

## TEN CLASSICAL METAPHORS OF SELF-TRANSFORMATION

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Philosophers, social scientists, futurists and others have argued that not only are we in a period of accelerating rate of change, but the very nature of the social transformation process itself is changing. Fundamental world views, paradigms of reality, conceptions of human nature are being questioned and challenged (Tomer, 1970; Markley *et al.*, 1974).

The changes may be even more fundamental: there are suggestions from some quarters that humanity as a whole, the species *homo sapiens*, is undergoing a collective transformation (de Chardin, 1961; Young, 1976). We have no precedents in our experience for what this kind of evolutionary change might be like. The understanding of evolution itself is changing. In the words of Sri Aurobindo,

In the previous stages of evolution Nature's first care and effort had to be directed toward a change in the physical organization, for only so could there be a change of consciousness. . . . But in man a reversal is possible, indeed inevitable; for it is through his consciousness, through its transmutation and no longer through a new bodily organism . . . that the evolution can and must be effected (Satprem, 1968),

To a considerable degree the evolution of society or of humanity is anchored in and depends upon the evolution of individuals. Here, modern frontiers of scientific thinking converge with ancient Eastern and esoteric teachings (Ouspensky, 1949; Satprem, 1968). These philosophies see self-transcendence and self-transformation as the essential feature of hu-

*the  
evolution  
of  
individuals  
and  
society*

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man life on earth, and the key to its participation in the evolutionary design of life and nature as a total system.

Whereas for some people the prospect of a transformation of consciousness is charged with delight and excitement, for many the idea of change produces fear. Even more so, the *experience* of changing, particularly of self or identity changing, provokes fear of the unknown, the unfamiliar, the strange.

*psychological  
aspects  
of  
evolution  
of  
consciousness*

What can one say, then, in psychological terms, about this evolution of consciousness that many individuals find themselves participating in? One could speak of mental, cognitive changes, new ways of thinking or using the mind, a kind of *metanoia* (meta-knowledge); these are the kinds of changes aimed for in the Indian *jnana yoga* (wisdom yoga), One could speak also of the transformation of the emotions, the change of heart, repentance, surrender, or the purity of devotion aimed at in *bhakti* and other ways of the heart. Extensive literature also exists on the transformation of perception: the development of heightened sensory awareness, of psychic senses such as clairvoyance, of new ways of "seeing" the world.

At the level of physical body and behavior we can and do look for signs of different behavior: the transformation of *function*. In Western religion, saints perform "miracles"; in yogic traditions adepts are said to have powers (*siddhis*): supernormal psychic abilities, such as levitation or healing by touch. Modern research has suggested that top athletes may develop paranormal perceptual and physical capabilities as a result of their concentrative training (Murphy & White, (978).

Attempts to describe the process of the transformation of consciousness in abstract, psychological terms are comparatively recent. In prior periods, in the mystical and religious literature of East and West, and in the secret oral traditions of esoteric, spiritual schools, the teachers have resorted to myths, parables, similes, symbols and metaphors to allude to that strange process, that changes *us*, our *selves*. For here is the problem: how *can* we know or describe anything about the changes we have not yet experienced, changes that by universal consensus take us *beyond* the realm of everyday reality, for which our words and concepts were fashioned? It may be that all we can really go by are the reports of those who have gone ahead, who have explored further, who have seen and understood more, and who come back and say, "it's *like* this ... ,"  
"Is as if"

One of the favorite allegories of the ancient poets and philosophers for the human transformation is that of the *metamor-*

*phosis* of caterpillar to butterfly. The Egyptians and Greeks seem to have conceived of the soul as a winged being with butterfly wings and human head (the *BA* in Egyptian). The question is: what does this symbol really mean? Does it refer exclusively to the process of death, where a winged being is released from the larva-like body? Or does it mean that a transformation is possible, *in life*? Would a person so transformed experience a physical change, or function differently, or would the principal transformation be one of world view, of perception?

We could, with the Jungians, go through the stages of metamorphosis, applying them to the human level: the seed/ovum corresponds to the original state of womb-like unconscious oneness; the larva to the stage of separation, the skin-bounded ego-consciousness; the chrysalis to an intermediate stage of incubation and growth; and the *imago* to the fully unfolded being that is able to fly, i.e., move in other dimensions.

Symbols, in Jung's view, point us to the unknown; one could even say, to that which is *unknowable* by the usual criteria of rational knowledge. The unconscious speaks to the conscious in symbols and analogies; the collective unconscious, the ancient storehouse of the accumulated wisdom of the human race, speaks to the personal consciousness in stories and parables; the Higher Self speaks to the ego-personality self in the language of myth and metaphor. This great Spirit, or *Atman*, has access to the buried strata of our psyche, where it can awaken the sleeping memories of long past experiences; and being beyond time, it can send us messages from the future, views from points down the path of our lives, and even views from probable, alternate paths not taken, as argued so persuasively in the Seth books (Roberts, 1974).

In that spirit, this paper describes ten classical metaphors for the transformation of human consciousness. Realizing that volumes could be, and have been, written about everyone of these metaphors, it is perhaps useful nevertheless to attempt a highly abbreviated, overview of these different analogies to what may well be the central mystery of human life.

*an  
abbreviated  
overview  
of  
ten  
classical  
metaphors*

#### 1. FROM DREAM-SLEEP TO AWAKENING

In several streams of the primordial wisdom tradition we find this metaphor emphasized: that our ordinary state of consciousness is like a dreaming sleep state compared to the transformed, awakened consciousness that is possible and desirable for human beings. The Christian and Jewish Gnostics made much of this analogy, as did the Sufis and Buddhists. The

very name "Buddha" means literally "Awakened One." Many poetic expressions of this theme exist, as for example Wordsworth's "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting"; and Shakespeare's "We are such stuff as dreams are made on...." The fairytale of Sleeping Beauty can be considered a symbolic rendering of this ancient teaching.

Among modern teachers, Gurdjieff in particular has emphasized the mechanical, somnambulistic quality of our everyday consciousness: we do not think, or do; *it* thinks, *it* does. We have no awareness of our mental processes; they simply flow along, following the automated lines of habitual conditioning. We *think* we are awake, but in fact we are asleep, dreaming that we are awake. Objective consciousness, which is brought about by systematic, sustained efforts at self-observation and self-remembering, is a state that compares to our ordinary consciousness, as the latter compares to dream sleep. Just as when we awaken from a dream, our awareness expands to include more of what was previously excluded (the room we are sleeping in, our body, the environment, other areas of our field of consciousness), so when we awaken to objective consciousness, we are aware of more-of the elements of our consciousness presently excluded.

*the  
process  
of  
awakening*

The process of awakening to the greater reality is sometimes described as sudden, as in moments of *satori*, an abrupting of the eye of awareness. In other writings the process of awakening is described as gradual, proceeding in a step-by-step manner, marked by regressive periods of falling back to sleep, sinking back into *lethal* forgetfulness (*Lethe* is the Greek river of forgetfulness). In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus repeatedly asks the disciples to stay awake for and with him; again and again they are unable to do so.

If the eye never falls asleep, all dreams will cease of themselves.  
Third Zen Patriarch

Gradually, then, we are to learn to maintain longer and longer, more permanent periods of wakefulness.

As part of the yogic technology of awakening and maintaining awakened consciousness, Tibetan dream yogis taught practices designed (a) to help a person become more aware and *lucid* during periods of sleep dreaming; and (b) to point out the similarity of ordinary "waking" consciousness to a dream state.

As images seen in a dream, so should one see all things.  
*Prajnaparamita Sutra*

Parallel in many ways to the dream-sleep metaphor is the ancient notion that everyday consciousness is a shadow play of illusions and images, and that the transformation of consciousness involves the transcending or dissolving of this web of illusions. Indian metaphysicians have long taught that the world as we perceive it is *maya*, a word related to root meanings of "show," "display," "appearance." *Maya* is often likened to "veils" that interpose between our perceptive organs and reality, causing us to perceive only the surface, the outer appearance. William Blake spoke of the mystic vision that is possible,

If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything will appear to men as it is-Infnite,

The experience of a cleansing of the "doors of perception," or a rending of the "veils of illusions," is one that subjects in psychedelic research often report: sometimes a person will describe a literal peeling away of layer after layer of veils, or tissues, or screens, accompanied by an increasing sense of greater reality, a heightened vibrancy and numinousness of what is seen (Huxley, 1954). The function of "clairvoyance" as traditionally conceived in esoteric literature (not the more limited use of that term in experimental parapsychology) is one that enables "clear seeing," compared to which ordinary seeing is murky, cloudy, or veiled. All objects are seen and sensed to exist within a continuous, shimmering, dancing field of energy in motion, infinite and omnipresent.

*cleansing  
the  
"doors  
of  
perception"*

*In* research on altered states of consciousness with hypnosis and psychedelics (Aaronson, 1967) it has been found that greater, more expanded, ecstatic awareness is marked by greater depth perception, more dimensionality and motion; whereas restricted, depressive and psychotic states are accompanied by perception that is flattened (as a picture or shadow is fiat) and relatively more static.

The most complete transformation of consciousness occurs when self-perception is altered from illusory self-images and concepts to "self-realization." Self is then seen and experienced as the source and center of our total experience, our total world. This would seem to be the core of the Buddhist doctrine of non-self: to recognize the illusoriness of our images and concepts of self.

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know, even as I also am known.

St. Paul

### III. FROM DARKNESS TO ENLIGHTENMENT

The mystical literature of East and West is replete with descriptions of the experience of light. It is implicit in the two processes already described: awakening comes about through more light, and the cleansing of the doors of perception involves light. Enlightenment, the mystics emphasize, is not merely a symbolic process of attaining greater knowledge, as in our references to the historical period misnamed "The Enlightenment." Rather, it is an experience of one's own inner essence, or Self, as a being of light. According to the *Upanishads*, the *Atman* is a "light in the heart" (*antarjyotihi*). Christ said: "Within a man of light, there is light, and his light illumines the whole world." This light has been said to literally radiate from the person of the illumined one. Ramakrishna, for example, was observed by his disciples, when in *samadhi*, to become totally luminous and glowing all over his body. The halo or gloriole of Christian or Eastern religious art is, in addition to being symbolic, also a representation of a perceived energy phenomenon.

When there is knowledge, the light shines through the orifices of the body.

*Bhagavadgita*

clear  
lights  
and  
dull  
lights

Nor is this perceived inner light, that is accompanied by a total blending of understanding, perception, and feeling, a matter of seeing "colored lights" or visions. In the Tibetan Buddhist *Book of the Dead*, careful distinctions are drawn between the "clear light" that accompanies insight and understanding and merges with the divine personifications (Buddhas) of the various planes, and the "dull lights" that fascinate and entice the initiate into the various *samsaric* realms of earthly existence. Visions and lights may be images and illusions, the play of *maya*; but the clear radiance of the Spirit is the source light of which these are the shadows and reflections.

The Sun of the One I love has risen in the night,  
Resplendent and there will be no more sunset...  
I saw my Lord with the eye of the heart, and I said  
"Who are you?" and he said "Your Self."

Hallaj

To bring about the enlightenment of consciousness and body, yogis and adepts employed meditative techniques of channeling and directing inner light-energy. These are referred to in terms such as the "circulation of the light" in Chinese Taoism, the use of fiery *prana* in Indian yoga, inner heat or *duma* in Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism, *mana* in the Polyne-

sian Kahuna religion, purification fire in European alchemy, and many more (Metzner, 1979).

#### IV. FROM IMPRISONMENT TO LIBERATION

There are numerous expressions of the theme of deliverance or liberation (*moksha*) in the world's mythic and mystic literatures, e.g., Plato's metaphor of the prisoners chained in the cave is a familiar example. In Egyptian mythology Osiris is locked into a wooden coffer by his "dark brother" Set, and this coffer first becomes part of a tree, and then part of a building, all with the divine Osiris (symbolically, the Self) embedded in the wood. Spirit is imprisoned in matter, from which it needs to be freed. In Scandinavian, pre-Christian mythology Odin hangs himself from the great world tree Yggdrasil, in order to obtain self-knowledge. Esoteric Christianity regards Christ on the cross as a totally parallel symbol of the Spirit attached, or bound to the two cross-bars (time and space) of the material world. The Gnostics, emphasizing the mother-god principle, taught that Sophia, Divine Wisdom, is imprisoned in matter, the *prima materia*, from where she must be freed by the skill and knowledge of the devoted adept of *gnosis* (LacARRIERE, 1977).

One does not need to go very far to find evidence for the "boundedness" of ordinary human conditioned consciousness. The experience of feeling imprisoned, trapped, attached, or "hung-up" is cross-culturally and historically extensively documented. The process of personality development and acculturation is widely seen and experienced as a progressive locking into a set of fixed concepts and world-views. The extreme state of "no exit" entrapment has been linked in psychedelic research to a memory imprint from a particular phase of the birth process (Grof, 1976). Fear and other negative emotions have the effect of fixating the fluid processes of awareness in set, repetitive routines. In the medieval Tarot, we have the Hanged Man as a symbolic portrayal of this state of distorted, limited, inverted self-awareness.

*personality  
development  
and  
acculturation*

The ancient mythmakers played subtle variations on the theme of punishment and responsibility: Osiris is tricked into the coffer, but he does agree to get into it, out of his own good nature; Odin's sacrifice is totally voluntary; Christ is assumed to have taken the crucifixion voluntarily, although in at least two of the Gospels (Matthew and Mark), he is said to have had a moment of despair, of feeling victimized ("Why hast thou forsaken me?"). Prometheus who brought fire to mankind and

then is chained to a rock, is first in the state of punishment and involuntary bondage. But the resolution of the story, when an immortal being takes his place, shows the shift of attitudes that is necessary.

Tradition also varies as to whether the liberation from *the* bondage of the material world is brought about passively or actively. Some religious teachings emphasize the role of divine grace in accomplishing the redemption of man, requiring only surrender and faith on our part. Others, such as the Gnostics, Alchemists, and Tantrics, stress the active work of transmutation: of liberating spirit from matter (analogously to extracting precious metal from ore), or of active yogic practice to loosen the knots of karma that keep us tied.

#### V. FROM FRAGMENTATION TO WHOLENESS

*health  
hale  
and  
whole*

Frequently we encounter the mythology and symbolism of the human condition as fragmented, scattered, dispersed, and the necessity to find ways to bring about unification, collection, wholeness. This is connected to the process of healing: health, hale and whole are all related concepts. Disease, whether physical or psychological, is often experienced as a disintegration, a fragmentation, a lack of synchrony between different organ systems, or a lack of interrelationship among different parts of the psyche. The multiple personality syndrome is perhaps only a more extreme manifestation of the fragmented condition of human consciousness in general, the lack of a common, organizing center. Expressions such as "feeling torn," or "shattered," or "broken-hearted" are indicative of such a state.

Osiris, when released from the wood coffer, is recaptured, cut into pieces and scattered. Later he is re-assembled with primary help of the feminine principle; he is integrated, his structures and functions synchronized. This is the process of "re-membering" the Self (Osiris). Self-remembering is the central process or technique in Gurdjieff's teaching; self-recollection was a basic concept in mystical Christian teachings. We collect ourselves, our scattered selves; we re-member our connection to the prime source Self; we repair what some Jungians call the "ego-Self axis" (Edinger, 1972).

When the ten thousand things are viewed in their oneness,  
We return to the origin and remain where we have always been.  
Third Zen Patriarch



The theme of scattering and dismemberment also connects to other important myths in which there is a near-fatal wound that has to be healed. Amfortas, the Grail King, is wounded in the thigh, which has the result that the entire kingdom is laid waste and barren. According to the ancient curse put upon him, it is only when a pure knight succeeds in finding the Grail, and in attaining to its essential meaning, that the wound is healed and the land restored to fruitfulness. The Grail (as the cup holding the blood of Christ) here symbolizes the source of healing and spiritual nourishment. So when the connection is made to the life-blood of the Spirit, the wound is healed, the land restored, the Self re-membered.

This treasure of the Kingdom of God has been hidden by time and multiplicity ... and by creaturely nature. But in the measure that the soul can separate itself from this multiplicity, to that extent it reveals within itself the Kingdom of God.

Meister Eckhart

## VI. FROM SEPARATION TO ONENESS

Closely akin to the progression from multiplicity and dispersal to wholeness, is the evolutionary movement from a divided, schizoid state of consciousness to an inclusive, unified state. This is the classical theme of "at-one-ment." The Greeks had the concept of the *monachoi*, the "single ones" or "unified ones," which we find referred to in the following famous saying:

When a person finds himself single, he will be full of light;  
But when he finds himself divided, he will be full of darkness.

*Gospel/Thomas*

The process of healing the divided consciousness, of blending and integrating the polarities of the psyche, the *coincidentia oppositorum* has three main aspects: the split between male and female, the split between good and evil, and the division between man and creature. Each of these has a vast wealth of mythic and symbolic lore associated with it, which we can only touch on here.

*integrating  
polarities  
of  
the  
psyche*

Ordinary consciousness is conditioned along polarized opposites of male and female, expressive and receptive, dynamic and magnetic, that may be unevenly developed, separated and divided from each other, or even in conflict with each other. The psycho-spiritual development of consciousness involves the healing of this division, the androgynous union of ego with

anima or animus, of *sol* and *luna* in the alchemical *conjunction*, of *Siva* and *Sakti* in Tantric yoga, of *yin* and *yang* in Taoist mysticism (Singer, 1977).

When you make the male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male and the female not be female ... then you shall enter the Kingdom.

*Gospel of Thomas*

The union with one's dark, evil, or negative side is another powerful aspect of the balancing of opposites. The struggle with, and coming to terms with, the shadow, the dark side of our nature, has had numerous mythic and poetic expressions in world literature. On a cosmic scale there are the battles of the gods with the demons, the contest of Ormuzd and Ahri-man, Jehovah and Satan, Osiris and Set, Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca. On the microcosmic, human albeit heroic scale, there are the various stories of jealousy, envy, and competition between brothers or adversaries: Rama and Ravana, Abel and Cain, Joseph and his brothers-to name but a few from ancient sources. In more modern literature, the relationship between Faust and Mephistopheles ("the spirit who always negates") is a vivid portrayal of this age-old struggle.

*the  
struggle  
with  
shadow!  
adversary*

Often, the struggle with the shadow/adversary is presented as one between man and monster, or hideously exaggerated and distorted animal form, as for example in the story of Heracles and the Hydra, or Theseus and the Minotaur, or the various dragon-slayer myths. Such stories can be seen as symbolic of the process of overcoming the monstrous aspects of our nature, as part of the struggle with the shadow. But they are also part of the more general and very widespread *mythos* of coming to terms with our animal nature, the heritage of our biological-evolutionary past.

The continued existence in our nature of the animal itself is necessary to preserve the continuity of the evolutionary process in its totality; it is necessary as a living vehicle of the emerging god in the material universe.

Aurobindo

While a great deal of mythology portrays our relationship with the animal as one of struggle and mortal combat, there is also another stream of tradition, stemming from shamanism in which the animal is revered for its strength and knowledge. The hero may *tame* the animal with love, rather than conquer it with force. The Tarot card Strength depicts such a gentle contact between lion and human. The Babylonian hero Gil-

gamesh makes a brotherly friend out of the wild and hairy creature Enkidu. Whereas the serpent in one version of the Judaic creation story is the tempter and deceiver, there is evidence to suggest that this was a superimposed interpretation on a much older tradition, widespread throughout the ancient Near East, in which the serpent was the initiator to knowledge, the one who provided man with the fruit of the tree of knowledge-si.e., who opened the door to the understanding of evolution (Stone, 1976). Jesus hinted at this aspect of our reptilian inheritance, when he counseled his disciples to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves."

VII. FROM BEING ON A JOURNEY TO ARRIVING  
AT THE DESTINATION

The ever-changing flux of life's events as journey or path is certainly an almost universal experience; and so the transformation of consciousness as a journey to another land, across a river, up a mountain, through a wilderness, into the depths of the Earth or the ocean-has been the central symbol in many of the great mythic traditions. One of the meanings of *Tao* is "the way" or "the track." The three great streams of Buddhist teaching are called *yanas*-"vehicles," with which to arrive at the other shore, with which to cross the ocean of *samsara*.

"the  
way"  
or  
"the  
track"

When a person undertakes to discover the meaning of their existence, to find the true core of their being, whether they do it alone, or under the guidance of a *guru*, it is like a departure on a journey; a journey into the unknown interior landscapes, away from the safe contours of the conventional social world. Joseph Campbell (1956), in his classic *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, has described some of the salient features of this great journey as they appear in the world's myths. The grieving search of Demeter or Ishtar turns the Earth into a barren desert. The Grail Knights, searching for the mysterious silver chalice of their vision, find themselves crossing the grey lands, the wastelands laid bare through the wounding of the Fisher King. Jesus has to wander forty days in the desert, to confront the temptations of his shadow-adversary, just as the Israelites under Moses, two thousand years before, had to wander in the desert after leaving the safe conventional world of their slavery in Egypt. Wandering in the desert or wasteland is a poignant symbol for man's condition of existential despair, of the search for meaning in a world deprived of life and feeling. Water is the great symbol of emotional and spiritual nourishment-so the desert land is a state of emotional-spiritual emptiness and starvation, of longing and of grief.

And it is *in* the desert, or by going through it, that the questing hero finally finds that which he or she is seeking. Ishtar and Demeter descend to the very bowels of the Earth and bring back their lost love. The pure knight Percival ("he who pierces the valley") finally finds the Grail castle. From time immemorial, apprentice shamans and American Indian vision seekers have gone into the desert or wilderness to find the vision of their purpose, and their allies in the quest. The hermit fathers of early Christianity, such as St. Anthony, withdrew to the fierce desert to be able to confront and explore the depths of their unconscious. The Israelites were finally nourished by *manna* from Heaven; spiritual food became physical food and they were saved. The desert and wasteland, because of its very bareness and stark isolation, is a vision-inducing environment, much like the sensory deprivation chambers of modern experiments that produce visions and hallucinations, and are conducive to deep meditation.

#### VIII. FROM BEING IN EXILE TO COMING HOME

*"coming  
home"  
as  
a  
surprise*

One of the most universal and most surprising experiences of those who report mystical or cosmic consciousness, whether induced by psychedelics or not, is the experience of "coming home." In Jesus's parable, the prodigal son leaves his parents, goes into the foreign land, loses sight of his purpose, eats among the beasts of the field-returns home and is surprised by the generous, forgiving welcome extended to him.

The sense of being in the wrong place, of a mistake having occurred, of being a stranger, is an extremely widespread notion in the collective consciousness of humankind. When heightened to an acute degree we have the agonizing sense of alienation and estrangement found in severely neurotic or psychotic individuals. In many others perhaps this sense is repressed or forgotten.

Perhaps, too, a sense of having departed or been expelled from a paradise state of innocent bliss is connected to memories of the intra-uterine state of complete immersion in oceanic oneness with the mother. Many people under psychedelics have experiences that appear to be memories of such a state and the subsequent abrupt and sometimes violent expulsion through the birth canal (Grof, 1976). Accompanying such memories there are frequently mythic, transpersonal experiences of paradise as described in various traditions, and the banishment or fall from paradise.

This sense of coming *from another place*, to which we must

return, accounts, I think, for the popularity of much science fiction which amplifies this theme. One of the most popular classics of this genre was Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, which became almost a cult phenomenon in the 1960's.

In his recent book *Coming Home* (1978) Lex Hixon has gathered together a whole series of writings on this theme from religious traditions of East and West. Becoming aware of the exiled or alienated condition we are actually in is the necessary first step to returning on the homeward journey. And so, paradoxically, the closer we come to the source-center from which we originated, the more acutely we sense our estrangement.

When you understand, you belong to the family;  
When you do not understand, you are a stranger.  
Those who do not understand belong to the family,  
And when they understand they are strangers.

Zen master Mu-mon

#### IX. FROM SEED TO FLOWERING TREE

The unfolding of human potential from the present, ordinary state of consciousness to the full extension of what is possible, has often been compared to the growth and flowering of a tree.

*the  
full  
extension  
of  
what is  
possible*

The seed of God is in us ... it will thrive and grow up to God, whose seed it is; accordingly its fruit will be God-nature. Pear seeds grow into pear trees, nut seeds grow into nut trees, and God seeds into God.

Meister Eckhart

In Indian yoga philosophy, *merudanda* (the "staff of Meru") is the world axis, and also the individual human axis, the *su-shumna*, at the base of which is the *muladhara*, the "root chakra." The Kabbalistic Tree of Life, with its three axes (center, left, and right), is both a map of the process of the emanation of macrocosmic energies from the divine source, and also a map of psycho-physical energy-centers of the human being. In Egyptian myth, the *djed*, or pillar of Osiris, was both tree and spinal axis, providing within the human being the linkage between Heaven and Earth, between Self and ego, between Spirit and personality (Schwaller de Lubicz, 1978). To "straighten the *djed* pillar" meant to reconnect this axis. The tree provides the framework for the ascending and descending processes of energy transformation in which we all, as human beings, are involved.

A slightly different interpretive slant is given to the tree sym-

bolism if we regard it, not as extending between sky and earth (the spiritual and material realms), but *extending through time*, as the pattern of individual life development, in much the same way as we can make a tree diagram of the evolution of different species. From this perspective, our "roots" are the hereditary tendencies acquired from our ancestors, both human and pre-human; our "trunk" is the main axis of our life's growth through time; our "branches" are the traits, qualities, and abilities with which we extend and *ramify* ourselves; and our "fruits" are the products of our creativity, the seeds clothed in the nourishing flesh of our individual energies. These are the "fruits of our actions," by which we are known. What is said in the following quotation about the artist is true of any human being:

... the artist, like a tree trunk, gathers what rises from the depths and passes it on ... he acts as a go-between. His position is humble.  
Paul Klee

#### X. FROM DEATH TO REBIRTH

The most profound analogy for the radical transformation that is possible for human consciousness, is that of dying and being reborn. People undergoing psychedelic or spontaneous mystical experiences often *feel and sense* themselves to be dying and then reborn.

*a  
radical  
and  
total  
transformation*

We are dealing here with a relatively abrupt discontinuity in the stream of individual consciousness: one feels that the *person* one is has died, that there is an end to the ego-identity that has been in existence up to that time. This is a very radical and total transformation. Such an experience would bring about a fundamentally new and different perspective and attitude about life, and a totally fresh, innocent outlook, like that of a child. The "dying" of this kind is conscious, intentional dying. It is purposeful withdrawal of ego-identification with our habitual thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and behavior, so that the personality can become a living vehicle for the Spirit.

It is sown a *natural* body, it is raised a spiritual body.

81. Paul

Many spiritual teachers have advocated that one practice continual awareness of and conscious intention towards death. This is not morbid pre-occupation with mortality, but a means to maintain aware connection with the immortal continuity of our being.

While living, be a dead man, thoroughly dead;  
Whatever you do, then, as you will, is always good.  
Zen master Bunan

From a slightly different perspective we may say that parts of our nature are constantly dying. The teaching of transformation is that we need to accept these deadened or dying aspects of our selves, consciously include them, assimilate them, so that they can become part of the regenerative totality of our being. In this way, the death and rebirth process is an ongoing, continuous regeneration, a gradual reduction and elimination of the dead and dying elements, and their replacement by new life.

So shalt thou feed on death, that feeds on men,  
And death once dead, there's no more dying then.  
Shakespeare

In each of these descriptive metaphors—whether it is awakening, realization, enlightenment, liberation, remembering, unifying, arriving, returning, unfolding, or being reborn—there are certain common themes, or shared features. There is always a definite change in awareness from our usual state of consciousness and our usual sense of identity; sometimes sudden and abrupt, sometimes gradual and by degrees.

*common  
themes  
and  
shared  
features*

Each of the concepts described has been emphasized in one tradition or another; different teachers have focused all the different aspects of the process of change that the symbols and metaphors point to. An individual seeking to bring about a transformation of his consciousness and identity may resonate to one or more of the metaphors closest to his or her experience. Thus the actual experience of personal transformation, in all the richness of its nuances, gives meaning and depth to these conceptual and symbolic formulations that have long served as signposts on the Great Journey, and tools for the Great Work.

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