide."

► *On spiritual practices:* "When Inayat Khan first instructed me in some practices, it was in a railway station where he was waiting to take the next train. Everyone sat there and looked at us as if they didn't even notice. There was no secrecy.

"At that time there was a big superstition among people: The more practices you got, the more important they thought you were. I never thought that. I thought practices were given because there was something wrong with you that you had to correct. So I did the practices conscientiously, but I didn't feel the least bit proud of them."

► *On initiation:* "Initiation is as much as the initiated one accepts of the initiation, nothing less and nothing more. Some are afraid that initiation will oblige one to acknowledge one's membership in a certain order. Initiators may think so, but in that case I feel sorry for them. The only thing that initiation makes is a *contact*, which may be very important or may be rather unimportant—it all depends.

"For instance, anyone can get in touch with Inayat Khan or his teacher or any of the spiritual beings, but if you are initiated, it is easier, because you have been reminded to them, your name has been told. It may be easier the more sincere you were at the moment of initiation. But once you have had that initiation, no one can take it away from you. It goes beyond lifetimes."

Beorse's own early spiritual path took him on what he calls a "wild search" for a teacher through India during his twenties. Born into a Lutheran family in Norway, he had begun to study yoga at an early age and chose engineering as an occupation so that he could travel widely. But he found nothing in India and returned to Oslo determined to forget about the whole thing. At that point he met Inayat Khan, who asked him to translate a lecture that the sufi was going to give.

His meeting with Inayat Khan to prepare for the lecture consisted solely of ten minutes of silence, Beorse recalls. "I thought that since he didn't want to discuss the lecture, why should I," he said. "So I came to his lecture, listened to the whole thing, and went up and gave it all in Norwegian without any notes. Normally I wouldn't have remembered that

*(continued on page 76)*

# BRYN BEORSE

(continued from page 51)

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much, but there was something in Inayat Khan. He managed to transfer it to my mind so that I was able to repeat it correctly."

After that, Beorse knew Inayat Khan for four years before the teacher's death. Beorse recalls that in a sort of repeat of Buddha's farewell address, his teacher used the last four hours he spent with his European disciples to warn them about using mediums or psychics instead of relying on their own intuition.

"One of the things he said was that teachers never, never talk to pupils through a medium. If they want to reach their pupils, they talk to them directly," says Beorse. "Most mediums have no capacity of discrimination; they believe in everything that comes from the other side. I have met so many people who say, 'Oh, I have direct guidance from the other side!' Well, the other side is just as full of cheating and nonsense as this side—even more so.

"And do you know, after Inayat had warned us and after he had gone to the other side, four of his closest disciples, with high titles, came to Suresnes (the sufi headquarters in France) and each said, 'I must tell you that I have been appointed to be the leader of the whole sufi movement—I have been told so by a medium.'"

Even so-called "mystic sciences" such as the I Ching, tarot, and astrology can get in the way of developing one's own intuition and spiritual guidance, says Beorse. And when an intuition does come, it still needs to be discriminated from the mental static that can get mixed in; and doing so is an art that people must learn for themselves. What all teachers and all paths point to is nothing but this self-reliance for communication with the Absolute, which Beorse says Inayat Khan referred to as "faith."

"Faith, said Inayat, is what makes people venture out in the sea in boats that will hardly carry them. Faith is what makes people shoot down a ski slope and jump into the wild air and not know what will happen. And faith is what brings mystics up to the top of the mountain, where they can see the whole world before them, while scientists dig themselves up along the mountainside

and also reach the top," Beorse says.

Testing out intuitions, digging one's way up, is what leads to the true knowledge, enlightenment, or whatever one wants to call it, Beorse says. What is necessary is a balanced life—"in the world, but not of it," in the words of the Bible.

"There is a trend now in the opposite direction," he says. "You are supposed to give all this up and just think about your own development or become peaceful before you start working for peace in the world. That is complete nonsense. You don't get any peace within yourself without working in the world and with the world. We are here for that reason. We weren't born here to retire into a cave and sit there the rest of our lives. Then you could just as well be on another plane."

In his long and varied life, Beorse has tackled two of the biggest problems on this plane—energy and employment.

As an engineer, he was the first to bring to the U.S. the technology that makes it possible to extract solar energy from the ocean's waters. Called ocean thermal energy conversion (OTEC), the system could supply one hundred times as much energy as the world is projected to need in the year 2000. Unlike photovoltaic cells and other solar electric systems, ocean thermal conversion has been ready to put into production at competitive costs for the past several decades, but it has been disregarded while both fossil and nuclear fuels were monopolized for profit.

The OTEC system uses free fuel—the sun's energy extracted from the temperature difference between the surface and depths of the ocean. There would be no pollution, says Beorse, and millions of jobs would be created worldwide by the production of the plants.

Fortunately, more and more people have begun to listen to him and the few other engineers who have advocated OTEC over the past ten years. In fact, seven major universities have come to conclusions similar to Beorse's. And the federal government has begun to fund a sea solar project, but apparently at a rate that places it well behind other priorities. At present, the government funds OTEC

development for \$36 million, fossil fuel development for \$903 million, and nuclear power development for \$3.4 billion.

"OTEC is much better technically prepared than the nuclear plants," says Beorse, "but people have a hard time seeing that, since they have worked so hard on the nuclear plants. I talked with a nuclear engineer from Massachusetts who said, 'I can agree with you that OTEC might be cheaper than nuclear, but it isn't cheaper now because you have to build new plants. We already have nuclear plants.'"

Under his other hat as economist, Beorse has fought an even larger battle, for insured full employment for everyone. How, after all, can one work in the world if there is no work?

"Employment is a condition for dignity and humanity," he says. "It is the most cruel and most thoughtless thing in the world to keep even one person unemployed against his or her wish."

During the Kennedy administration, Beorse met with Arthur Schlesinger, one of the chief presidential advisors, to discuss a plan for full employment based on his work as well as that of economists John Phillip Burnett and John H. G. Pierson. Both Burnett and Pierson have developed ways to finance full employment under a free enterprise system, Beorse says. He and Schlesinger "formed an alliance" on the plan, he recalls, and the aide told him that the President and everyone else would meet to decide on it "as soon as this silly trip to Texas has been completed." "And that was the end," says Beorse.

Full employment, he adds, would be the quickest way to cut down on the number of senseless, unfulfilling jobs and give more people a chance for interesting ones, closer to what the Buddhists call "Right Livelihood."

"There will always be people who are working in jobs that aren't fulfilling to them. That can't be helped," he says. "But full employment can gradually change that, because you could leave a job and get another one. You could say, 'I quit, because I don't like this.' That is what so many businesses are afraid of. And to hell with their fear."

As an engineer, Beorse himself has held several jobs he would have left sooner but had a family to support. And there weren't many openings after he passed seventy. Beorse now works as a

consultant on sea solar power to the Sea Water Conversion Laboratory of the University of California-Berkeley. He also serves as an advisor to the newly formed Alternative Directions in Energy and Economics in San Francisco.

One thing Beorse consistently refuses to discuss is the future. As his own projects inch closer to fulfillment, as the discoveries of the scientist-engineer begin to parallel those of the mystic, as young people ask him what they should do with their lives, Beorse finds himself besieged with requests for predictions. Not much chance for that, however. With an indeterminate gleam in his eye, he directs one back to Buddha, the farewell address, and one's own resources.

"We are *making* the future, we are not predicting it," he said. "When you predict, you predict on the basis of past experiences, which have no significance anymore."

"Science mainly lives in the area of Isaac Newton—cause and effect. But today's physicists are beginning to understand that this is just a concept we have. There is no such thing as a fixed or stationary thing. Everything is in constant movement. Not in millionths of a second, but in millionths of a millionth of a millionth, subatomic particles are created out of the void, out of space, and again enter into space. It is the same thing in a small time period that happens in a great time period when God or Brahman or the Universe expresses itself and begets planets and plants and animals and people and spiritual longings, and then contracts again and turns it into nothing in billions of years. And there would be no satisfaction in the work for OTEC or for full employment if it weren't for the light of this evolution."

"We don't know whether we will have a stable or an unstable future. We don't know whether there will be a colossal evolution or even a nuclear war. But it is our damned duty to try to lead the evolution in a sensible way. That is all we can do." ■

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*More information about Bryn Beorse's work with sea solar power and full employment may be obtained from Alternative Directions in Energy and Economics, 119 Ripley St., San Francisco CA 94110, (415) 285-8079.*