

THE TALE OF THE HERO AS MYSTICAL THEOLOGY¹

"One of the chief problems of mythological research still consists in the elucidation of the reason for the extensive analogies in the fundamental outlines of mythical tales, which are rendered still more puzzling by the unanimity in certain details and their reappearance in the most of the mythical groupings."

Otto Rank²

"A ritual death, then, is the preliminary condition for attaining to the presence of the gods and, at the same time, for obtaining a full life in this world."

Mircea Eliade³

"To be born have I been born"

Pablo Neruda

¹ First chapter of the book Songs of Enlightenment (published in German as Gesänge der Erleuchtung by Sphinx/Hugendubel)

² In The Myth of the Birth of the Hero

³ In A History of Religious Ideas. The University of Chicago Press, 1978

1- FORGOTTEN MEANING

It was the publication of Otto Rank's The Myth of the Birth of the Hero in 1909 that brought into generalized awareness the similarity that exists among a number of legends of heroes and founders of religions in different cultures. In all of these it is possible to find -- aside from the heroic feats that brought them into history (and in various combinations) -- motifs like virgin birth, persecution during infancy, foster parents, marrying a princess, kingship, a journey to the underworld and so on. Because such legends seemed to have originated independently of each other, their similarity became a stimulus for reflection as to their possible reference to universal psychological truths.

Already at the time of Rank's writing, the subject had been widely discussed in scholarly circles and the pattern of the "monomyth" had been first pointed out by the English anthropologist Edward Taylor⁴ in 1871. And the discussion continued. Leaving out, for the moment, the issue of interpretation -- let me just say that significant additional communalities were later observed by Lord Raglan in the legends concerning heroes. I reproduce his observations below:

- 1- The hero's mother is a royal virgin;
- 2- His father is a king, and
- 3- Often a near relative of his mother, but
- 4- The circumstances of his conception are unusual, and
- 5- He is also reputed to be the son of a god.
- 6- At birth an attempt is made, usually by his father or his maternal grandfather, to kill him, but
- 7- He is spirited away, and
- 8- Reared by foster-parents in a far country.
- 9- We are told nothing of his childhood, but
- 10-On reaching manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom.
- 11-After a victory over the king and/or a giant, dragon, or wild beast,
- 12- He marries a princess, often the daughter of his predecessor, and
- 13- Becomes king.
- 14-For a time he reigns uneventfully, and
- 15-Prescribes laws, but
- 16-Later he loses favor with the gods and/or his subjects, and

⁴ In Quest of the Hero -- Princeton University Press, 1990 - ref. E.Taylor, Primitive Culture, 5th ed. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958 [1871]) vol.1.

- 17-Is driven from the throne and city, after which
- 18-He meets with a mysterious death,
- 19-Often at the top of a hill.
- 20-His children, if any, do not succeed him.
- 21-His body is not buried, but nevertheless
- 22-He has one or more holy sepulchres.

As Segal has observed the first thirteen items in this list (see table I) roughly correspond to Rank's entire scheme, though Raglan himself never read Rank. Also, as Segal⁵ further observes "for Rank, the heart of the hero pattern is gaining kingship. For Raglan, the heart is losing it." Unlike Rank's list (derived from his analysis of twenty two myths) which reflects the author's interest in childhood experience, that of Raglan's extends from the hero's conception to his death.

The sequence that we obtain, when we consider Rank's and Raglan's observations together, is that of a story where the hero, after a temporary victory, is defeated and dies, yet in the end he attains divine or near-divine stature, so that his memory and influence live on. I think that this pattern may be regarded as similar to that which has emerged from a parallel field of endeavor: the study of structural similarities among folktales. Such similarities were observed already when Russian studies such as that of R.M. Volkov, which pointed out fifteen common themes including the persecution of the innocent, the hero as fool, fighting against a dragon, the winning of a bride, his becoming the victim of enchantment, the talisman and others. Yet particularly comprehensive has been the work of Vladimir Propp, who published in Leningrad in 1928 his *Morphology of the Folktale*.⁶ In his introduction to the Portuguese edition to this book, Prof. Adriano Duarte⁷ writes that the work of Propp was an important influence on Levy Strauss, and thus "in spite of having been considered with suspicion by Marxists and having been ignored in Western countries, Russian formalism came to influence in a decisive way structuralists thinking."

Through his own investigation of fairy tales Propp arrived at the formulation of no fewer than 31 "functions" that he regarded as being the "fundamental constituents" of magical tales, and observed an identical sequence between them. Rather than inserting his long list below (from his *Morphology of the Folktale*) I am relegating it to a footnote, and will only say here that the

⁵ Robert A. Segal in *In Quest of the Hero*, Princeton University Press, 1990.

⁶ *Morfologija Skazky* - Leningrado 1928 which appeared in English translation in 1958 (Bloomington).

⁷ In *Morfologia do Conto*, Vladimir Propp, Vega Universidade, Lisboa, 1983.

narrative pattern abstracted by Propp involves not one but two victories in the life of the hero: first a temporary victory, and later a definitive one -- which follows defeat, betrayal and the greatest trials.⁸

I say that we may regard Propp's pattern comprising both an early and a definitive victory is congruent with the legends arisen around historical heroes, for in these too there is an early (earthly) victory and, in the end, a heavenly apotheosis (after their earthly life has ended in the grave and perhaps in seeming failure -- as in the Christian story of the resurrection).

Much better well known than the ideas of Rank, Raglan or Propp are today those of Joseph Campbell, who, in spite of his hermeneutic contributions, fails to draw the distinction that I am emphasizing here between two different stages in which the hero overcomes adversity.⁹

At the end of the first part The Hero with a Thousand Faces he summarizes his view of the monomyth in the following terms:

"The mythological hero, setting forth from his common day hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to

⁸ 1- A member of the family (the hero) leaves home. 2- A prohibition is imposed on the hero. 3- The hero violates the prohibition. 4- The aggressor seeks information. 5- The aggressor obtains information on his victim. 6- The aggressor seeks to deceive his victim so as to get hold of it or its goods. 7- The victim allows itself to be deceived and thus unknowingly helps its enemy. 8- The aggressor damages a member of the family. 8a-A member of the family misses something/wants to possess something. 9- Notice of the damage or the lack becomes known. Something is asked of the hero. 10-The questing hero accepts or decides to act. 11-The hero leaves home. 12-The hero goes through a test, a questioning, an attack, etc; which prepares his being granted an object or a magical aid. 13-The hero reacts to the future donor's actions. 14-The magical object is put at the hero's disposal. 15-The hero is transported or conducted to the place where is to be found the object of his quest. 16-The hero and his aggressor meet each other in combat. 17-The hero receives a mark. 18-The aggressor is defeated. 19-The initial harm or fault is repaired. 20-The hero returns. 21-The hero is persecuted. 22-The hero is helped. 23-The hero arrives incognito in his home or in another country. 24-A fake hero imposes fake pretensions (or makes them valid). 25-A difficult task is proposed to the hero. 26-The task is accomplished. 27-The hero is acknowledged. 28-The false hero or the aggressor, the evil one, is unmasked. 29-The hero receives a new demeanor (transfiguration). 30-The false hero or aggressor is punished. 31-The hero gets married and gets to the throne.

⁹ I think it is appropriate to mention two points of disagreement with Joseph Campbell: his presentation of the "belly of the whale" as a stage that follows the crossing of the first threshold (rather than as the defeat after early victory), his account of "the road of trials" as something different from the above, and the failure to de-symbolize the goddess as the individual's inner essence.

the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark (brother-battle, dragon-battle; offering charm), or be slain by the opponent and descend in death (dismemberment, crucifixion). Beyond the threshold, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers). When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. The triumph may be represented as the hero's sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world (sacred marriage), his recognition by the father-creator (father atonement), his own divination (apotheosis), or again -- if the powers have remained unfriendly to him -- his theft of the boon he came to gain (bride-theft, fire-theft); intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being (illumination, transfiguration, freedom). The final work is that of return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection (emissary); if not, he flees and is pursued (transformation flight, obstacle flight). At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world (elixir)."

The whole process has been further condensed by Campbell into a paragraph:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.

Or, again:

The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation -- initiation -- return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth.¹⁰

My thesis in this chapter -- as a background to the analysis of literary documents reflecting the same pattern (in the rest of this book) -- is that the time of "initiation" between "separation" and "return" comprises three distinct stages, and that a more complete statements of the "monomyth" involve the pattern of two culminating episodes separated by a defeat: two

¹⁰ The Hero of a Thousand Faces.

victories or attainments that are as different as early kingship is from kingship regained; as the invincible Achilles differs from the travel-seasoned Odysseus and as Mount Sinai differs from the Promised Land. The pattern of these two victories -- one temporary, the other permanent -- separated by dreary times in a waste-land or night-sea journey will be a theme that the reader of this book will encounter throughout its pages: first in myths and folktales, then in the process of expansion and contraction of consciousness before complete enlightenment, and then, in the following chapters, in the tale of the two journeys of Gilgamesh, the two epic books of Homer, in Dante's youthful Vita Nuova and his spiritual rebirth in the Comedia, in the two books of Faust and in the experience of two births reflected in Totila Albert's epic.

When we shift from a consideration of form to that interpretation, we find that the scholars of myth and religion first regarded the heroic myth as a primitive approach to the "mysteries of nature" on the part of "barbarians."

The hero, for an early school of thought, was invariably the sun. For an alternative school, he was, rather, the moon. Then Frazer proposed that myths are the echo of an old cult the purpose of which was to influence nature through imitative magic. Osiris, for instance, celebrates the cycle of seeming death and unceasing renewal of plant life throughout the year's seasons.¹¹

I think that such views are only meaningful to us now if we lend them a level of interpretation subtler than what was intended by their early proponents, and say that this or that hero is a celestial body or life on earth in a metaphoric sense. Most readers in our psychologically sophisticated times would take for granted that such metaphoric sense was implicit in the Egyptian identification of Osiris with the sun, for instance, or in the statement of Aztec religion in regard to Quetzalcoatl, when it tells us that he gave birth to the sun and was ultimately transformed into the planet Venus.

Levy-Strauss' observation to the effect that myth echoes sociological phenomena may be valid, but touches on what I regard

¹¹ The view of myth as an allegory for natural events was endorsed not only by Max Müller and Frazer (for whom myth was also a verbal crystallization of ritual) but more recently by Prof. Kramer -- best known specialist in Mesopotamian mythology.

an epi-phenomenon to the true meaning that myth sets out to convey. Thus it is true that patriarchal myths use the language of kingship, but it would not be true to say that they are about kingship -- except in a figurative way.

I suspect that few beyond some professional psychoanalysts committed to the orthodox creed would feel satisfied today with Rank's contention that the tale of the hero speaks to us of every man's experiences during childhood -- unless this, too, is taken as metaphor, and we transpose the "hero's birth" into a spiritual "second" birth (for instance), and read frustrations in mother or father love as emblematic of a victimization of spirit in an endarkened world. And I think that it is too narrow to say, with Campbell that "through the wonder tales -- which pretend to describe the lives of the legendary heroes, the powers of the divinities of nature, the spirits of the dead, and the totem ancestors of the group -- symbolic expression is given to the unconscious desires, fears, and tensions that underlie the conscious patterns of human behavior. Mythology, in other words, is psychology misread as biography, history, and cosmology." Certainly, Campbell was modern in his day in his endorsement of psychoanalysis, yet in so doing he seems to have over-endorsed psychoanalytic prejudice. Thus, he approvingly quotes Geza Roheim who writes: "It is to show that the medicine man is either a neurotic or a psychotic or at least that his art is based on the same mechanisms as a neurosis or a psychosis. Human groups are actuated by their group ideals and these are always based on the infantile situation. The medicine men, therefore, are simply making both visible and public the systems of symbolic fantasy that are present in the psyche of every adult member of their society."

Even Jung's interpretation of the hero as an archetype with a structure of its own -- a sort of "organ within the psyche" -- leaves us dissatisfied. For I would say (paraphrasing a remark of Segal apropos Alan Dundes' *The Hero Pattern in the Life of Jesus*): if the life of Jesus symbolizes the development of every man's ego out of the unconscious and the eventual return of the ego to unconsciousness, this amounts to the trivialization of a wisdom teaching.

Though sympathetic to Jung, Joseph Campbell was avowedly not a Jungian, and I am sure that he would not have brought about the present day "mythology revival" if he had not allowed himself to follow the example of his friend and teacher Heinrich Zimmer, who had imbibed traditional teachings concerning Indian religious symbols and made them part of his hermeneutics. Though it must be

credited to Campbell that he both endorsed the achievements of psychology and transcended psychologism, it seems to me that he managed to propagandize for his more valuable contributions to the understanding of myths through an over-endorsement¹² of both Freud and Jung. Catering to the fashion among the elite of his day, he was able to "smuggle" the spiritual into academia just as Jung before him played the trickster as he smuggled the old gods into the modern West under the distinguished garb of "archetypes."

In contrast to the Jungian contention to the effect that the myths refer to the second half of ordinary man's life what I am claiming to constitute the innermost meaning of the myths is something both rare and extraordinary. I think the magic of the so called "marvelous" tales (to use Propp's language) is precisely intended to convey that the events in the life of the spiritual hero are most extraordinary, for heroes live in an unenlightened world where such events and experiences are rare.

Not only have the initiates of many lands known better, but also the artists. When Dante, for instance, explains to the Can Grande of Verona how he intends his Commedia to be read, he invokes the four levels of meaning explained by Aquinas in connection with the interpretation of scripture. He illustrates these meanings through a consideration of Psalm 114 and remarks that if we attend to the letter of the text, it refers to the departure of the Israelites from Egypt in the time of Moses; allegorically, it suggests redemption through Christ; morally, it alludes to the conversion of the soul from its sinful condition to the state of grace, while

¹² "What is the secret of the timeless vision?" he asks in his early classic on the monomyth. From what profundity of the mind does it derive? Why is mythology everywhere the same, beneath its varieties of costume? And what does it teach? I think some of my readers will feel that his answer comes as an anti-climax: "Today many sciences are contributing to the analysis of the riddle. Archaeologists are probing the ruins of Iraq, Honan, Crete, and Yucatan. Ethnologists are questioning the Ostiaks of the river Ob, the Boobies of Fernando Po. A generation of orientalists has recently thrown open to us the sacred writings of the East, as well as the pre-Hebrew sources of our own Holy Writ. And meanwhile another host of scholars, pressing researches begun last century in the field of folk psychology, has been seeking to establish the psychological bases of language, myth, religion, art development, and moral codes." I must at least confess that Campbell's revelation to the effect that the secret of the timeless vision is to be sought in the "the revelations that have emerged from the mental clinic" was disappointing. Surely mythic motives occur in dreams - but does this mean that the content of the myths is comparable to that claimed by psychoanalysts to be the content of such dreams?

in the anagogical ¹³sense it refers to the "holy soul's exit from slavery to its corrupt condition toward the freedom of eternal glory."

Just as the story of Moses echoes the pattern of the tale of the hero, the pattern of Exodus constitutes a variation on the monomyth -- in that the hero is here not an individual alone but a people. There is the arrival of Moses into Pharaoh's world through the river's waters, his being raised by foster parents, his escape from persecution, the other-worldly call, the great epiphany, the trials and tribulations, and death in sight of the Promised Land. And the story continues on beyond Moses through Deuteronomy and Joshua beyond the walls of Jericho through all of sacred history until Solomon's construction of the Temple. There can be no question that to the old commentators and living rabbis the story is not about nature, childhood experience or every man's collective unconscious. All would agree that it contains a teaching concerning the process of individual maturation along the mystical path, and that it amounts to a map of advanced stages of human unfoldment.

My intent in this book will be to proceed further in the direction of elucidating an inner meaning of the monomyth, and thus will entail showing that the stages in the hero's journey correspond precisely to those in an "inner journey" of the individual in the course of his or her psycho-spiritual evolution. Part of my purpose, then, will be to outline the pattern of unfolding in the real life of spiritual heroes, who, after having experienced a "second birth," still have a journey before them, and even a return after the completion of a seemingly fated pilgrimage. This elucidation of the stages of spiritual development potentially open to the individual corresponds to what the Christian tradition has called "mystical theology" -- thus the title of this chapter.

While most of this book will constitute an attempt to decipher the anagogical meaning of some of the great books of the West, in the rest of this particular chapter I will concentrate on making explicit the inner meaning in the "tale of the hero" as it has been generally recognized in the realms of myth and folklore. In carrying out this inquiry I will be attempting to vindicate the claim of an ancient Sufi master (Daudzadah) to the effect that the "sum of wisdom" is contained in the different levels of interpretation of the following story:

¹³ A term originally adopted from navigation, where ana-gogon had the sense of "lifting anchor."

"In a remote realm of perfection, there was a just monarch who had a wife and a wonderful son and daughter. They all lived together in happiness.

One day the father called his children before him and said: 'The time has come, as it does for all. You are to go down, an infinite distance, to another land. You shall seek and find and bring back a precious Jewel.'

The travelers were conducted in disguise to a strange land, whose inhabitants almost all lived a dark existence. Such was the effect of this place that the two lost touch with each other, wandering as if asleep.

From time to time they saw phantoms, similitude of their country and of the Jewel, but such was their condition that these things only increased the depth of their reveries, which they now began to take as reality. When news of his children's plight reached the king, he sent word by a trusted servant, a wise man: 'Remember your mission, awaken from your dream, and remain together.' With this message they roused themselves, and with the help of their guide they dared the monstrous perils which surrounded the Jewel, and by its magic aid returned to their realm of light, there to remain in increased happiness for evermore." ¹⁴

To say that here is a "sum of wisdom," refers, of course, to an understanding that cannot be properly translated into words and cannot be fully known by one who has not completed the journey -- yet the very fact that the stories are told and have constituted an important part in the spiritual traditions in the world implies that words can at least illuminate the way of the travelers.

The above-quoted outline of a tale -- known in many variations (among which the best known is the parable of the Prodigal Son in the Gospels) -- is, of course, no other than the mythologem that modern scholarship has been calling the "tale of the hero." Yet since scholars, like most people, tend to be less wise than the mystics (who, I believe, created the prototype of the tale) much of the inner meaning of the stories, forgotten, lies like buried treasure beneath their familiar surface. I hope that the rest of this chapter will contribute to an understanding of the correspondence between the inner content of "folklore" (tales, legends and myths) and the understanding of human unfolding in the living spiritual traditions.

¹⁴ Thinkers of the East, by Idries Shah -- Penguin Book -- 1971

2- FOLKTALES, TEACHING TALES AND MYTHS

As I set out to explore the symbolism of the inner journey and what meanings it conveys concerning the spiritual unfolding of the individual, I will undertake to do this in three distinct domains. First I will consider folktales, then "teaching tales" or "wisdom tales" (which are similar in content to folktales and yet differ from them in that they constitute deliberate attempts to explicate spiritual truths) and lastly myths -- which may be understood as very old teaching tales that have survived the original teaching situation and the living wisdom of the spiritual traditions in which they were originally embedded.

I begin with the realm of folktales -- or more specifically that of wonder tales or fairy tales, and first of all I propose to illustrate the two triumphal stages in the hero's journey through Grimm's well known tale "The Water of Life."

This is the story of the three sons of a king who is seriously ill. A wise old man has told them that the only way of saving their father is to find the fountain of the water of life. The eldest seeks the king's permission to go -- yet he is driven by selfish motivation: "If I bring the water, then I shall be best loved of my father and shall inherit his kingdom." After the king reluctantly gives his permission, the young man leaves and before long finds along the way a dwarf, who asks where he is going in such haste. (Here we run into the familiar theme of the helper incognito -- and the idea of finding help where one might least expect it.)

The haughty prince rebukes the ugly gnome saying that it is none of his business to know. The dwarf formulates the wish that he may lose his way; and this curse is soon made effective, for after some time he cannot advance any further in a narrow ravine, being neither able to turn back on his horse nor dismount from the saddle.

The second son then embarks on a similar adventure with the same consequences. When the third and youngest brother sets out, however, his attitude and motivation are different -- for he truly goes forth for the sake of his father. When he meets the dwarf on the road and is asked where he is going in such haste, he stops and says, "I am seeking the water of life, for my father is sick unto death." At this the dwarf gives him the necessary information to obtain his end. He tells him that the water of life, "springs from a fountain in the courtyard of an enchanted

castle" and warns him that he will not be able to make his way to it without an iron wand and two loaves of bread, all of which he proceeds to give him.

"Strike thrice with the wand on the iron door of the castle and it will spring open." The passing of the iron wand is, more than information and teaching, a tool.

The gnome-like spiritual guide informs him next that once inside the castle he will find two lions with gaping jaws. "If you throw a loaf to each of them, they will be quiet," he adds. Furthermore he warns him that he needs to fetch some of the water of life before the clock strikes twelve, else the door will shut again and he will be imprisoned.

Everything goes as the dwarf had said. Once the prince is inside the castle he finds a beautiful maiden who is to rejoice when she sees him, kisses him and tells him he has set her free and is to have the whole of her kingdom. She bids him return in a year so their wedding can be celebrated. She tells him where the spring of life is, but -- as in the earlier encounter with the gnome, the prince leaves with more than love in his heart and information in his mind: she also gives him an unconquerable sword, and never ending bread. So he goes onwards -- though he nearly fails his adventure from the temptation of a newly made bed that he finds on the way, for his weariness causes him to lie down to rest and to fall asleep. He is awakened by the clock when it is striking a quarter to twelve, and he manages to get the water and leaves the castle just in time -- though when he is passing through the iron door, exactly as the clock strikes twelve, the door falls to with such violence that carries away a piece of his heel.

On his way home the prince meets the dwarf again. He has carried along from the castle the sword and loaf of bread given to him by the Princess and now the dwarf explains to him that with the sword he can slay whole armies and that the bread will never come to an end; yet the prince does not want to come home without his brothers, and undertakes to rescue them in spite of the warning of the dwarf, "Beware of them for they have bad hearts." He liberates them and as they ride home together tells them of his adventure. Also, as they ride together, they chance upon a land where war and famine reign and its king thinks that he must perish, for the scarcity is so great. With his loaf and his sword, the prince is able to assist the king in overcoming his enemies, and twice again -- as the brothers cross countries where war and famine reign -- the adventure is repeated, so the prince leaves three very grateful kings behind him.

Later, however, after boarding a ship that will take them home across the sea, the two elder brothers plot against the younger one, taking the water of life from him while he sleeps and claiming it is them, not him, that have found it. (We come, then, to the theme of betrayal by the envious, and to the well known folkloric motif of the false hero.)

The brothers exchange the water of life for salt water in their brother's bottle, and in consequence, when the young brother wants to heal his father with it, the king only becomes worse. The two elder brothers then accuse the younger brother of intending to poison the king and say that they have brought him the true water of life. The young prince is thrown into prison and they set out to fetch the beautiful princess, expecting to claim the bride while their younger brother is sentenced to death.

In the end, however, the huntsman who has been entrusted with the slaying of the prince allows his victim to exchange clothes with him and go his way into the forest. In the end the king is relieved to know that his youngest is alive, for caravans of gifts from the three countries that he had helped liberate have led him to understand his error.

In the end only the young prince is able to find the princess, for she has ordered that the road leading up to her palace be covered with gold, and told her servants that whoever comes to her riding straight along it will be the right one to be admitted. At the sight of this splendid golden road both elder brothers think that it would be a sin and a shame to ride over it, however, and they turn to the right and left side respectively. The younger brother thinks only of the princess, however, so he rides up the middle of the path; and when he comes to the door, it is opened.

As one can see, it is not so much a matter of going and returning in this story (as in Campbell's scheme) but of two successive adventures. First, the one in which everything flows smoothly for the young prince as a reflection of his right intention; an adventure where he meets the princess and is able to bring back from an enchanted realm not only the water of life, but magical means (sword and loaf of bread or bag in an alternative version); then a second adventure that begins with the treason of his brothers and involves a close encounter with death (that may symbolically be read as a going through death). This, in turn, culminates with a fruition of that which the first meeting with the princess (as a transient experience of beauty and plenitude) suggested: internal unification proper.

An additional tale, also in Grimm's collection, gives the better sense of the widespread pattern: "The Three Golden Hairs."

There are many tales that present to us the hero as the son of a king or one who, also like the hero of classical myth, ends by winning kingship. At the very beginning of this particular tale we find a modest symbolic equivalent of a king's crown on the hero's head that signals to us his special destiny: he has been born with a "caul," i.e. the remnant of the bag of waters, or amnios, that is most commonly destroyed in the birth process. When I first read the story I had to inquire what a caul was, and even now I have not heard of a person born with the intact amniotic membrane on his head. The phenomenon exists, however (Freud was born with a caul, for instance) and it is also true that, as in our story, European folklore has regarded it a sign of good luck. Indeed, according to the story, the caul-crowned boy was expected to have the good fortune of marrying the king's daughter one day.

The king learns of this expectation, however, and he is not pleased to think that the son of simple laborers will one day marry his daughter; consequently, he attempts to destroy the newborn. As in the case of the aggressor in the stories analysed by Propp, he makes deceitful use of the information that he has received: he approaches the humble peasants incognito, and then offers to bring the child into the palace so that he may receive an education. They trustingly accept, and thus the good luck of the child begins to be fulfilled. We encounter another widespread folktale motif immediately after: with the intent of destroying the baby, the king puts it in a chest on the waters of a river. And still, another universal motif comes next, when this chest is gladly received by a miller and his wife, who had been desiring in vain to have a child. Yet the king once more intervenes to destroy our young hero -- when he hears that the miller's adolescent son had been originally picked up from a chest that came with the waters. Now he approaches the miller to ask him whether the young man might serve him to send a message to the queen at the palace, and offers to pay him well.

The adoptive parents agree happily, and the youngster is given a letter -- yet he is not able to reach the palace within the day. He needs to spend the night in the forest and a band of thieves happens to gather precisely in the clearing in the forest where he is sleeping. They search him with intention of robbing him, yet when they find the letter that he is carrying and read its contents -- indicating that the youth needs to be killed immediately -- the thieves pity him, and they exchange the letter

for another, indicating that the king's daughter should be given to him in marriage.

Again here is a theme that may be found in many stories: evil is transformed into good. It is the hero's "good star" that adversity works on his behalf. So he marries the king's daughter, and when the king returns he is naturally furious. He now decrees that if the youngster wants to be his son-in-law, he will have to first obtain the three golden hairs of the devil.

The fortune-child is not afraid of the Devil, so, determined to get the golden hairs, he sets out. And here begins the second adventure: "His road took him to a great city, where the watchman at the gate questioned him about his trade and about what he knew. 'I know everything', replied the fortune-child. 'In that case you can do us a favor,' said the watchman. 'You can tell us why the fountain in our market place that used to have wine running out of it has dried up, so that we don't even get water from it now'. 'I'll tell you that', he answered, 'but you must wait till I return'."

"Then he went on and came to another city, and again the watchman at the gate asked him what his trade was and what he knew. Once more he claims to know everything and, when presented with a question promises to answer it on his return; and again the same inter-action occurs when he comes to a wide river that needs to cross with the help of a ferryman. He wants to know why he needs to keep at his job with no one ever taking it from him."

As in the Sufi story of Maruf, the cobbler, in The Arabian Nights, who lives on a fortune that he trusts will be coming to him (and, indeed, miraculously arrives) here, too, the hero knows that on returning from his quest he will be able to know what he still does not know; and the story will bear out his confidence, for, as in the real life of those who tread the path of the quest, he indeed returns with greater knowledge and power.

The story next brings us to the entrance of hell, where our hero has come to seek the devil and his hairs. As in many fairy tales, he finds help from a kind woman -- the devil's grandmother -- who turns our hero into an ant so that he will go undetected and offers to help him with his questions. As the devil sleeps that night, she tweaks a hair from his head on three successive occasions and in each case, as he awakens, she claims to have been dreaming and poses to him one of the questions that the young man has offered to answer on his return. In this way he is able to return with not only the required hairs, but with the knowledge of

why a certain tree does not bear golden apples anymore, why the fountain that used to flow with wine has dried up and with an answer to the ferryman's question. I quote from the end of this episode:

"Then she seized the third golden hair and tweaked it out. The Devil jumped up with a yell and began to set about her, but she calmed him down again and said: 'How can one help having bad dreams!' 'What have you been dreaming now?' he asked, his curiosity getting the better of him. 'I dreamt there was a ferryman complaining that he has to keep on crossing the river and no one takes over his job from him. What can be the cause of that?' 'Ho ho, the stupid lout!' answered the Devil. 'When someone comes and wants to cross, he must just put the oar into his hand, and then the other man will have to do the ferrying and he'll be free.' So now that his grandmother had plucked out the three golden hairs and the three questions had been answered, she left the old dragon in peace, and he slept till daybreak."

Our youngster now helps the three men who await an answer to their questions, and returns home enriched by several donkeys laden with the gold and other gifts given to him by the watchmen as expressions of gratitude.

At this point the king cannot deny the lad his daughter's hand. He only wants to know the source of the gold, so he can also increase his riches. Our young man now sees fit to play the trickster "I crossed the river," he obliges, "and there is where I got it from and it's lying all along the bank, instead of sand."

As in myth, the hero triumphs through what may be read as an allegory for the undoing of the ego: the greedy king sets off in great haste, and when he reaches the opposite bank of the river the ferryman hands the king his oar and jumps out. Defeated and removed from the scene -- the king had to go on ferrying as a punishment for his sins.

If "marrying the princess" is a folkloric equivalent of the hieros-gamos -- that sacred inner marriage of the soul with the divine that is the essence of mystical attainment -- we may say that these stories tell us that after setting out and overcoming certain obstacles the traveler of the inner journey experiences a transient experience of love fulfillment that is still not the definitive union, and that between these two events there unfolds a second adventure -- a journey into death and darkness.

Of course, these and similar tales speak to two successive stages in the life of the individual human being that sets out on the spiritual quest: first the world is left behind to embark on an exploration of the unknown, with its adventures, trials and victories -- up to a certain level of spiritual attainment. But then -- after the hero of the quest (who has perhaps overcome a monstrous being and liberated a princess) has, so to say, climbed the holy mountain to its summit and planted there a conqueror's flag -- there is still another journey before him: returning to the world is not so simple as it seemed, and (the myths are in agreement on this) there remains to him a no less heroic adventure of bridging the gap between the magical world and the ordinary world to which he must return as a bearer of experience, inspiration and guidance. Returning, thus, is hardly ever the brief ending of a story that the reader might have anticipated after the great deeds of heroism have taken place. After the archetypal dragon has been slain and the princess liberated in the typical tale, there will still remain a long and weary journey home; and the tales surely echo the fact that so it is in real life.

Let me remark at this point that I do not agree with Jung's contention to the effect that folklore such as I have quoted reflects the spontaneous projection of archetypal material, and are a result of a cumulative, popular creation. I believe, rather, that the most important material collected by the Grimm brothers, by Perrault and others derives from an older source, and that these originals, far from being acts of spontaneous creation, originated as conscious statements, "tales of wisdom" embodying a knowledge about life and the spiritual path that far surpasses that of its average reader.

Today we know that such stories were (together with the use of medicinal plants) part of a tradition that Christianity branded as "witchcraft" and nearly exterminated in Europe. They make no less sense as tales of wisdom than those in the treasure of Chinese, Indian and Jewish tales, and a similarity in content between some of these and earlier Middle Eastern and Central Asian tales suggest to an esoteric Caucasian origin.

Not only has the inner Islam spoken the language of stories, but Sufism is striking among the spiritual traditions for the extent to which it has developed the use of this teaching tool and the extent in which the art survives. It is my impression that a great deal of today's explosion of interest in mythology is not unrelated to an implicit stimulus provided by books of Idries Shah like The Tales of the Dervishes, Caravan of Dreams, and others in

which he collected and wisely rewrote ancient materials from living Sufi lore.

I quote Shah, foremost of authorities on this aspect of the Sufi tradition :

"The teaching-story was brought to perfection as a communication instrument many thousands of years ago. The fact that it has not developed greatly since then has caused people obsessed by some theories of our current civilisations to regard it as the product of a less enlightened time. They feel that it must surely be little more than a literary curiosity, something fit for children, the projection, perhaps, of infantile desires, a means of enacting a wish-fulfillment.

Hardly anything could be further from the truth than such pseudo-philosophical, certainly unscientific, imaginings. Many teaching-stories are entertaining to children and to naive peasants. Many of them in the forms in which they are viewed by conditioned theorists have been so processed by unregenerate amateurs that their effective content is distorted. Some apply only to certain communities, depending upon special circumstances for their correct unfolding: circumstances whose absence effectively prevents the action of which they are capable.

So little is known to the academics, the scholars and the intellectuals of this world about these materials, that there is no word in modern languages which has been set aside to describe them. But the teaching-story exists, nevertheless. It is part of the most priceless heritage of mankind."

Let us turn to one of these, now -- the tale of "The Magic Horse," which in its apparent simplicity embodies all the stages of the path taken into account by mystical theology and a little more. We may read it as a conscious statement on that inner journey that lies potentially open to every human being.

It tells us of a king who reigned over a prosperous country and had two sons. One of them -- Hoshyar -- helped the community in a conventional way, through the application of his intelligence, and was honored. The other -- Tambal -- was considered a dreamer.

From time to time the king -- whom in his English retelling Shah suggestively calls Mumkin -- circulated announcements to the effect that all those who had produced notable devices and useful artifacts should present them for examination so they might be appropriately rewarded. And so, on one occasion, two men that were rivals in most things agreed to compete for an award, so that their relative merits could be decided once and for all by their

sovereign and publicly recognized.

One was a smith that had invented an iron fish that could serve as a vehicle not only on earth, but in the water and through the air. The other a carpenter who presented sovereign with a wooden horse which, unimpressive as it looked, could fly in response to his rider's desires.

The king was overjoyed at the technological achievement of the smith, whom he honored with the title of "Benefactor of the Community." As for the work of the simple woodcarver, he agreed with his chief minister, this was a mere "plaything" of no real advantage.

Tambal asked his father for the discarded wooden horse, though, while Hoshyar occupied himself after that with the manufacture of the iron fish.

"In this way, day after day, Tambal flew to places which he had never visited before. By this process he came to know a great many things. He took the horse everywhere with him.

One day his brother met Hoshyar who said to him: 'Carrying a wooden horse is a fit occupation for such as you. As for me, I am working for the good of all, towards my heart's desire!'

Tambal thought: 'I wish I knew what was the good of all. And I wish I could know what my heart's desire is.'

When he was next in his room, he sat upon the horse and thought: 'I would like to find my heart's desire.' At the same time he moved some of the knobs on the horse's neck.

Swifter than light the horse rose into the air and carried the prince a thousand days' ordinary journey away, to a far kingdom, ruled by a magician-king.

The king, whose name was Kahana, had a beautiful daughter called Precious Pearl- Durri-Karima. In order to protect her, he had imprisoned her in a circling palace, which wheeled in the sky, higher than any mortal could reach. As he was approaching the magic land, Tambal saw the glittering palace in the heavens, and alighted there.

The princess and the young horseman met and fell in love."

The story of The Magic Horse begins with the ordinary and average

condition of the human mind, and in its prosperous people we can readily recognize our technocratic world. The iron fish community in the story, like the symbolic Babylon of the Judeo-Christian tradition at the turn of our era -- evokes the aggressive and self-idealizing ignorance of the patriarchal world.

Higher values and a higher potential -- "the carpenter" -- are present in this "prosperous" kingdom, but unenlightened rulership involves the victimization and obstruction of the higher by the lower, so that the story tells us that on the day of the iron-fish victory the carpenter was tied to a tree "so that he will realize that our time is valuable" as the king proclaims, to be released only when Tambal comes to the end of his adventure and we to the end of the story.

The two brothers in the story, we today know, live in the right and left hemispheres of our brain: while the left hemisphere (controlling the right side of the body), is conceptual, logical and language bound, the right hemisphere (controlling the left side of the body) is now understood to be synthetic rather than analytic, and to handle pattern recognition and meaning.

It would seem language-bound half of our psyche, which is more "infected" by the social world and its pathology, is also more wordly, utilitarian, driven and devilish, and that the quest of the soul begins with a willingness to leave survival behind so as to allow the mind to run freely. (This is a theme as ancient as the institution of the Shabat and is vividly conveyed by the popular modern story of John Livingston Seagull).

It may be appropriate to interject here that the relevance of this book's subject (i.e. the inner meaning of poetry) to seekers lies, among other things, in precisely this: that art engages the non-utilitarian part of the mind, and that the contamination of spiritual seeking by the excessive goal-directedness of our practicality is bound to fail. Among the three pieces of advice that Israil of Bokhara (one of the great Sufi masters of the past) gave to his son, one was: "you will seek Truth for Its sake, and not for your sake."

The symbolism of the tale in consideration proceeds to show us how the mind that has learnt to "fly" (i.e. has developed a capacity to detach itself from the everyday world and go within itself) comes to contemplation proper - here conveyed through the felicity of love. Appropriately, this is a happiness not connected to anything previously known -- though, at the same time, something that constitutes the hero's hitherto unknown desire.

Yet clearly the stage of mystical development to which this part of the story corresponds is not the definitive one. Not only is it transient but it is something not integrated into the total personality. Significantly, the story tells us that the princess has been imprisoned by her father in a palace whirling in the sky (i.e. without a connection to earth-bound life). Also the name of her father, "Kahana," makes reference to the Arab word for an inspired yet spiritually intoxicated seer -- i.e. one who manifests precisely this level of development, akin to a spiritual honeymoon. (Let it be said that the more mature Sufis do not regard intoxication as the highest spiritual state, but, like Buddhists, have great appreciation for the sobriety that develops at a later time.) The symbolism of this stage in Tambal's journey, thus, represents an exalted, elevated, heavenly, yet all-too-heavenly condition.

Just as the love affair between Tambal and the precious princess takes place in the context of the magician king's world, in the human psyche does the spiritual honeymoon - which constitutes the entrance into the path proper - takes place in the context of an egoic spirituality - i.e. the channeling of spiritual energy into the service of narcissism. The kind of spirituality conveyed by Kahana, to whose kingdom he has come, is not compassionate but grandiose, reminiscent of that often portrayed in Indian legends of selfish yogis, who put magical power to destructive use.

Let us turn back to the story once more.

The princess rightly anticipates her father's opposition to a marriage to Tambal: he has already ordained that she become the wife of the son of another magician king. Furthermore, his will has never been successfully opposed. Tambal plans to reason with the king, but finds so many new and exciting things in the magic land to which he has come that he does not hurry, and as a result complications arise. When Kahana finds out about her daughter's intentions and, furious, decides to make arrangements for her wedding without delay, Tambal feels constrained to escape the palace by night, leaving his magic horse behind.

"His quest for his heart's desire now seemed almost hopeless. 'If it takes me the rest of my life,' he said to himself, 'I shall come back here, bringing troops to take this kingdom by force. I can only do that by convincing my father that I must have his help to attain my heart's desire.'

So saying, he sets off. "Never was a man worse equipped for such a

journey. An alien, travelling on foot, without any kind of provisions, facing pitiless heat and freezing nights interspersed with sandstorms, he soon became hopelessly lost in the desert.

Now, in his delirium, Tambal started to blame himself, his father, the magician-king, the woodcarver, even the princess and the magic horse itself. Sometimes he thought he saw water ahead of him, sometimes fair cities, sometimes he felt elated, sometimes incomparably sad. Sometimes he even thought that he had companions in his difficulties, but when he shook himself he saw that he was quite alone."

In the language of Sufism the spiritual stages corresponding to the mythical hero's first victory and subsequent "world of trials" are called "expansion" and "contraction" respectively, and it is often repeated that while expansion represents a blessing, no lesser a blessing is involved in contraction. In tales (such as "The Water of Life" and "The Three Hairs of the Devil") this is a stage of persecution in which the hero is at mercy of the temporary supremacy of his enemies, and loses what he had once found. Also in "The Magic Horse," the hero first meets the princess, then undergoes trials throughout which he is not assured of a happy outcome, only to find the princess again near the end of his adventure. Let me quote once more from Shah's version of the story:

"He seemed to have been travelling for an eternity. Suddenly, when he had given up and started again several times, he saw something directly in front of him. It looked like a mirage: a garden, full of delicious fruits, sparkling and almost, as it were, beckoning him towards them.

Tambal did not at first take much notice of this, but soon, as he walked, he saw that he was indeed passing through such a garden. He gathered some of the fruits and tasted them cautiously. They were delicious. They took away his fear as well as his hunger and thirst. When he was full, he lay down in the shade of a huge and welcoming tree and fell asleep."

The hero's sleep entails, of course, a reference to a lowerness of consciousness, and in many tales it is followed by catastrophe (as we will again see on occasion of Gilgamesh and Ulysses). In the present story the eating of the luscious fruit refers to a brief "false paradise" followed by what may be described an equally transient visit to the hell realm at an advanced stage of the journey. Let me only remark concerning these episodes that they reflect the wisdom of experienced travelers, and that they

correspond to the accounts of the journey that we will be examining in the next two chapters.

"When he woke up he felt well enough, but something seemed to be wrong. Running to a nearby pool, he looked at his reflection in the water. Staring up at him was a horrible apparition. It had a long beard, curved horns, ears a foot long. He looked down at his hands. They were covered with fur.

Was it a nightmare? He tried to wake himself, but all the pinching and pummelling had no effect. Now, almost bereft of his senses, beside himself with fear and horror, thrown into transports of screaming, racked with sobs, he threw himself on the ground. 'Whether I live or die,' he thought, 'these accursed fruits have finally ruined me. Nobody would marry me now, much less the Princess Precious Pearl. And I cannot imagine the beast who would not be terrified at the sight of me -- let alone my heart's desire!' And he lost consciousness."

We may say that the episode in which Tambal sees horns on his head and his body covered with hairs makes reference to the seeker's deepest acknowledgement of the "devil within" -- or, in psychological rather than religious terms -- the destructive core of his own ego. After this time of hopelessness, the journey will be -- as in Dante's after his vision of Satan in the nethermost hell -- one of progressive, smooth and spontaneous evolution.

"When he woke again, it was dark and a light was approaching through the groves of silent trees." After Tambal, overcoming a measure of distress, reaches out for help, the wise man proceeds:

"'If you really want your heart's desire,' said the other man, you have only to fix this desire firmly in your mind, not thinking of the fruit. You then have to take up some of the dried fruits, not the fresh, delicious ones, lying at the foot of all these trees, and eat them. Then follow your destiny.'"

Making a long story short, Tambal eats some of the dry fruit lying under the trees, regains his human shape, and hears a cavalcade approaching the enchanted forest. It is a prince, and, as an officer explains, he demands some of his "strange apricots."

He happens to be Jadugarzada, son of the magician king of the East, that advances towards the realm of Kahana to marry Princess Precious Pearl -- but his plans are thwarted: it is he who now grows horns and hair, turning into a sort of devil. His officers decide to put him away at the entrance to Kahana's kingdom, asking

Tambal to take his place while they claim the bride and until they may return to their own kingdom. Tambal, biding his time and following his destiny, agrees to his own part in the masquerade. At this stage (i.e. that of Tambal's return to normality while Jadugarzada becomes a demon) may be described as an inner healing concomitant with an outer demonization.

While the seeker may appear to the world no better a person or more balanced an individual than he was at an earlier stage -- for at the periphery of his being there is a less inhibited expression of all those personality manifestations that at an earlier stage were hidden at the core of his being -- it is the case that at the core of his psyche he is increasingly himself and at peace.

When Tambal, at last, was before the princess, he was able to whisper to her: " 'Fear nothing. We must act as best we can, following our destiny. Agree to go, making only the condition that you will not travel without the wooden horse.'" It was thus that in the end he was able to rise into the sky on the wooden horse with the Princess Precious Pearl mounted behind him.

It is noteworthy that this story includes both the motif of ascension (as in the story of Daudzadah) and that of the hero's return to his original environment: for soon the couple alighted at the palace of Tambal's father, and when in the end "the king was gathered to his fathers, Princess Precious Pearl and Prince Tambal succeeded him. Prince Hoshyar was quite pleased, too, because he was still entranced by the wondrous fish."

As a bridge between the humble medium of fairy tale to the exalted language of myth, I will now briefly touch upon a humorous myth that is a sort of hybrid between myth and fairy tale: Apuleius' account of the remarkable story of "Eros and Psyche" contained in his longer story of "The Golden Ass." This tale, which was extensively commented upon by Erich Neuman (in The Evolution of Consciousness) and part of which Joseph Campbell quotes to illustrate "the way of trials," has more recently been the theme of a book by Robert Johnson (under the title She) and I surmise some Jungian feminists might object to calling it a version of the "tale of the hero," or even of the heroine in view of the predominantly masculine and manlike connotations of such words.

Much as I have been concerned with the indictment of the patriarchal bias which I take as the root of our cruel history and the essence of our obsolete institutions, I disagree with those who insist on the view that the mythology of a patriarchal world

does not appropriately reflect the process of spiritual evolution of women.

Truly, the warrior hero is a symbol derived from the experience of organized war since the bronze age, but the inner meaning of the symbol is universal, for it refers to inner combat, a struggle in pursuit of a spiritual aim that is not different for men and women. Also, it is easy to see that the pattern in the story of "Psyche and Eros" is the same as that in the tale of the hero in general: our heroine -- the name of whom (Psyche) most explicitly tells us that she is an allegory for the human mind -- is supremely endowed but unhappy in the ordinary world, for her beauty is so great that she is worshipped rather than approached. Thus she remains unmarried even when her younger sisters have found their mates. As in some versions of the creation of man, divine jealousy is involved, for Psyche is so beautiful that she receives a devotion due to the goddess of love and beauty alone, and Aphrodite determines to punish and humble her. To do this she requests from her son Eros that he make her fall desperately in love with somebody of little value. The result, however, that at the sight of her beauty, the God-of-love wounds himself with one of his arrows at the sight of her, and falls in love. I turn to the story itself:

"Meanwhile Psyche got no satisfaction at all from the honours paid her. Everyone stared at her, everyone praised her, but no cummoner, no prince, no king even, dared to make love to her.

Her poor father feared that the gods might be angry with him for allowing his subjects to make so much of her, so he went to the ancient oracle of Apollo at Miletus and, after the usual prayers and sacrifices, asked where he was to find a husband for his daughter whom nobody wanted to marry. Apollo delivered the following oracle:

*On some high mountain's craggy summit place/ The virgin, decked
deadly nuptial rites,/ Nor hope a son-in-law of mortal birth /But
a dire mischief, viperous and fierce,/ Who flies through ether and
with fire sword/Tires and debilitates all things that
are,/Terrific to the powers that reign on high./ Great Jupiter
himself fears this winged pest/ And streams and Stygian shades his
power abhor.*

The king, who until now had been a happy man, came slowly back from the oracle feeling thoroughly depressed and told his queen what an unfavorable answer he had got. they spent several miserable days brooding over their daughter's fate and weeping all

the while. But time passed, and the cruel oracle had to be obeyed.

The hour came when a procession formed up for Psyche's dreadful wedding. The torches chosen were ones that burned low with a sooty, spluttering flame; instead of the happy wedding-match the flutes played a querulous Lydian lament; the marriage-chant ended with funeral howls, and the poor bride wiped the tears from her eyes with the corner of her flame-colored veil. Everyone turned out, groaning sympathetically at the calamity that had overtaken the royal house, and a day of public mourning was at once proclaimed. But there was no help for it: Apollo's oracle had to be obeyed. So when the preliminaries of this hateful ceremony had been completed in deep grief, the bridal procession moved off, followed by the entire city, and at the head of it walked Psyche with the air of a woman going to her grave, not her bridal bed.

Her parents, overcome with grief and horror, tried to delay things by holding up the procession, but Psyche herself opposed them. 'Poor Father, poor Mother, why torment yourselves by prolonging your grief unnecessarily? You are old enough to know better. Why increase my distress by crying and shrieking yourselves hoarse? Why spoil the two faces that I love best in the world by crying your eyes sore and pulling out your beautiful white hair? Why beat your dear breasts until my own heart aches again? Now, too late, you at last see the reward that my beauty has earned you; the curse of divine jealousy for the extravagant honours paid me. When the people all over the world celebrated me as the New Venus and offered me sacrifices, then was the time for you to grieve and weep as though I were already dead; I see now, I see it as clearly as daylight, that the one cause of all my misery is this blasphemous use of the Goddess's name. So lead me up to the rock of the oracle. I am looking forward to my lucky bridal night and my marvellous husband. Why should I hesitate? Why should I shrink from him, even if he has been born for the destruction of the whole world?'

She walked resolutely forward. The crowds followed her up to the rock at the top of the hill, where they left her. They returned to their homes in deep dejection, extinguishing the wedding-torches with their tears, and throwing them away. Her broken-hearted parents shut themselves up in their palace behind closed doors and heavily curtained windows.

Psyche was left alone weeping and trembling at the very top of the hill, until a friendly west wind suddenly sprang up. It played around her, gradually swelling out her skirt and veil and cloak until it lifted her off the ground and carried her slowly down

into a valley at the foot of the hill, where she found herself gently laid on a bed of the softest turf, starred with flowers."

Though Psyche's entrance into the land of adventure is like a death to those she leaves behind, it is, of course, the beginning of a higher life.

An ecstatic hyeros-gamos begins now -- yet, as in other tales, it is not a lasting one. The reason, as the tale implies, is the same for which the illuminative of the soul's journey is transient, and is followed by a time of trials: the persistence of that very past which seemed to be left behind.

While Psyche enjoys the embrace of the God-of-Love in the dark of night without being able to see his face, her sisters, who by now have managed to get her attention and communicate with her, out of jealousy instill in her the doubt that she may be deluding herself. Maybe her husband is a monstrous serpent, they suggest, and they urge her not to accept her lover's warning that she should not be concerned with seeing his face.

Following her sisters advice, then, psyche one night waited for her husband to be asleep to approach him with a lamp in one hand and a sword in the other.

"But as soon as the light was brought out and the secret of their bid became plain, what she soul was of all wild beasts the most soft and sweet of monsters, none other than Cupid himself, the fair God fairly lying asleep. At the sight the flame of the lamp was gladdened and flared up, and her blade began to repent its blasphemous edge. Psyche, unnerved by the wonderful vision, was no longer mistress of herself Coleman feeble, pale, trembling and power as, she crouched down and tried to hide the steel by burying it in her own bosom; and she would certainly have done it, had not this key and in theater of such crying slipped and thrown out of her rash hands..."

I imagine that many a reader will remember the story of how psyche in the end wounds herself one with of one of Cupid's arrows and thus falls in love with love before being discovered, and how Cupid, own seeing his confidence betrayed, flew away without a word.

Psyche's invalidation of her own experience thus leads to the catastrophic ending of her exalted state -- and after the God-of-Love, betrayed, flies away, the "road of trials" begins for her.

It is not long before she realizes that only through an appeal to Venus will she be able to find her lost husband again -- for he is her son, and Venus does not make it easy for her. Psyche is able to accomplish each of the seemingly impossible tasks that Venus has set for her, the last of which involves a descent to Hades. Yet she barely manages to survive and find her beloved again -- now in the daylight and forever.

She nearly fails in her last task, for she is so concerned with pleasing her lover that she cannot refrain from going against Venus' warning not to open the box in which Persephone is sending her gift of beauty. Sleep falls upon her, yet Cupid awakens her and she is thus able to complete her errand. In the end, Cupid (who has by now fallen even more deeply in love with Psyche, and continues to be in conflict with his mother) appeals to the king of the gods. Jupiter then commands Mercury to summon a Council of the Heavens and proclaims to all his decision of stopping the "young rascal" in his customary misbehavior by fettering him to marriage. "He has found and seduced a pretty girl called Psyche, and my sentence is that he must have her, hold her, possess her and cherish her from this time forth and for evermore." At the climax of the marriage ceremony that follows he hands Psyche a cup of nectar to make her an immortal.

Apuleius has masterfully given us a tale within a tale - (or, more accurately said, a myth within a tale) in such manner that the outer story is built on the same pattern as the inner. The story of Lucius' transformation into an ass is only his "road of trials" after an ecstasy of love. This, too, occurs after his travelling from his own land to Beotia (reputed to be a land of witches), where he becomes intimate with the beautiful servant of his host. His new lover has seen her mistress practice sorcery, and she invites Lucius to spy on her through a peep-hole as she turns into a bird. Stimulated by what he has seen he wants to do the same, yet -- like many a sorcerer's apprentice -- he engages in the art before knowing enough. He becomes a donkey instead of a bird, and before he can turn back into his natural shape he is separated from his lover through robbers that fall on the house that night and take him away. After the long series of his trials (and at the end of the book) he will be restored to his original form when he comes to a shore where there is a procession in worship of Isis. Here for the first time in his adventures he has the opportunity to eat a rose, and the book ends with his initiation to the mysteries of the goddess.

The redundancy of the message in both the inner story of Psyche and the outer story of Lucius (the author) makes it clear that

this is indeed beyond an account of "feminine individuation". It is, rather, the universal adventure of finding eternal-life.

It is a unique feature of the "Eros and Psyche" story that what I have called the early and the late "victories" are in it contrasted not only in regard to a permanence, but in terms of light -- an obvious allegory of consciousness. Not only does the myth tell us that Psyche's ecstatic honeymoon, however near to God, involved an imperfect consciousness. It even suggests that it is appropriate for the individual, at this stage, not to insist in knowing more than what is revealed; nor probe impatiently into the mystery.

As in many a fairy tale, the myth describes Psyche's "road of trials" as one that demands her utmost and yet cannot be completed without assistance: assistance from natural sources, it would seem -- from the animal, plant and mineral realms (though ultimately divine in its source and coming to her in virtue of her being the wife of her beloved Eros). There is a reference here to a time in the life of the individual when he or she is cast down, rather than exalted. A drop of hot oil awakes the god of Love when Psyche violates his warning not to look upon him, and when he flies away the road of trials begins for her. Yet at the same time she is being protected and providentially assisted.

When the union of Eros and Psyche takes place at the end, it is not the union between the human and divine anymore, but a union between two divine entities, which the story teller brings about through the intervention of Zeus. yet we can imagine that Zeus only acknowledges what Psyche has already achieved by now: for after returning from the realm of death her identity has surely changed -through the recognition of her ultimately divine nature.

Though many myths of antiquity have been for such a long time separated from the living spiritual tradition in which they were once embedded (so the very word "myth" has taken on a connotation of unreality), we may say that, as in the case of the Old Testament books, there was a time when myths were not essentially different from teaching tales. An indication that this was the case is the myth of Osiris (a variation or a story widespread in antiquity), for it is clear that Osiris not only refers to an individual who was the civilizer of Egypt, but -- as the pyramid texts show -- to the "inner Osiris" in every human being.

Frazer's contention to the effect that the myth refers only to the "mystery" of the death and rebirth of vegetation in the course of

the year cycle demonstrates how little credit Western scholarship in his time gave to the mentality of "primitives", and how far it was from grasping then the inner meaning of myths. Of course, annual plants are born and die according to the rhythms of the seasons, and this fact may be "mysterious" to a scientifically underdeveloped mind -- yet this kind of mystery is not the one that we can recognize as the true substance of myths. Rather, the birth and death of plants (like the birth and death of the hero) can perhaps most accurately be seen as echo of a deeper mystery -- a mystery of a spiritual nature, concerning birth and a death in a realm of experience available to humans but not universally known by all.

Indeed, one finds it hard to believe that the peoples of antiquity needed myths to talk about plants. They needed them to talk about the same things for which we still need myths, literature, and fairy tales: to talk about the real mysteries, which are facts of the inner life. From this we may say that the Egyptian resurrection mystery is no different from the Christian mystery (and I have heard it said that there was a continuity between the teaching of Jesus and the much older teaching of the Egyptian initiates).

The myth of Osiris has two phases; a journey through the day and a journey through the night. A journey on the ship of the sun, and another on the ship of the moon. One journey is symbolically equated with the visible movement of the sun over the horizon; the other, with the invisible journey of the sun through the underworld -- as it returns from the West to the East by night.

The visible journey is that of Osiris as a living king who brought civilization to Egypt. According to legend it was he who taught the Egyptians to cultivate the land and improve its fruits, gave them a body of laws to regulate their conduct by, and instructed them in the worship of the gods. Because he was believed to have converted neighbouring peoples through the force of persuasion and the beauty of song rather than war, he was later identified by the Greeks with their Dionysius, just as they identified Osiris' enemy, the crocodile-headed Set, with Typhon.

We don't have an Egyptian source for the myth of Osiris, for it seems to have been so omnipresent in antiquity that nobody felt the need to set it down. While the name of Osiris appears in all the pyramid texts, for instance, it is always taken for granted that his history is known. Thus it is that the only organized narrative that we have of his story is that of Plutarch, from which I will be quoting in connection with most of the events

along the God's "second adventure" -- which begins when Seth persuades 72 others to join him in a conspiracy.

"For having privily taken the measure of Osiris' body, he caused a chest to be made exactly of the same size with it, as beautiful as may be, and set off with all the ornaments of art. This chest he brought into his banqueting-room; where, after it had been much admired by all who were present, Typho, as it were in jest, promised to give it to any one of them whose body upon trial it might be found to fit. Upon this the whole company, one after the other, go into it; but as it did not fit any of them, last of all Osiris lays himself down in it, upon which the conspirators immediately ran together, clapped the cover upon it, and fastened it down on the outside with nails, pouring likewise melted lead over it. After this they carried it away to the river side, and conveyed it to the sea by the Tana<tic mouth of the Nile; which for this reason, is still held in the utmost abomination by the Egyptians, and never named by them but with proper marks of detestation."

As we read on, we form the impression that the sarcophagus containing the body of Osiris is not only death-giving -- as its name ethymologically ("flesh eating") implies -- but something like a cocoon, and the journey of Osiris as he floats down the Nile may be viewed as the incubation of a new life. A first suggestion of it is the episode at which it comes to be lodged in the branches of a bush of tamarisk in such a way that the tree grows around the chest, enclosing it on every side. The image suggests death lodging itself at the core of a new life, and this meaning is further confirmed as the myth proceeds to tell us that the trunk of this tree was used by the king of Byblos as a pillar to support the roof of his house. Not only is the dead Osiris now at the center of a natural growth process, but also a center of human organization.

While Osiris floats along, in his coffin, Isis, already mourning, seeks him. Significantly, Plutarch tells us that she heard about his accident in a place that was ever since called *Koptis*, and some are of opinion that this word signifies "deprivation." We may say that Isis is the soul that mourns the disappearance of spirit during its "dark night."

Just as Demeter in search of Persephone (according to Homer's account of the Greek myth) employed herself as a wet nurse, so Isis seeks such employment with the queen, and feeds her child by giving it her finger to suck instead of her breast. I quote Plutarch further:

"She likewise put him every night into the fire in order to consume his mortal part, whilst transforming herself into a swallow, she hovered round the pillar and bemoaned her sad fate. Thus continued she to do for some time, till the queen, who stood watching her, observing the child to be all in a flame, cried out, and thereby deprived him of that immortality which would otherwise have been conferred upon him."

An accident -- and yet the abortive divinization suggests a regularity in the process of spiritual unfolding -- an "accident" that may be expected to occur in everybody's spiritual odyssey, and in which the incomplete perfecting of an aspect of the mind is nothing but an episode in the course of our longer maturational process.

The logic of the myth, at this point, is that from the queen's mistake there arises the need for the manifestation of Isis; also, apparently, her right to claim the pillar that she has sought. After removing from it the chest, she now takes it with her and brings it back to Egypt, where she deposits it in a remote and unfrequented place among the rushes.

Yet Seth found it and tore the body of Osiris into 13 pieces, which he dispersed in different parts of the country. Dismemberment suggests a stage of death beyond mere absence of life, and the symbol may be read inwardly in similar manner: a disintegration of personality that follows the cessation of a certain level of life.

Isis returns to the search, which now becomes the search of scattered fragments. Now the myth, like a dream, seems to continue in two simultaneous tracks. On one hand, it tells of the burial of the scattered limbs of Osiris -- an image that suggests a further stage of death: rotting (and, concomitantly, a sort of psychological putrefaction). On the other time, we are told that Isis is able to bring all the pieces together, except the phallus of Osiris, which has been eaten by a fish. This member she reconstituted, however, and lying with her husband she conceives Horus -- an event that constitutes the culmination of the generativity of death that has made itself present since the beginning of the story.

In Horus we may see the reborn Osiris and also the avenger of his father. He is represented by the falcon -- and the Egyptian conception of the sun as one of the eyes of Horus can convey to us the measure of Horus' power. It will be Horus that conquers Seth,

the crocodile-god, in the end, so the myth suggests that evil can only be conquered after the maturation of the hero through his triumph over death -- i.e. through resurrection.

3- OLD TEACHINGS AND NEW INSIGHTS

While Western esotericism regards the Christian resurrection teaching a continuation of the old Egyptian mystery, the myth of the god that dies and is reborn is so prominent in the ancient East that some scholars have seen in the Gospels a reiteration of this pervasive old myth rather than history.

In his masterful synthesis of the scholarship of past decades, Prof. Guignebert of the Sorbonne shows how the absence of historical corroboration of the existence of Jesus outside the Gospels has constituted a stimulus to those who have inclined to a mythological explanation of the Christian movement. He quotes Jensen, for instance, who has seen in the Gospel figure of Jesus "an adaptation of the savior hero Gilgamesh ... and since the legend of Gilgamesh represents a solar myth, the Jesus of the Gospels became the sun surrounded by the twelve signs of the Zodiac." For Robertson¹⁵, "Jesus was the hero of a sacred drama which was performed in the secret circle of a company of initiates of Jewish origin, and represented the story of a god sacrificed by his father for the salvation of men. In primitive times the drama may have culminated in the real sacrifice of a man playing the part of the god. At the time when the Gospels were written it ended in a ritual feast at which the faithful were supposed to eat the god, symbolized by the consecrated bread and wine, for the purpose of assimilating his substance and becoming one with him."

Without concerning ourselves with the issue of the historicity of Jesus Christ or with the influences that converged on the early Christian movement, let us just say that it has always been part of the Christian understanding that the Gospel story has an inner meaning. As in the case of Osiris, this inner meaning was conveyed through a story concerning a real individual, and we can imagine the old Egyptians as being no more able than

¹⁵ In Jesus, Charles Guignebert, University Books, New York, 1956.

contemporary Christians to tell the exact boundary between history and mythological construction.¹⁶

The story of Christ, like that of Osiris, comprises, of course, a rising and a fall before the resurrection: there is the apprenticeship, the struggle with the devil in the desert, the baptism and the apostolate, and then the passion, death and descent into hell. While in the story of Osiris as it has come to us it is mostly the tale of the dark journey that is emphasized, in the Christian story the account of the passion is balanced with that of the earlier teaching career of Jesus.

In the same manner as the Egyptians spoke of an "inner Osiris" in each individual, there is in the Christian tradition the notion of an "inner Christ" (made explicit by Saint Paul) and an injunction of following of Christ's way -the "imitation" of Christ that was to be the theme of Kempis' classic. Yet there is truth in what I once heard Alan Watts say: that the problem of Christianity has been that from being the religion of Christ it has become, instead, a religion about Christ. The religion of Christ was, of course, one of dying to the world and returning, in a sense, to the womb, to be reborn.

It was the gnostics that most emphasized the inner meaning of Christ's resurrection. It would be a mistake, however, to believe that only gnostics were aware of this inner meaning: Aquinas was explicit about a mystical meaning in all scripture and it was a saying in the Middle Ages that "few come to Bethlehem, fewer still come to Golgotha." Bethlehem and Golgotha in this saying correspond to what I have called the hero's first and second adventure, each with the character of a new beginning; yet from the perspective of the human process rather than its allegorical reflection we might best call them a first and second initiation. In Christian terminology, the first of these is a first "baptism" of water (that signifies the birth into spiritual life -- the birth of the inner Christ in the manger of the heart) and the other a second baptism "of Spirit" or fire, for which the Christian tradition reserves the name of resurrection.

¹⁶ On Alan Watts, his book Christian Mythology -- (Alan Watts' book Christian Mythology has constituted a break through in the application of the word myth to the Christian domain of religious symbolism, which is valid if we give myth the rightest and highest sense in contrast with its lesser, narrower, yet also common meaning which carries connotations of unreality and superstition).

In the language of later mystical theology, the spiritual explosion of the first birth is called the *via iluminativa* and it may be regarded a spiritual honeymoon. It is a time of consolation, a time of blessings, grace, and wisdom; a time of visions, gifts of the spirit -- and much excitement. It is the "Mount Sinai" in the life of the person who has come thus far: revelation. The person will have had an intimation of the divine (a "burning bush" time) before the *via purgativa*, the time of intentional efforts, a holy war against the lower self. Yet after the *via purgativa* comes the time of spiritual birth proper, as distinct from spiritual fertilization or conception.

Notwithstanding its sublimity, this blossoming of the higher self takes place while the older self still lives, and there will follow a period during which the "new man" and the "old man" (to use Saint Paul's language) coexist in the individual. As Dante explains in his Vita Nuova, when the spiritual self is born, the carnal self knows that he is condemned to die sooner or later, and he is not happy about it; yet at the individual's conscious level, there could be no greater happiness than this, at the time immediately following the *metanoia* the change of mind or "conversion" (when this word is used in its deeper sense¹⁷). The individual's condition may be characterized as one of spiritual intoxication, and great happiness is certainly appropriate to the momentous event of a rebirth. Not many come thus far -- as the above quoted saying intimates: while many are consciously seeking spiritual rebirth, "few are chosen."

Not only does "the old man" live on within the individual's psyche, but to the extent that there is a lingering "ego"¹⁸ (as in the story of Psyche and her sisters) there takes place a contamination of spiritual experience by the ego; and of this the individual may be, for a long time, unaware. The saying of Jesus to the effect of not letting the left hand know what the right hand does is particularly relevant to this situation where the ego takes credit for spiritual experiences and feels, thereby, inflated. Here is the condition symbolically encountered in the tale of how Kahana wanted the princess

¹⁷ Equivalent to *metanoia* or the Jewish concept of Tshuvah.

¹⁸ I use this word in the more commonly meaning given by the spiritual traditions and today's transpersonal psychology as distinct to the meaning in modern psychoanalysis, that is better rendered to the traditional word "self."

Precious Pearl to marry the powerful magician-king of the East. A new stage of purification needs to take place, then, and a new victory over the ego; this stage of purification is what St. John of the Cross called the "dark night of the soul," in which the individual's consciousness shifts from expansion to contraction, and from nearness of God to an eclipse of the divine.

Just as in the story of The Magic Horse the time that elapses between Tambal's falling in love with the princess and his being able to elope with her and marry her is divided in two segments (before and after the "enchanted forest" episode), so too, St. John of the Cross speaks of two stages of the "dark night of the soul": the night of the senses and the night of the spirit -- in which psychological and spiritual impoverishment, respectively, are in the foreground of the seeker's experience. The first of these stages may well be described as a "hellish" state -- for pain is greater when hope is lowest, as it is after the passing away of the illuminative condition. The second, pervaded by a satisfaction that derives from the sense of moving forward along the path rather than being lost, is best described through the traditional image of purgatory.

When St. John of the Cross wrote about the "dark night of the soul" his intent was not autobiographic so much as that of a spiritual director wanting to be of help to others undergoing a process similar to the one he had come to know through personal experience. He quoted abundantly from the Psalms concerning the pain of this spiritual condition and made it known that even individuals who have been gifted with grace and have even been of assistance to God feel at this time lost and abandoned.

To one "swallowed by the whale" the "dark night" of its belly may seem a punishment -- and indeed it is inasmuch as it is an answer to a condition of spiritual imperfection and the need to be liberated from the passions. Yet it is also a blessing that the passions are not eclipsed any longer by the divine effulgence of the epiphanies of the *via iluminativa*, so that the mythical dragon now rears its many heads. (A considerable portion of St. John's "Dark Night of the Soul" is dedicated to the manifestations of the seven capital sins, and Evelyn Underhill has remarked how during this stage of the

mystical life many saints temporarily lose their sainthood and even their reputation.)

The greater blessing during this stage, however, is the fact that, despite its aridity and expression of an inner dying process, it is also the incubation of a rebirth. Thus the stories that tell us how after the princess (or the sacramental castle) is lost, they are found again. This reappearance of the inner Christ after a time of agony and descent into hell, mystical theology calls the *via unitiva* -- and "via" (way) here again refers not to a state of mind so much as to an ongoing process of development: one that now proceeds in an atmosphere of painful deprivation, that will be the preparation for spiritual ripeness.

The Sufis describe the advanced stages of the path in terms of *faná* and *baqá*- "annihilation" and "subsistence."

While in the end, *faná* and *baqá* are coexistent aspects of the mind, they may also be seen as a temporary unfolding, for the process of self emptying precedes and is a precondition for the ultimate attainment. Thus, for instance, in Attar's The Conference of the Birds (which does not ostensibly invite comparison with the tale of the hero, and yet is an expression of the selfsame inner journey) the birds who have traveled through the valley of the quest and the valley of love and, further, have crossed the valleys of knowledge or mysteries, detachment, unity and awe come to the valley of bewilderment, and then the valley of poverty, at which stage the thirty birds that remain meet with the herald of the Simourgh -- that mythical sovereign of birds whom they have been seeking and is "always near to us though we live far from his transcendent majesty." Through the information given by this herald Attar tells us at the end of his poem that "the souls of these birds were able to rise free of all they had been before." ("The past and all its actions were no more"). Now in the Simourgh's radiant face they are ready to see themselves, just as Dante saw "our face" when he turned his gaze to the divine light at the end of his Commedia: "they look at both and see the two as one."

In Attar's metaphor God ("their shining Lord") tells the travelers that he is only a mirror in which they can see themselves. yet it is the process of progressive self-

emptying that has culminated in the valley of nothingness, and has permitted the mirror-like consciousness.

If St. John of the Cross' description of the "dark night" in terms of "aridity" in the soul, and Attar's description of "contraction" as bewilderment, unknowing and emptying, seem to the reader of these pages still far from the images of tribulation in the adventures with devil and death in the tale of the hero, he or she will surely be interested in what description Al Gazzali has left us of the seven valleys of the quest -- a description that bears not only on internal states but is also allusive to the life situation of the seeker. In The Way of the Worshippers.¹⁹

The closest analog to these allegorical maps of the journey in the Buddhist world, is The Tibetan Book of the Dead. Once this is read not as a statement about the after life of those who have come to the end of their days, but one about transitional states of consciousness after an inner death, it also becomes a map of the advanced stages of the path.

According to The Tibetan Book of the Dead, the first state of consciousness that is to be experienced by one undergoing ego-death is that of the clear light -- which is a coming face to face with ultimate reality. This *Dharmakaya* realization or dawning of the "body of truth" is not something that the individual can sustain, however, so he is carried to the *Shambogakaya* level and the visionary realm. There is in this second *bardo* a continuation of revelatory experience, yet it is a less immediate revelation: a reflection of the ultimate experience into a symbolic medium. This is the realm that Sufis have called the *alam-al-mital* -- the realm of relative imagination, of which Corbin has written in connection with his study of Ibn' Arabi and other works.

After the peaceful and wrathful stages of this second bardo (an ecstatic one followed by another pervaded by an atmosphere of fear and anger) -- concerning both of which the text recommends non-attachment and non-identification with the objects of perception -- the individual undergoes a journey through the six *lokas* or realms of consciousness distinguished by Buddhist mythology and its implicit psychology. Here is a reference to the fact that after a

¹⁹ In The Elephant in the Dark, by Idries Shah, The Octagon Press, London 1978.

time when the advanced voyager knows the bliss of the Gods, and after a titanic stage in which the prideful satisfaction of God-identification gives way to the envy of striving for greater nearness to the divine, there is a stage -- years perhaps -- during which his condition may be appropriately conveyed through the image of the "hungry ghost," ever thirsty and big bellied, yet suffering from a constriction of the throat that condemns him to deprivation even in the presence of food. This condition, in turn, shifts into that of the hell realm, when the individual suffers even more and (at least intermittently) loses assurance concerning salvation, and then to that of the animal *loka* or realm: a quality of consciousness that entails a seemingly healed yet de-spiritualized creature-likeness.

The human realm stage that completes the journey through the *lokas*, according to The Tibetan Book of the Dead, corresponds to a further descent of the *prana* through the body, a further embodiment of a spiritual seed that penetrated through the crown of the head on occasion of the experience of the clear light, yet this does not correspond to the last stage in the descent of the *kundalini*²⁰, nor to the end of the process of re-humanization, after the journey through non-ordinary consciousness. "Returning" in mythology mostly corresponds to the last *bardo* in the Book of the Dead, which describes the true fulfillment of rebirth into the human world. In consonance with Egyptian pyramid texts, according to which the unbinding of the individual Osiris (that precedes resurrection) ends with the coccyx, in the teachings associated with The Tibetan Book of the Dead, the journey ends with the penetration of the lowest *chakra* by the enlightened mind -- which here manifests as *Vajrakilaya*.

If we read the *Bardo Trödol* as a document concerning a "death before dying" at a culminating point of the spiritual path, we may also read it as one referring to a reintegration into the human world after the "journey to the underworld" is completed. This involves a further spiritual evolution, for it symbolically portrays an integration of spiritual perception to the ordinary condition of the mind before the journey. The last of the *bardos* is the time of completion of the *Nirmanakaya* or enlightened physical body.

²⁰ Serpente power.

In still another Buddhist document on the path the manifestation of the three *kayas* can be recognized, as Chögyam Trungpa has explicitly commented²¹ : the series of the Ten Ox Herding Pictures -- and more specifically the last three of these.

After seven stages that begin with the equivalent of Attar's "Valley of Seeking" (here seeking the tracks of the ox) and have to do with an inner unification comparable to that involved in tales of heroes and dragons, there comes in the classical water color series an eighth stage, in which both the ox and the seeker have vanished, and Trungpa has interpreted this blank picture as a reference to an absence of both striving and non-striving characteristic of the entrance into the *Dharmakaya*. The ninth stage in the series in the sequence corresponds to the play of energies and wisdom in the state of openness that has been thus far achieved, the "inexhaustible treasure of Buddha activity" corresponding to the *Sambhogakaya*, while the tenth -- "in the world" -- depicts an old man as he goes about his shopping at the marketplace while nobody knows that he has been on a spiritual journey. His human level is the "fully awakened state of being in the world." I think that the Buddhist analysis may be applicable to the stages recognized in the Western world as well: the luminous *via iluminativa*, the *ath* of alternating vision and despair and the final condition in which spiritual experience is integrated into the ordinary.

Joseph Campbell has given us a detailed account of the correlation between the stages in The Tibetan Book of the Dead and the descent of the *kundalini*. He has also elegantly presented the classical views on the rising of *kundalini*, yet he never attempted a contribution to the perplexities of those who cannot reconcile the teachings on *kundalini* rising and those (such as in The Tibetan Book of the Dead or Aurobindo's writing) who present the inner journey as a process paralleled by a "descent of a force."

I have elsewhere²² expressed my view to the effect that, in *kundalini* terms, the journey is "up and down the holy world axis" -- just as the tale of the hero.

²¹ In his book Mudra.

²² "The Kundalini Process and The Tale of the Hero" presented at "The Energies of Transformation," Asilomar Center, Monterey, CA.

Which brings us back to the dragon, who was present in our introductory story, yet concerning which little has been said thus far. For it was a dragon -- even if in that particular version the text says "monster."

The dragon of myth and fairy tale is sometimes God, sometimes the Devil, sometimes endless life-death biting its tale, sometimes the ego -- as in the cosmic dragon, *Vritra*, whom *Indra*, the king of the Gods in the Indian pantheon, slay with his diamond thunderbolt.

He was holding the precious waters of life in his body, which, after he was pierced, fell on the world and became the rivers, the seas and life.

References to the dragon as benevolent, heavenly power that rains blessings upon us abound in China, and generally speaking, in the far East; while in the West the figure of the dragon is typically associated with that arch enemy whom Saint George and the Archangel Michael were able to conquer. Yet in divine or demonic form, the encounter with the dragon contains a reference to *kundalini*, for *kundalini* is a spiritual force related to the deep spontaneity of our reptilian brain. And another: the greedy ego-dragon will be transformed into the Life-dragon, while full humanization entails "dragonification;" implicitly, the dragon adventure is a step forward on the path even when, as in the case of Hatim Tai, the hero is swallowed and carried forward in his belly. This is a process that may be symbolized in different ways, for not only the spiritual warrior slays the dragon in his adventure, but finds the death of his all-to "heroic," striving and Faustian mind. Yet as the hero dies, a child is born -- a child, who like Krishna, Hermes, Heracles and Apollo, has power over snakes.

While the symbolism of The Tibetan Book of the Dead emphasizes through its downward progression the return to embodied consciousness, another map from the same tradition -- the ladder of the ten *bhumis* of the *Bodhisattva* path -- constitutes the Buddhist equivalent to what in Western versions of the tale of the hero is the hero's ascension to heaven.

Not every hero ascends, inasmuch as not every tale is a complete tale, but just as in the teaching tale of

Daudzada at the beginning of this chapter, brother and sister, reunited, return to the land of their other-worldly parents, so Jesus ascends, as also Gesar (in the Tibetan epic) ascends; and Quetzalcoatl, the "Lord of the Dawn" who gave the early Mexican their civilization -- and the return of whom the Mexican calendar predicts for our time. As will be seen, it is also with ascent that Dante and Goethe end their expressions of the journey.

It may be thought that the tale of the hero is a "visionary journey." Not so. I feel prompted to clarify this in response to those who might think that dwelling in the symbolic material of teachings, myths and tales is just involvement in fantasy. Of course there was the case of Don Quixote and others, yet the Sufis do not think much of those who have not gone beyond the stage of "experiences." The inner journey is always a physical ("*kundalini*") process, inasmuch as, from a certain point onwards, it is a process organized around a bodily manifestation of sacredness. More than a visionary journey, then, it is a transformational process manifested at all levels; yet most particularly as a subtle, yet momentous transformation of the body. In the body is crystallized our conditioning and our sense of self, our angry grasping, and it is in the body (when we are able to get out of the way) through the relinquishing of all that that there may manifest a creative, deeply spontaneous self-regulation that heals both our bodies and our minds from the lingering imprints of past conditioning or "karma."

I have thus far discussed the inner journey of the inner pilgrim/warrior in terms of a first expansive (solar) phase and a second (lunar) phase of contraction in which dominate light and darkness respectively; I have correlated these with the two stages in the unfolding of *kundalini* and I have discussed the whole transformative process in terms of a psychological death and a spiritual birth. I now want only to point out the relation of all these experiential characteristics to those associated with the stages of the physical birth process.

In his cartography of the mind as revealed through the effects of LSD-25, Dr. Stanislaus Grof coined the expression "perinatal matrices" for what I have been discussing under such words as "heaven," "hell," "purgatory," "dying" and "birth."

"Perinatal matrices" wants to signify modes of feeling that have to do with the states surrounding birth -- by which, in turn, Grof means states at the time of 1 - slowly maturing in the mother's womb; 2 - the time when the contractions of the womb have begun but the cervix has not dilated yet, when we may imagine that the fetus is undergoing maximal discomfort and a sense of being imploded; 3 - progression through the birth canal, which culminates, in turn, in 4 - the completion of birth.

Just as Freud, who acknowledged a blissful potential of the mind, described this as an "oceanic experience," Grof claims that the heavenly experiences of LSD correspond a return of the mind to its womb-like condition. Also, he suggests that the psychedelic hell state is a replay of the original experience of the fetus experiencing the primordial pain of the pre-natal no-exit situation.

It is easy to see an analogy between the concept of purgatory (a place of spiritual progress in the midst of pain) and the perinatal stage of moving along the birth canal, and the wall of fire" traditionally imagined (by the Sufis and Dante at least) as a last barrier before paradise is most evocative of the explosive, "volcanic," and "titanic" state of consciousness that Grof traces back to the passing of the head of the new born through the mother's bony pelvis.

It is one thing to talk about mental states, however, and another to talk about the stages along the inner path. The Sufis have been the most explicit in pointing out the difference between *makamat*, that are stable achievements, and *hal*, which are transient conditions of the mind. Like Totila Albert (as I will have occasion to elaborate upon toward the end of this book) saw a special appropriateness in the biological language of embryonic life to the process of "soul making," I think that biological birth more than one more symbol among others, offers itself to us as something bearing such a degree of correspondence between the symbolic and the experiential, that we may say that it is a case where, "as above below, and as below above." Borrowing a word from Gestalt and general systems vocabulary, we may say that physical and spiritual birth are isomorphic.

The journey proper begins -- as in the story of Tambal -- with a season in heaven -- a state of rapture in which we may say that the traveler is spiritually fecundated. From there, he proceeds to a hell which -- as a sinking into the earth that becomes a passage to the antipodes, turns into a rising. Pain increases throughout

this process, yet it is also increasingly compensated and overshadowed by an increasing ability to remain joyful in the midst of it.

In other words, we may say that the spiritual hero goes back to the womb, agonizes to the point where he believes that he is dying but, eventually, realizes that he has been, instead, born. Which is only elaborating a little on what Jesus told Nicodemus.