PARABOLA

MYTH AND THE QUEST FOR MEANING

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SABBATH IN GEHENNA by Isaac Bashevis Singer
FEAR NO MORE THE HEAT OF THE SUN by P. L. Travers
SWIMMING IN THE OCEAN OF BECOMING by Conrad Hyers
THE VARIETIES OF DEATH / THE NATURE OF DEATH: TWO ANTHOLOGIES

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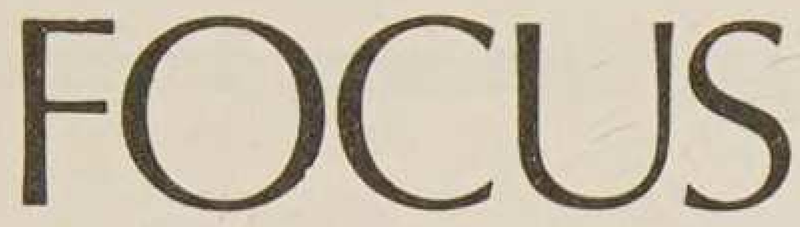

FOCUS

In the twilight of an era, as in the twilight of an individual life, one's thoughts turn more and more to the dark ending and the doubtful question of another sunrise. We may be either morbidly obsessed with death, or searching for its meaning, and this meaning surely conditions, orients, limits to the finite or expands to the infinite the meaning of our life. Even if we choose the quest for meaning, it would be absurd to think that one mind, or one issue of a magazine, could do more than open some new questions; but this is perhaps not unimportant.

The individual search of man or magazine must turn to others for help, and in this issue we hear voices from many times and places. Among the contents are contemporary, personal reflections, both graphic and verbal, on aspects of death or points of view about it. Isaac Bashevis Singer's fable about Gehenna pokes sly fun at our ways of living and thinking, and P. L. Travers makes Brompton graveyard a happy and mutually welcoming meeting place of the dead and the living. Brother David, like don Juan, sees death as our stern friend and adviser, and Conrad Hyers confronts it with Zen laughter. But what is striking is that their thoughts, like ours, return always to a sort of home base in one or another of the great teachings.

When we search the scriptures, we find among them, again, traces of a sort of home base, hints of a common ground in a knowledge of the human and cosmic facts: facts which are hidden in mystery for the literalism of the intellect, and so an eternal source of argument and difference; yet the knowing of those facts is there present in the very marrow of our bones and flows in our bloodstream. The mind (or what we call the mind) cannot see beyond the logic of the opposing and mutually exclusive poles, the two ends of the line: life and death, good and bad, yes and no. It is only when the more organic perceptions join the mental vision that the "line" is seen for what it is: one surface of a many-dimensional whole. Then the sterile impasse of the two is released into a creative, moving combination of three opening to four and five and the possibilities of infinity. Then we see that the "opposites" are not opposites at all, but steps of a process, and that difference does not mean contradiction. In place of the sentimental, literary concept of life as waking and death as sleep, we find suggestions in every teaching that on the contrary, death is waking, "from the dream of having lived." Professor Thurman points out that in the Tibetan Buddhist teaching, death is never considered to be the antithesis of life, but the correlative of birth; birth, life, and death form the moving triad which opens to another and another in new reincarnations.

Everywhere in the sacred texts and in the most authoritative commentaries we find our understanding shaken out of its one-planed dualism and offered the lifting perspective of an infinite range of levels. "Body" and "soul" become a process of bodies and souls in an ever-expanding view. Shaikh Ahmad Ahsa'i delineates a structure of four bodies through which the "I-spirit" passes as upon stepping stones to its immortal perfection. The Zohar tells us of three aspects of the soul "each with its separate abode," but with the possibility of final union. The Egyptian Book of the Dead refers to *khat*, the physical body, and *sahu*, the spiritual body, and in the Epistle to the Corinthians St. Paul speaks openly of the

secret teaching, only hinted at elsewhere in Christian scripture, of the perfecting process of incarnation of the spirit in other bodies. Must there perhaps be an *incarnation* in this life before there can be *reincarnation*? What part does the human will, human intention and effort, play in this process—or none at all? Is something up to us?

So in our by-no-means-exhaustive research through the traditions, we have discovered questions and also seen glimpses of a common ocean floor from which it would seem that all the apparently separate islands of belief arise, and in which for all their superimposed discrepancies they are secretly joined.

Our cover for this issue is a photograph lent to us by the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, one of its great treasures, the Aztec rock crystal skull of Mictlantecuhtli, the god of death. It was recognized as genuine among a flood of copies by the absence of any anachronistic flakes of metal in the crystal, which betrayed the later date of the copies. The eye-sockets of the genuine crystal skull are seen to be conical, having been hollowed out by the circular movement of a reed using sand and water as grinding agents. The skull is pierced vertically (perhaps to be carried on a pole in ritual processions) and it was through this aperture that the anthropologist-photographer directed a light, to take this luminous photograph. It gives a visual form for the expression of our feeling about "life" and "death":

The Crystal Skull

I am bone:
bright bone, translucent bone, aware
of soft opacity of flesh, but separate:
older than flesh and longer lasting
I bone have a different destiny.

Alone, aware
bone does not care
for skin's sensation,
knows but is free
of colored pictures dancing in the mind.

Bone thinks and feels
by what the marrow knows:
informed and fed by secret nerve and blood,
lit, fired from within to find
exact articulation
structure's precise and beautiful affirmative:

bone to its bone stand up:
these bones shall live.

D.M. Dooling

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On the Cover:
The Aztec rock crystal skull of Mictlantecuhtli, from Musée de l'Homme, Paris.

PARABOLA

MYTH AND THE QUEST FOR MEANING

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FULL CIRCLE: A READERS' FORUM

Let me congratulate you on the conclusion of your first year of publishing. You have avoided the temptation of vapidity and eccentricity on one side and hermetic scholarliness on the other. When the fourth issue came in, I was inundated with work that had a near deadline, but I found that I could not resist reading Franck's "Liturgy of Noh." Though that says little for my powers of will, it does say something good about *Parabola*. And special thanks are due for the Eliade conversation.

May I offer some cavils? I find the Readers' Forum somewhat vapid. Is the editorial board deliberately avoiding controversy or are the readers afraid to engage in strong criticism or controversy? I find it hard to believe that the subject matter of the magazine should inspire so little passion.

My objection would extend to some degree to the book reviews. As a trade editor in publishing, I am perhaps more aware of the value of a review than are those not involved in the commercial end of books. There is perhaps just a touch too much sweetness and light in that section and a refusal really to get on with the business at hand. I can't possibly read or even flip through every book in the area, but I find just so much even-handedness and restrained deliberation that I find myself unable to come to much of a judgement about the worth of a possibly engaging title. I tend to look elsewhere for some idea of a book's worth. When I was a child, I used to hear the older ladies say that if I couldn't say something nice about a person, then I should curb my natural critical sense and not say anything. That does not hold in book reviewing. And from a crass commercial viewpoint, may I add that if everything is good, nothing is good? If I see a "good" review of a book I *know* to be bad, I will not feel much inclined to seek out the other titles I might otherwise have wanted.

How about a little iron in these reviews, preferably with a cutting edge? I am certainly not asking for those artificial and pedantic controversies that delight certain editors in this town, but I am asking that a terrible book —and they are proliferating in this area to cash in on a craze—be called a terrible book. Don't avoid dealing with these questions to spare the tender sensibilities of publishers.

Bernard J. Hassan
Urizen Books
New York, N.Y.

We certainly have no desire to suppress "strong criticism or controversy." In fact, we too are surprised that so many readers are hesitant to voice criticisms and alternative viewpoints, as well as to share insights and ideas. We would welcome much more comment and debate. As to book reviews, you will certainly find that some strong stands are taken in this issue. The general policy is to try to take note of those books in our area that seem to have genuine promise, but the review should make clear when that promise is disappointed.

This section is for the free expression of opinions, ideas, observations, and the like, on subjects within Parabola's **milieu. Contributions may and often should relate to material published in earlier issues, but they need not. Please send contributions to: FULL CIRCLE,** Parabola, **150 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10011.**

In Sam D. Gill's article "Disenchantment" (Summer 1976, I:3), he discusses the initiation of a Zen monk under the heading "Japan: The Broken Buddha." This is so bewildering and misleading that one feels compelled to question it. In the experience of a decade spent as a lay student attached to a traditional Zen monastery in Japan I have never even heard of such a practice.

Further, in none of the Zen schools in Japan is there anything like an initiation, nor is there any reference to such in any of the classic Zen texts of Chinese origin. Initiation in this sense is foreign to Zen training.

The breaking of a statue of Buddha before an "initiate" is puerile and totally uncharacteristic of the life and tenor of a Zen monastery in Japan. Since there are no "initiates"

in Zen monasteries, the question arises as to where Mr. Gill got his information. It must have been quoted from outside traditional Zen lines.

The quoted Zen saying refers to a process of ripening and not, as Mr. Gill is at pains to explain, to an "initiatory process of disillusionment."

Dr. Irmgard Schloegl
The Buddhist Society
London, England

Sam D. Gill responds:

Since I received this information from a Japanese Buddhist priest who is also a scholar on Japanese Buddhism, I must leave to the scholars in the field the resolution of the authenticity of the example I cited. But even if the example were in error, I find it difficult to understand how Dr. Schloegl can say that "in none of the Zen schools in Japan is there anything like an initiation," at least in the terms I have attempted to present it. Generally, I was referring to any formalized techniques used by a religious community to lead initiates to "the mature religious perspective and to promote authentic apprehension of the sacred." The purpose of my article was to demonstrate that within the wide range of initiation methods, some incorporate the use of the technique of disenchantment with regard to naive views of reality, and I think it is well known that this is not uncommon in Zen training.

Feenie Ziner, in her review of Jane Yolen's *Moon Ribbon and Other Stories* (Fall, 1976), has misinterpreted a number of points crucial to the understanding of such tales.

1. The girl of the title story does not "repeat with her own child the pattern of suffering," but simply makes another ribbon for her daughter from her own gray hairs.

2. The protagonist of "Moonchild" does not retreat into a dark inhuman netherworld to live out her years in "ever-changing dream" but "in the place *past* darkness where the sunlight and shadows met and danced together in ever-changing ways." With these words, taken from the story, the whole point is quite other than as represented in the review. Plus the very basic fact that the quote was not correct!

3. In "Rosechild" it is love, not simply "a touch on the cheek," that brings about the magic.

4. In each story, there is positive action taken by the hero or heroine; in no way is there a suggestion that "the compensatory fantasy of renunciation and passivity is the only real value in existence."

Shulamith Oppenheim
Amherst, Ma.

Fear No More the Heat of the Sun

P.L. Travers

I was walking through the streets of London, inwardly saying No to my life. "Set me free of things," I prayed, "the merciless brute matter of *objects* that bears us down with its tyranny till living is hardly living." And my prayer, miraculously, was answered. From somewhere—for lack of a better word, call it that—came the voice of W. H. Auden:

The glacier knocks in the cupboard,
The desert sighs in the bed
And the crack of the tea cup opens
A lane to the land of the dead.

Of course! I should have remembered sooner! The lost cap of the blender and the broken chair-leg that had set me searching for replacements, were nothing—if I would let them be—but doors into other dimensions. From lying prone, I stood up in myself, sensing my length and breadth and height, drawing in life from my surroundings and—was it coincidence or fate? There before me was the Brompton graveyard, forty acres of trees and marble, that lies full fathom five in quiet under the noise of the city.

I have always loved graveyards and here I stood, lifesize, by one of the largest in England and at the same time dwindled—or not yet grown—in another in the Southern Hemisphere. This situation, impossible to the reason, is no great feat mythologically. It can happen at any moment.

In my family when we lived in the wilds of Australia, the children were sent out of church before the sermon, probably to the relief of the congregation, certainly to the consternation of the vicar. For he knew from experience that the churchyard, when he next saw it, would have undergone certain changes. Miss Jebb's profusion of metal roses, glassed in against marauding hands,

might be shared with Mr. Perse, who had none; or distributed among the Teeth—Isaac Tooth, Sarah Tooth, Simon Tooth, Athene Tooth—Athene and no stone owl! Lucinda Fry, aged three months, and dead for more than twenty years, would be lifted, mythically, from her grave and dandled, intangible but real to us, from one pair of arms to another. (Do not cry at being dead, Lucinda! you'll become a star like Castor and Pollux.) Deeply steeped in *Robin Hood*, we robbed the rich and gave to the poor. From graves that still had friends to tend them, we took cut flowers from the pannikins and doled them out, just rather than merciful, to those that had been forgotten. And if the sermon were long enough we would visit Amos Tupper, whose grave with its simple marble curb was a convenient spot for lying down in, arms folded, feet together. "Here lies X," we informed each other, "beloved child of Y and Z, gone and deeply regretted." We took turns at being deeply regretted, tasting for a moment

our death-in-life, seriously and with confidence. For Amos, we knew, would never haunt us. With his gravemould sprinkled on our backs, we still had no fear of Amos. He was so far away and so long ago that we felt him as a beneficent presence, near and neighborly.

But the new graves with their fading flowers—violets whitening, lilies darkening—we passed with eyes averted. Down there beneath the mounded earth were persons we had seen and known, looking so beautiful, the grown-ups said, which was something we did not believe. They

were palpable, ugly and frightening, too close to the huge fact of death, not yet gone into the Dreaming. They faced us with the unfaceable and forced us to live, if but for a moment, with the fearful contradiction —This will happen to me some day /No, no, I shall live forever.

But now, myself on the way to Amos, I know that the word contradiction is not really exact; that between all pairs of opposites there is a point—could we but find it—of reconciliation. From the first breath, when we choke on air to the last when air forsakes us, dying is happening to us. Occasionally, for a waking moment, such as I found in the Brompton graveyard, we ourselves happen to it, as the reconciling factor. Here, in this forest of trees and marble, to know oneself pregnant with one's death —an organic, growing shape within—is to experience a surge of energy, life so much at its apogee, that one feels one has the strength to leave it. The readiness, after all, is all.

Look! There at the edge of the crowding headstones is a small rectangle of empty earth, large enough, I would have said, for one more parcel of flesh and bones to become, in time, its essential grass. In principle, the graveyard is closed but in England, land of compromise, it is always possible to find some one who has a string to pull. Snobbishly speaking, it's a good address, mostly Carrara, a little limestone, and in the democracy of death one would soon be on terms with the neighbors; the stone children, boy and girl, dutifully guarding their father's grave with, clearly, no relish for the task; the "Darling sister" whose brother, in a paroxysm of grief—"Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse"—raised up upon her a marble mound almost as high as the tallest trees and on top of that, a Virgin; Major Arbuthnot under his broken pillar—"Oh, withered is the garland of the war /The soldier's pole is fallen"—; the life-sized angel with a child-size trumpet, too small even to wake the living, let alone Mr.

and Mrs. Cooper who died in 1903; Albert Henry Glossop Harris who, "Looking for the face I had /Before the world was made" has a finely carved bust of himself on the top of an obelisk; Lot Brass, aged sixteen, wordlessly reminding passers-by that "Golden lads and girls all must /Like chimney-sweepers come to dust"; and all the thousand others.

In the west of Ireland there is a tradition that the last corpse into the graveyard must sweep and keep it tidy. If it should happen that two funerals occur at the same time, the cart-drivers whip up their willing horses and race the last lap of the journey in order to get their man in first. I would not mind sweeping leaves in the Brompton —provided, of course, they let me in—for, like the monk in the Zen story, I would shake the trees before I began so as not to do it more than once. And tidying up would be merely child's play for the place is so orderly, so shipshape, that the last one in must have been a sailor or a very meticulous housewife.

A pair of lovers, neither in their first youth, stroll past me hand in hand. They are in heaven, not a graveyard, in spite of the surrounding headstones with their elegies of love and loss. Two small boys, in school caps, clearly on a bird-nesting trip, are craning up at the ilex trees, like Johnny-head-in-air. A mother pushing a child in a stroller, bustles domestically by, using the graveyard, I assume, as a short cut between supermarkets. But no, I am wrong. She lifts the child out of his harness and settles him on a marble anchor inscribed with the motto *God is Love.* He straddles it regally, king of the world, eating a chocolate biscuit. It pleases me that he and the nesting boys are here, weaving their own mythology around the fact of life-and-death. We cannot begin too early, I feel, to make our truce with it. I have seen children playing in little family plots in Maine, set in the midst of fir trees; in Père Lachaise with its mausoleums; in the cemetery for Soviet heroes in the Grounds of the Alexander Nevsky Monastery—stone propellers about the airmen, cement machine-guns for the soldiers. And I think of a child in an English graveyard, eagerly searching among the headstones, with the eye of a connoisseur. "I'm choosing my grave," he said to me. "And this," he pointed, "is the one I want. Promise me that when I'm dead you'll give me one just like it."

I promised. Why burden him with time and statistics? Or the fact that when he was ready for his Celtic cross I would be weaving rain with the Pleiads or hunting with Orion? Now he is a grown man, preparing himself for fatherhood in a house whose one-apple-tree garden abuts upon this graveyard wall. Its windows look out on the marble forest and when the children are old enough they, too, will come to hunt for birds' nests, in and out among angels.

The mother gathers up her child but not before he has offered his biscuit to a tall leonine grey-haired man who has wandered into the graveyard. "Take it!" I beg him, wordlessly, and to my delight the gift is accepted, courteously and with relish. He is still eating as he makes a gesture asking me

if he may share my bench. It is as if the Balzac in the Louvre, grown milder, with all passion spent, had suddenly come to life. He sits there, like a brooding bird, gathered into himself. Indeed, we are like two brooding birds. Silence and sunlight wrap us round and in it we seem to commune together, taking upon us"the mystery of things / As if we were God's spies." Has he, too, found the crack in the tea-cup? Does he, too, swing between the poles of confidence and fear—"I will not cease from mental fight" and *Timor mortis conturbat me?* Is he, too, collaborating with Necessity? It cannot be otherwise, I feel. We are both pared down to essentials. Why am I here? What is the meaning of this inconstant aggregate I glibly call myself? Who walks the world under my name? Whatever the answers, one has to admit that life,at best, is a tragic business, but—and here is the paradox, and paradox relates not only to earth, it is a cosmic phenomenon, as Einstein was to discover—once one freely makes the admission and casts off the heavy burden of hope, the situation changes. Something new has entered the field. The last word is by no means said. To give this new dimension a name would bring things to a conclusion. It can only be approached from the standpoint of myth—which is itself a way of thinking—and let the fecund questions rise. Of what is man the metaphor? Of what Eucharistic feast are we the sacrificial bread? Is it possible that in time beyond time I shall know as I am known? How can earth do the will of heaven?

A song-burst comes from the tree above us. "A wren!" exclaims Balzac, looking astonished. "In October!" I say, with equal wonder. He waits until the bird is silent, then he readies himself to depart. "*Au revoir!*" he says, and bows. The phrase, for a moment, startles me. How, when, where would we meet again? And then I remember the old song. "You'll take the high road /and I'll take the low road." Why should the low road reach Scotland first? Ask any Highlander and he'll tell you. The low road is the road of the dead. And so, untrammeled by space and time, they will always outpace the living. Was Balzac thinking of *Loch Lomond?* If so, he and I will meet in Scotland, or perhaps in Brompton, it doesn't matter. Here and there, by that time, will be the same for us "Thou thy worldly task hath done /Home art gone and ta'en thy wages."

The wren again shatters the silence and swoops towards the homes of the living, perhaps to the one with the apple tree where a child awaits its life-and-death. I send it a silent message.

You there, setting out on your journey, you newly risen from the Void, remembering still your original face and knowing all there is to be known—that all so soon forgotten—you, still swinging in your veiny hammock, spirit moving on the face of the waters, pray for me now and at the hour of my birth. I will do the same for you.

SWIMMING IN THE OCEAN OF BECOMING: A Zen Perspective on Death

CONRAD HYERS

Why are people called Buddhas after they die?
Because they don't grumble anymore
Because they don't make a nuisance of themselves.

Ikkyu[1]

In traditions which equate human perfection with the the loss of ego, death is not the problem it is for those concerned to perpetuate the finite self and its self-consciousness *ad infinitum*. Anxiety about death arises chiefly as fear of losing the finite self, its illusory continuity and substantiality, and all those facets of existence that are subject to change and dissolution. But to be free of ego, of its desperate striving and clinging, its "grumbling" and "nuisance-making," is to be liberated from dread of death as some dark, forbidding, perhaps evil fate lurking in the shadows of

the self. At least that is how Buddhists see it.

Zen stands within the general terms of this pan-Buddhist tradition, but with some important accents of its own. One of the more unusual and revealing of these is the introduction of a sense of humor with respect to death and dying—as in these playful words of Ikkyu, noted abbot of Daitokuji. The Zen records contain many humorous anecdotes on the deaths of various monks and masters. And the presence of a sense of humor in such circumstances as this is itself testimony to a remarkable way of perceiving and experiencing both life and death. When the dying Nan-chu'an was asked by his head monk, "Where are you going after your death?" he replied, "I am going down the hill to be a water buffalo!" "Would it be possible to follow you there?" inquired the devoted monk. Nan-chu'an responded, "If you want to follow me, please come with straw in your mouth!"

This is not a matter of frivolousness or insensitivity, but of profound insight and freedom. Chao-chou, on seeing the sombreness of the funeral procession for one of his monks, exclaimed: "What a long train of dead bodies follows in the wake of a single living being!" While we are inclined to associate joking and laughter in such a context with irreverence, callousness, hysteria, or even sadism, their manifestation in Zen is understood as a sign of enlightenment and liberation.

One of the more colorful examples of this spirit is that of Teng Yin-feng who, when he sensed that his time had come, asked his fellow monks, "I have seen monks die in various positions; some lying down, some sitting, some standing. But has anyone ever died standing on his head?" The monks could recall no stories to this effect. Whereupon Teng stood on his head and died. When it was time to carry him to the funeral pyre he was still upside-down, to the wonder of those who came to view the remains, and the consternation of those who would properly dispose of them. Finally his younger sister, a nun, came to the monastery and chiding him said, "When you were alive you took no notice of laws and customs, and even now that you are dead you are making a nuisance of yourself!" And with that she poked him with her finger, felling him with a thud. And the procession took him away to the crematorium.

In this way Teng expressed his achievement of spiritual freedom, his liberation from a pathetic clinging to life and anxiety over self, and so marked his transcendence of the problem of death. Similarly, Lo-shan, feeling his end to be near, ascended the rostrum to speak. But instead of addressing his monks with some edifying discourse or parting admonitions, he abruptly dismissed them, remarking simply, "If you wish to show your gratitude for the Buddha's goodness to you, you should not be too earnest about propagating the Great Teaching." After that he began laughing loudly, and died. Or Ikkyu again:

Though we do not preach the doctrine,
Unasked the flowers bloom in spring,
They fall and scatter,
They turn to dust.

To be sure, this equanimity—even playfulness—in relation to death is no easy achievement. Nor, for that matter, is it an easy achievement in relation to *life*, and all those things, including ourselves, that we take so seriously. Seriousness alone is a clear sign of attachment and bondage, however "worthy of serious attention" the object or circumstance might be. The secret, in both life and death, lies somewhere between seriousness and frivolity, earnestness and silliness, attachment and detachment. Humor means freedom; to the degree that one is free, one is free to laugh.

This is by no means a cynical laughter, born of resignation and despair. Nor is it a defiant laughter, making some last gesture of rebellion against the inevitability of dying, "head bloody, but unbowed." Nor is it, certainly, a bitter laughter, mocking the inequities of life and the irony of all those "best-laid schemes of mice and men" that "gang aft agley." The spirit is radically different. It is a laughter of acceptance, a final "yes" to the transiency of life and the naturalness of death. It is a laughter which expresses the joy of life, without at the same time frantically clutching it. It is the laughter of non-ego and non-attachment, which is therefore free to embrace death as well as life.

In Zen, however, preparation for death is not made at the *expense* of life, as happens in so many religions of salvation. Life is not turned into a mere stepping-stone to some other, more favorable and perhaps paradisal existence, free of suffering and sorrow. In Zen one does not reach this tranquil plane in the face of death by the essentially negative process of disparaging the circumstances of

life. There is no attempt to empty life of any intrinsic meaning and value, so as to reduce desire and attachment. Life is not expended in developing a spiritualized "death-wish." One knows how to die because one knows how to live.

True, in Zen teaching one comes across quite an array of negatives from *sunyata* (void, emptiness) to a long parade of Chinese *wus* and Japanese *mus*: no-mind, no-thought, no-self, no-concern, no-seeking, no-striving, no-action, no-attachment. And such terms might seem aimed at devaluing and "voiding" life, and thus putting oneself in a better position from which to let life go in death. But in Zen such terms imply an essentially positive attitude toward both life and death. The negatives do not negate life, but rather any approach to life (and death) which leads to bondage. This is the negation of negation. It is true freedom. The way of emptiness (*sunyata*) is thus the way of fullness. The mind is not closed off from the world, but opened in the widest manner possible. "What is no-thought?" asks the Sixth Patriarch. "It is to be present in all places and yet not become attached to anything. . . . It is to let the six sense-robbers run out of the six sense-gates into the world of the six sense-objects, and yet not to become defiled therein, nor to get away therefrom."

Clutching to life squeezes the life out of life—that is the problem—just as clutching to life does not permit one to die with dignity and freedom. The Zen solution is not to cultivate a detachment from and disenchantment with life, but to involve oneself totally in it and to celebrate each circumstance, however lofty or lowly. Whether one eats a feast or plain rice, one eats wholeheartedly and gratefully. Whether one chants *sutras* or sweeps verandas, one does so with undivided attention as if that activity at that moment were supremely worth doing. This is emptiness. The point is not to convince oneself that life is so fleeting, vain and illusory that all energies should be devoted to "spiritual" and "eternal" matters, and therefore to a gradual "dying to the world." Rather, one is invited to take hold of each moment as it presents itself, and in the form in which it presents itself.

Drinking tea, eating rice,
Passing time as it comes;
Looking down at the stream,
Looking up at the mountain.

Pao-tzu

Zen aims at being immersed in life without clinging to life. This is the "Middle Way." All things, however simple, menial and repetitious, are to be done as *zazen:* cooking, cleaning, gardening, walking, sitting. All things, however insignificant and commonplace, are to be seen and touched in the spirit of *sunyata:* tea-bowl and summer rain, chattering sparrows and a crimson leaf, the firefly and the bullfrog, chrysanthemums and cucumbers. To do so is to be

totally immersed, but without drowning. As Shan-neng counsels, "We must not cling to the wind and moon of the day and ignore the eternal void; neither must we cling to the eternal void, and ignore the wind and moon of the day."

The world of space and time, of body and matter, of eating and sleeping and drinking, is not in itself the illusory bubble of *maya* that must be burst in order to gain release. *Maya* is the world of craving and clinging, of attachment and bondage, of ignorance of the true way. Dogen, founder of the Japanese Soto sect, puts the point succinctly: "In life identify yourself with life; at death with death. Abstain from yielding and craving. Life and death constitute the very being of Buddha. Thus should you reject life you will be the loser, and yet you can expect no more if you cling to either life or death. You must neither loathe, then, nor covet . . . these things."[2] To live in such a manner is to be constantly living and dying. One lives fully, yet dies to all things.

There is something here of the old Taoist view of the rhythmic harmony *(ch'i-yun)* of opposites, as well as the notion later taken up in the Zen art of spontaneity, immediacy and naturalness *(i-p'in)*. Life and death, as Chuang-tzu taught, are not separate states of being that can be isolated from one another, but two aspects of the same process. The way *(tao)* therefore is that of flowing with the Tao, which is light and dark, life and death, each requiring and interpenetrating the other. Life and death are not great cosmic forces that confront one another in a pitched battle, like God and Satan or Ohrmazd and Ahriman. Existence is not necessarily a quarrel or titanic conflict, any more than nature is simply "red in tooth and claw." Life flows, as rivers flow, sometimes lazily in the summer sun, sometimes like a raging torrent; sometimes predictably and sometimes unpredictably; sometimes fertilizing, sometimes eroding; sometimes building up and sometimes destroying; but not at war with anything or anyone.

We are often deceived by our metaphors. Existence might as justifiably, and perhaps more justifiably, be seen in terms of the metaphors of play and contest—an interplay of forces, a competition, a structured game, a spontaneous dance—as in terms of the warrior metaphors of struggle and strife; adversary and enemy, hatred and enmity.

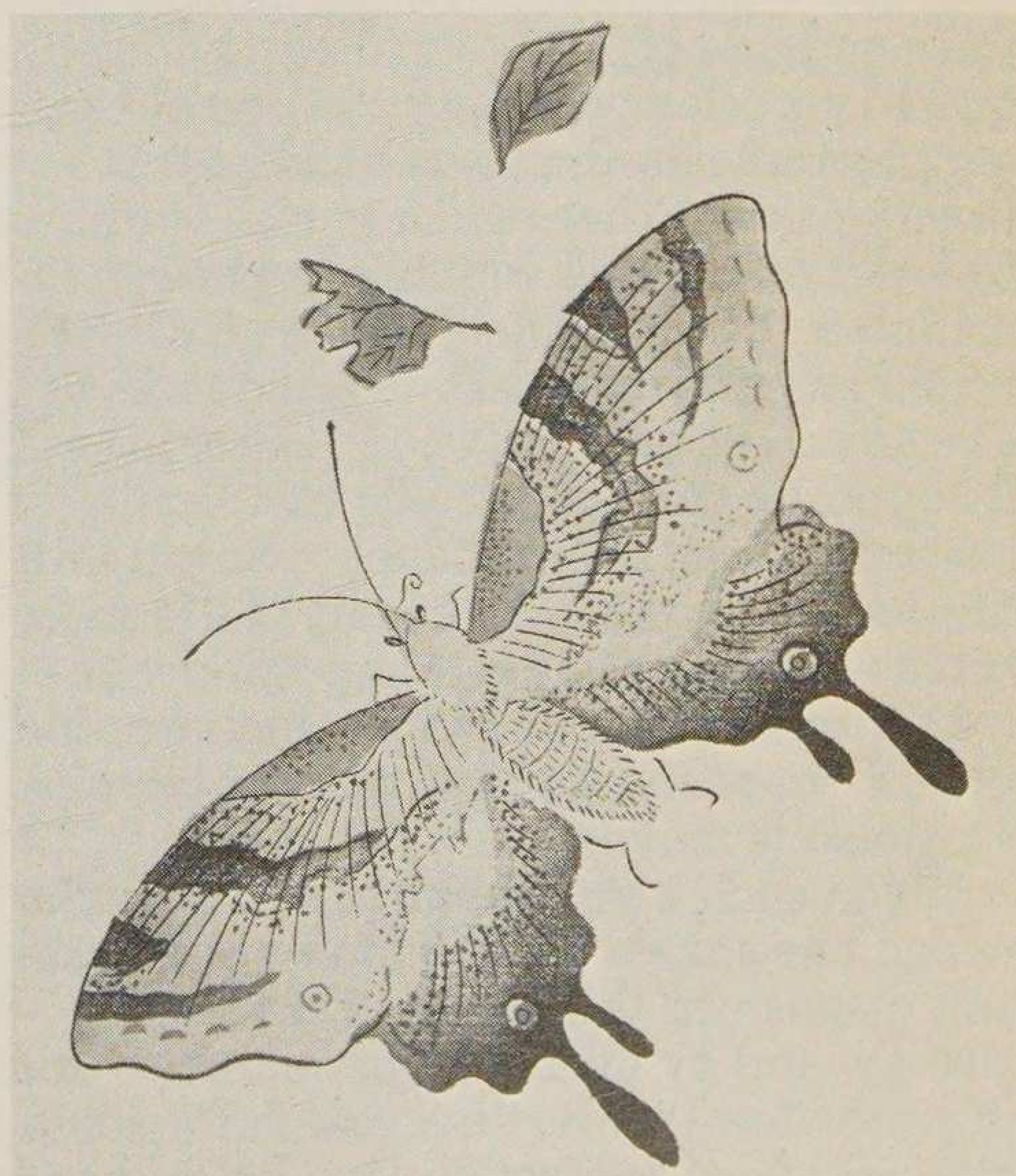
Meeting, they laugh and laugh–
The forest grove, the many fallen leaves.

Zenrin Kushu[3]

Are the fallen leaves "felled" in the "onslaught" of an "advancing march" of winter? Or are such the metaphors of *maya*? Meisetsu seems closer to an understanding of the interrelationship of life and death:

Butterflies
love and follow this flower wreath–
that on the coffin lies.[4]

Like classical Taoism, Zen has a surprisingly positive attitude toward time, and the transiency and ephemerality of things —especially considering the more characteristic Buddhist preachings on perishability and impermanence. As D. T. Suzuki insisted, "Zen is right in the midst of the ocean of becoming; it shows no desire to escape from its tossing waves."[5] Just because things are constantly changing, breaking,



dissolving, decaying and dying does not mean that they are to be despised or shunned in favor of things judged to be eternal and immutable. Plum blossoms and cherry blossoms, as the Japanese appreciate almost to the point of a national passion, are beautiful despite the fact, and in a sense because of the fact, that their beauty is so fragile and brief. Thus Kenko could write: "If man were never to fade away like the dews of Adashino, never to vanish like the smoke over Toribeyama, but lingered on forever in the world, how things would lose their power to move us! The most precious thing in life is its uncertainty."[6]

Time cannot be measured by the yardstick of an imagined eternity, or perishability by the concept of imperishability. The beauty of time is that it is so much like time. The beauty of change is that it is so changeable. If one judges an old, cracked, misshapen *raku* tea bowl, with its irregular coloration and happenstance configurations, by the standards of finely detailed and lacquered porcelain, it is ugly. Yet, in both Zen and Japanese aesthetics generally, it is highly prized. That which is old, worn, frayed, broken; that which is imperfect, incomplete, or unfinished; that which is off-center and assymetrical and accidental, has a beauty all its own. And no image or form of its opposite can ever negate that beauty; if anything, it can only enhance it. So too with life and death; there is a beauty of life and a beauty of death. To see things otherwise is to be imprisoned in illusory categories, and illusory uses and confusions of categories. This also is *maya*.

Given such a standpoint, a Nirvana after which one strives by developing a distaste and disgust for this world of time and change, and by fleeing impermanence and imperfection in a restless search for some eternally fixed perfection, is a limited and limiting Nirvana. Thus Chen Lung-hsin remarked: "The *Nirvana Sutra*? This is last in line for cremation!" The Zen way is not one of turning attention away from the world of passing forms, but of seeing them more clearly and fully. Nirvana is not some distant goal. Properly understood Nirvana *is* Samsara (the world of life and death); Samsara is Nirvana, just as form is emptiness and emptiness is form. "When we realize the everlasting truth of 'everything changes' and find our composure in it, we find ourselves in Nirvana" (Shunryu Suzuki).[7]

In Western theological terms, Zen advocates a "realized eschatology," and it does so on the foundation of non-dualism. There can be no absolute separation of time and eternity, life and death, Samsara and Nirvana. Nirvana is a present reality, a mode of perceiving and being in the world. It is a way of dwelling in fuller awareness within the present moment. It is a way of bestowing a devoted attention upon even the smallest and lowliest and most ephemeral particulars of daily existence.

"What is the teaching of the Buddha?" Pao-fu is asked. "Come, let us have a cup of tea!" Or Lin-chi, founder of the Rinzai sect, admonishes his disciples: "The Way (Tao) consists of no artificial effort; it only consists of doing the ordinary things without any fuss: going to the stool, making water, putting on clothes, taking a meal, sleeping when tired. Let the fools laugh at me. Only the wise know what I mean. . . . The truly noble man is a man of no concern and no ado."

Something of this spirit and understanding is reflected in the story of the late Zen master, Taji, who lay dying. One of his disciples, recalling the fondness the roshi had for a certain cake, went in search of some in the bake shops of Tokyo. After some time he returned with the delicacy for the master,

who smiled a feeble smile of appreciation, and slowly nibbled at it. As the master grew visibly weaker, his disciples asked if he had any departing words for them. Taji said, "Yes." As they drew closer, so as not to miss the faintest syllable, he said, "My, but this cake is delicious!"[8]

Footnotes

[1]Unless otherwise noted, the Zen materials cited may be found in my book *Zen and the Comic Spirit* (London: Rider, 1974; Philadelphia: Westminister, 1974).
[2]Philip Kapleau, ed., *The Wheel of Death* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 9.
[3]Alan W. Watts, *The Way of Zen* (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 147.
[4]Harold G. Henderson, *An Introduction to Haiku* (New York: Doubleday, 1958), p. 183.
[5]D.T. Suzuki, *Studies in Zen* (New York: Dell, 1954), p. 203.
[6]Donald Keene, ed., *Essays in Idleness* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1967), p. 7.
[7]Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (New York: Weatherhill, 1970), p. 10.
[8]Kapleau, *Wheel of Death*, p. 67.

Sabbath in Gehenna
Isaac Bashevis Singer

ON THE SABBATH, as is known, the fires do not burn in Gehenna. The beds of nails are covered with sheets. The hooks on which the wicked males and females hang—by their tongues for gossip, by their hands for theft, by their breasts for lechery, by their feet for running after sin—are concealed behind screens. The piles of coals and snow on which the transgressors are flung are hidden by curtains. The angels of destruction put away their fiery rods. The sinners who remain pious even in Hell (there are such) go to a little synagogue where an iniquitous cantor intones the Sabbath prayers. The free-thinkers (there are many of them in Gehenna) sit on logs and converse. As is usually the case with enlightened ones, their topic is how to improve their lot, how to make a better Gehenna. That wintry late Sabbath afternoon a sinner named Yankel Farseer was saying:

"The trouble with us in Hell is that we are selfish. Every sinner thinks only about his own business. If he believes that he can save his behind from a few lashes by the angel Dumah, he is in seventh heaven. If we could create a united front, we

would not be in need of private intercession. We would come out with demands—"

When he uttered the word "demands," his mouth began to water. He choked and puffed. Yankel was and remained a fat man with broad shoulders, a round belly, short legs. He had long hair around his bald spot and grew a beard—not a *kosher* beard as the pious in paradise have, but a rebellious one, every hair of which points at revolution. A little delinquent who braided his long hair in a pony tail tied with a wire he tore out of a bed of nails asked:

"What kind of demands, Comrade Yankel?"

"First, that the week in Gehenna should not last six days, but that we should have a four-day week. Secondly, that each villain should get a six-week vacation during which he should be permitted to return to earth and break the ten commandments without being punished. Thirdly, that we should not be kept away from our beloved sisters, the female sinners. We will ask for sex and free love. Fourthly,—"

"Dreams of a chopped off head!" said Chaim Bontz, a former gangster. "The angel Dumah is not afraid of your demands and petitions. He does not even bother to read them. The saints in paradise use them for toilet paper."

"What do you propose?"

"The angels, like the humans, understand one thing—blows. We must arm ourselves. Rub out the angel Dumah, storm the court of heaven, break a few ribs among the righteous. Then we must take over paradise, Leviathan, the Wild Ox, the sanctified wine, all the other good things. Then—"

"Arm ourselves?" a petit bourgeois who had fallen into Hell for swindling cried out, "Where will you get arms in Hell? They don't give us a single knife or fork. The fiery coals we eat we have to pick up with our naked fingers. Besides, Gehenna does not last longer than a year except for Sabbath and holidays. I am supposed to end my term on the day after Purim. If we begin a conspiracy now, the term may be prolonged. Do you know the punishment for conspiring against the angel Dumah?"

"This is the misfortune of us sinners," Yankel Farseer yelled out. "Everyone is only for himself. How about the wicked who will come after us? Every day new transports arrive. What will happen to them? This year is not so bad yet, it has twelve months. The next year will be a leap year, all of thirteen months."

"It is not my duty to worry about all the wicked in the world," replied the swindler. "I happen to be an innocent victim. All I did was to forge a signature. I shed ink, not blood. Those who murder, set fire to houses, and cause children to perish in the flames, those who stab and rape are not my brothers. If I were in charge here, I would keep them until the end of the 6,000th year!"

"Didn't I say that every sinner is out for himself?" Yankel Farseer spoke. "If we cannot unite, the angels can do to us as they please. In that case, why the idle talk? Let's play cards and finish out the rest of the Sabbath."

"Comrade Yankel," a sinner with eyeglasses spoke up, "may I say something?"

"Say. Talk doesn't change anything."

"My opinion is that we should concentrate mainly on culture. Before we come with maximal demands like six-week vacations, with sex, and with free love, we must show the angels that we are sinners with spiritual goals. I propose that we publish a magazine."

"A magazine in Gehenna?"

"Yes, a magazine, and its name should be *The Gehennanik*. When you sign a petition, the angels take one look at it and they throw it away, or they blow their noses into it. But a magazine they would read. The righteous in paradise expire from boredom. They are overfed with the secrets of the *Torah*. They want to know what's going on in Hell. They are curious about our view of the world, our way of thinking, our sex fantasies, and most of all are they intrigued by the fact that we are still atheists. A series of articles, *The Atheists in Gehenna*, would become a smash hit in Paradise. Of course, we would also publish a gossip column and a lot of special Hell pornography. The saints would have something to enjoy and to complain about."

"Silly babble! I'm going to sleep." Chaim Bontz yawned.

"Who is going to do all this scribbling and how will this help us?" asked a sinner with a hoarse voice.

"You don't have to worry about who will do the writing," said the sinner with the eyeglasses. "We have a lot of writers here. I was a writer on earth myself. I was condemned to Hell because I was supposed to be a rabble rouser. Every Monday and Thursday, I changed my opinion. When it was profitable to preach communism I became an ardent Communist and, likewise, I preached capitalism when that paid. They heaped accusations against me. But the fact is that I had many readers

and they wrote me enthusiastic fan letters. It is true that I changed my opinions like gloves, but were my readers any more consistent? Here in Hell—"

A sinner who looked young, and had long hair reaching down to his shoulders asked, "Why publish a magazine? Why not open a theatre? We have here a shortage of paper. Besides, it's so hot here that the magazine will catch fire. The righteous are all half blind and don't understand our modern language and are not accustomed to our spelling. My advice is that we should organize a theatrical group."

"A theatre in Hell? Who's going to play? And who's going to attend? They punish us day and night."

"We will play on Sabbaths and all holidays."

"Are there any scripts in Gehenna?"

"I have an idea for a play—a love affair between a sinner and a saint."

"What kind of love affair? The wicked and the saints never meet."

"I have thought it through thoroughly. My hero is lying on his bed of nails and screaming. He is an opera singer by profession and so wracked with pain that he breaks out into an aria. She, the saint, hears his song and falls madly in love with his voice. Then—"

"The saints in paradise are all deaf."

"This one happens not to be deaf."

"Well, then, what follows?"

"To be able to meet him, she asks for permission from the angel Eshiel to dress up like a demon and to become one who dispenses lashes in Gehenna. Permission is granted and so the two lovers meet. She is supposed to whip him, but when the angel Dumah looks away, she covers him with kisses and they soon reach a point where they cannot be one without the other."

"Melodrama of the worst kind!"

"What do you want to play in Gehenna—*Migdal Oz* by Mosheh Chayim Luzzato? Our sinners love action. A play like this would give the actors an opportunity to sing a song, to dance, and to make a couple of spicy jokes."

"Assuming that it will work, what would be the result?"

"Theatre is the best form of propaganda. It may very well be that the saints and the angels will visit our theatre to see our plays. And between one act and the other, we would explain to them our point of view, our situation, and our philosophy."

"Your play is not realistic, and your plan is not realistic. Where will we play—among the piles of coals? The saints will not come here. All day long they are busy with the secrets of the *Torah* and with munching Leviathan. In the evening they are afraid to leave paradise."

"What are they afraid of?"

"A couple of murderers and rapers managed to escape from Gehenna. They prowl around at night. They have already killed several saints and have tried to ravish Sarah bas Tovim."

"I hear this for the first time."

"Of course, as long as we don't have any magazines, no one is informed about anything. The magazine would give us news and explain—"

"Fantasies, fantasies," called out a sinner who had been a

politician on earth. "Culture will not solve our problem and neither will the theatre. What we really need is a progressive political party built on democratic principles. We don't need to come out with impossible demands, Comrade Yankel. We should be satisfied with a minimum. I have heard from a very reliable source that there is a liberal group among the angels who are asking for reforms in Gehenna."

"What kind of reforms?"

"They want us to have a five-day Gehenna week. Besides Saturday and holiday, we should be given a week vacation in the World of Illusions. Some of them would request that the nails on the beds of nails should be two millimeters shorter. I was told that there is some change in their attitude towards homosexuality, lesbianism and certainly masturbation. We could do a lot, but we need money."

"Money?" all the sinners called out with one voice.

"Yes, money. What do you know? 'And money answereth all things,' Ecclesiastes has said. If we had money we could achieve everything without revolutions, without petitions, without culture. In Gehenna—as everywhere else— every-body has his price. You are all greenhorns. I know Gehenna from top to bottom and inside out. With money we could even—"

The politician wanted to tell his listeners what else could be accomplished with money in Gehenna, but at that instant the Sabbath ended. The fires leaped up again. The nails on the beds of nails began to glow with heat again. The punishing demons grabbed up their rods anda lashing,and a whipping, and a hanging, and wailing erupted once more. The politician who just spoke about money winked an eye toward one of the older demons and both of them left—where, no one knew. Most probably to play cards and to engage in conversation about some non-*kosher* Gehenna business.

Last summer, in response to our invitation to contribute to this issue, Brother David told us that he did indeed have something that he would like to say about death, but that he would prefer to tell it rather than write it. The following is an edited version of what he had to say, and it retains an oral quality. It thus should be read as much with the ears as with the eye.

Learning to Die

Brother David Steindl-Rast

The only point where one can start to talk about anything, including death, is where one finds oneself. And for me this is as a Benedictine monk. In the rule of St. Benedict, the *momento mori* has always been important, because one of what St. Benedict calls "the tools of good works"—meaning the basic approaches to the daily life of the monastery—is to have death at all times before one's eyes. When I first came across the Benedictine Rule and tradition, that was one of the key sentences which impressed and attracted me very much. It challenged me to incorporate the awareness of death into my daily living, for that is what it really amounts to. It isn't primarily a practice of thinking of one's last hour, or of death as a physical phenomenon; it is a seeing of every moment of life against the horizon of death, and a challenge to incorporate that awareness of dying into every moment so as to become more fully alive.

I have found that this approach is present—sometimes more explicitly, sometimes more implicitly—in all the different spiritual traditions that I have come into contact with. It is certainly very strong in Zen Buddhism; it is present in Hinduism and Sufism. It is one of those basic human gestures by which one confronts meaning in order to live religiously. As I use the term "religious," it refers to the quest for *ultimate meaning*. Death has evidently to be one of the important elements in that, for it is an event that puts the whole meaning of life into question. We may be occupied with purposeful activities, with getting tasks accomplished, works completed, and then along comes the phenomenon of death—whether it is our final death or one of those many deaths through which we go day by day. And death confronts us with the fact that purpose is not enough. We live by meaning. When we come close to death and all purpose slips out of our hands, when we can no longer manipulate and control things to achieve specific goals, can our life still be meaningful? We tend to equate purpose with meaning, and when purpose is taken away, we stand there without meaning. So there is the challenge: how, when all purpose comes to an end, can there still be meaning?

This question suggests why in the monastery we are counseled (or challenged) to have death at all times before our eyes.

For the monastic life is one way of radically confronting the question of life's meaning. In it you cannot get stuck in purpose: there are many purposes connected with it, but they are all secondary. As a monk you are totally superfluous, and so you cannot evade the question of meaning.

This distinction that I am making between purpose and meaning isn't always carefully maintained in our everyday language and thought. In fact, we could avoid a good deal of confusion in our lives if we did pay attention to the distinction. It takes only a minimum of awareness to realize that our inner attitude when striving to achieve a purpose, a concrete task, is clearly different from the attitude we assume when something strikes us as specially meaningful. With purposes, we must be active and in control. We must, as we say, "take the reins," "take things in hand," "keep matters under control," and utilize circumstances like tools that serve our aims. The idiomatic expressions we use are symptomatic of goal-oriented, useful activity, and the whole of modern life tends to be thus purpose-oriented. But matters are different when we deal with meaning. Here it is not a matter of using, but of savoring the world around us. In the idioms we use that relate to meaning, we depict ourselves as more passive than active: "It did something to me"; "it touched me deeply"; "it moved me." Of course, I do not want to play off purpose against meaning, or activity against passivity. It is merely a matter of trying to adjust the balance in our hyperactive, purpose-ridden society. We distinguish between purpose and meaning not in order to separate the two, but in order to unite them. Our goal is to let meaning flow into our purposeful activities by fusing activity and passivity into genuine responsiveness.

Death puts our responsiveness to the ultimate test. Unless our dying becomes our full and final response to life, activity and passivity must ultimately clash in death. Because we are so one-sidedly active in life, we think of death one-sidedly as passive. In death we are indeed passive: obviously, dying is the most passive thing that can happen to us. It is the ultimate passivity—something that will happen to us inevitably. We will all be killed in one way or another, whether it be by disease or by old age or by an accident or in some other way. We are well aware of this aspect but not too many people realize that death is also ultimate activity. Again, some "symptomatic idioms" can help

make this clear. It is, for example, very significant that the one act that is the most passive in our experience, namely dying, cannot be expressed in English by a passive form. There is no passive voice to the verb *to die*. We can *be killed*, but we have *to die*. There is imbedded into our very language the realization that dying is not only passive, maybe not even primarily passive, but also the ultimate activity. Dying is something we have to *do*. Perhaps we can be killed without dying, which would explain those ghost stories in which a house or a room is haunted by the continuing presence of a person who has been killed but hasn't really died. These two things have to come together in death: we *do* something and we suffer something. More than that: we must suffer what we do and do what we suffer. This doing and suffering, this give and take, which constitutes responsiveness, is brought into focus by our confrontation with death, but it has a far wider range. It characterizes life in all its aspects. Life, if it isn't a give and take, is not life at all. The taking corresponds to the active phase, to our "purpose" when we do something; while the giving of ourselves to whatever it is that we experience is the gesture by which meaning flows into our lives. It must be stressed that this is not an either/or; life is not a give *or* take, but a give *and* take; if we only take or only give, we are not alive. If we only take breath in we suffocate, and if we only breathe out we also suffocate. The heart pumps the blood in and pumps it out; and it is in the rhythm of give and take that we live. In practice, however, the balance is often upset in our lives. Our emphasis falls far too heavily on the taking, on the doing, on the purpose. We belong to an "underdeveloped nation" with regard to meaningful living. Because we keep cultivating only one-half of the give and take of life, we are only half alive.

Here again the idioms we use are symptomatic of our preoccupation with *taking* and with purpose. We have scores of idioms that speak of taking but few that speak of giving yourself; we take a walk, take an exam, take a trip, take a course, take a bath, take a rest, take a meal. We take practically everything, including many things that nobody can truly take, such as time. We say we take time; but we really live only if we *give* time to what *takes* time. If you take a seat, it is not a very comfortable way of sitting down but if you let the seat take you that's more like it. Taking a nap is the surest way to insomnia, for as long as you insist on taking it you will never get it; but the moment you give yourself to it you will fall asleep.

We might begin to suspect that our one-sided insistence on taking not only prevents us from living balanced lives and living peacefully, but also from dying a balanced death and dying peacefully. Faced with the prospect of death, we must say "I can't take it." After a life in which we take and take, we eventually come up against something which we can't take; death takes us. This is serious. One can go through life taking, and in the end all this will add up to having taken one's life, which is in a real sense suicide. But we can learn to give ourselves. It doesn't come

easy, conditioned as we are to be fearful of giving ourselves, but it can be learned. In learning to give ourselves we learn both to live and to die—to die not only our final death, but those many deaths of daily living by which we become more alive.

This is precisely the point: whenever we give ourselves to whatever presents itself instead of grasping and holding it, we flow with it. We do not arrest the flow of reality, we do not try to possess, we do not try to hold back, but we let go, and everything is alive as long as we let it go. When we cut the flower it is no longer alive; when we take water out of the river it is just a bucketful of water, not the flowing river; when we take air and put it in a balloon it is no longer the wind. Everything that flows and is alive has to be taken and given at the same time—taken with a very, very light touch. Here again we are not playing off give against take, but learning to balance the two in a genuine response to living as well as to dying. I remember a story told me by a young woman whose mother was close to death. She once asked her: "Mother, are you afraid of dying?" and her mother answered, "I am not afraid, but I don't know how to do it." The daughter, startled by that reply, lay down on the couch and wondered how she herself would do it if she had to; and she came back with the answer: "Mother, I think you have to give yourself to it." Her mother didn't say anything then but later she said, "Fix me a cup of tea and make it just the way I like it, with lots of cream and sugar, because it will be my last cup of tea. I know now how to die."

This inner gesture of giving yourself to it, of letting go from moment to moment, is what is so terribly difficult for us; but it can be applied to almost any area of experience. We mentioned time, for instance: there is the whole problem of "free time," as we call it, of leisure. We think of leisure as the privilege of those who can afford to take time (this endless taking!)—when in reality it isn't a privilege at all. Leisure is a virtue, and one that anyone can acquire. It is not a matter of taking but of giving time. Leisure is the virtue of those who give time to whatever it is that takes time—give as much time to it as it takes. That is the reason why leisure is almost inaccessible to us. We are so preoccupied with taking, with appropriating. Hence, there is more and more free time, and less and less leisure. In former centuries when there was much less free time for anybody, and vacations, for instance, were unheard of, people were leisurely while working; now they work hard at being leisurely. You find people who work from nine to five with this attitude of "Let's get it done, let's take things in hand," totally purpose-oriented, and when five o'clock comes they are exhausted and have no time for real leisure either. If you don't work leisurely, you won't be able to play leisurely. So they collapse, or else they pick up their tennis racket or their golf clubs and continue working, giving themselves a workout as they say.

We can laugh about it, but it goes deep. The letting go is a real death, a real dying; it costs us an enormous amount of energy, the price, as it were, which life exacts from us over and over again for being truly alive. For this seems to be one of the basic laws of life; we have only what we give up. We all have had the experience of a friend admiring something we owned, when for a moment we had an impulse to give that thing away. If we follow this impulse—and something may be at stake that we really like, and it pains for a moment—then for ever and ever we will have this thing; it is really ours; in our memory it is something we have and can never lose.

It is all the more so with personal relationships. If we are truly friends with someone, we have to give up that friend all the time, we have to give freedom to that friend—like a mother who gives up her child continually. If the mother hangs on to the child, first of all it will never be born; it will die in the womb. But even after it is born physically it has to be set free and let go over and over again. So

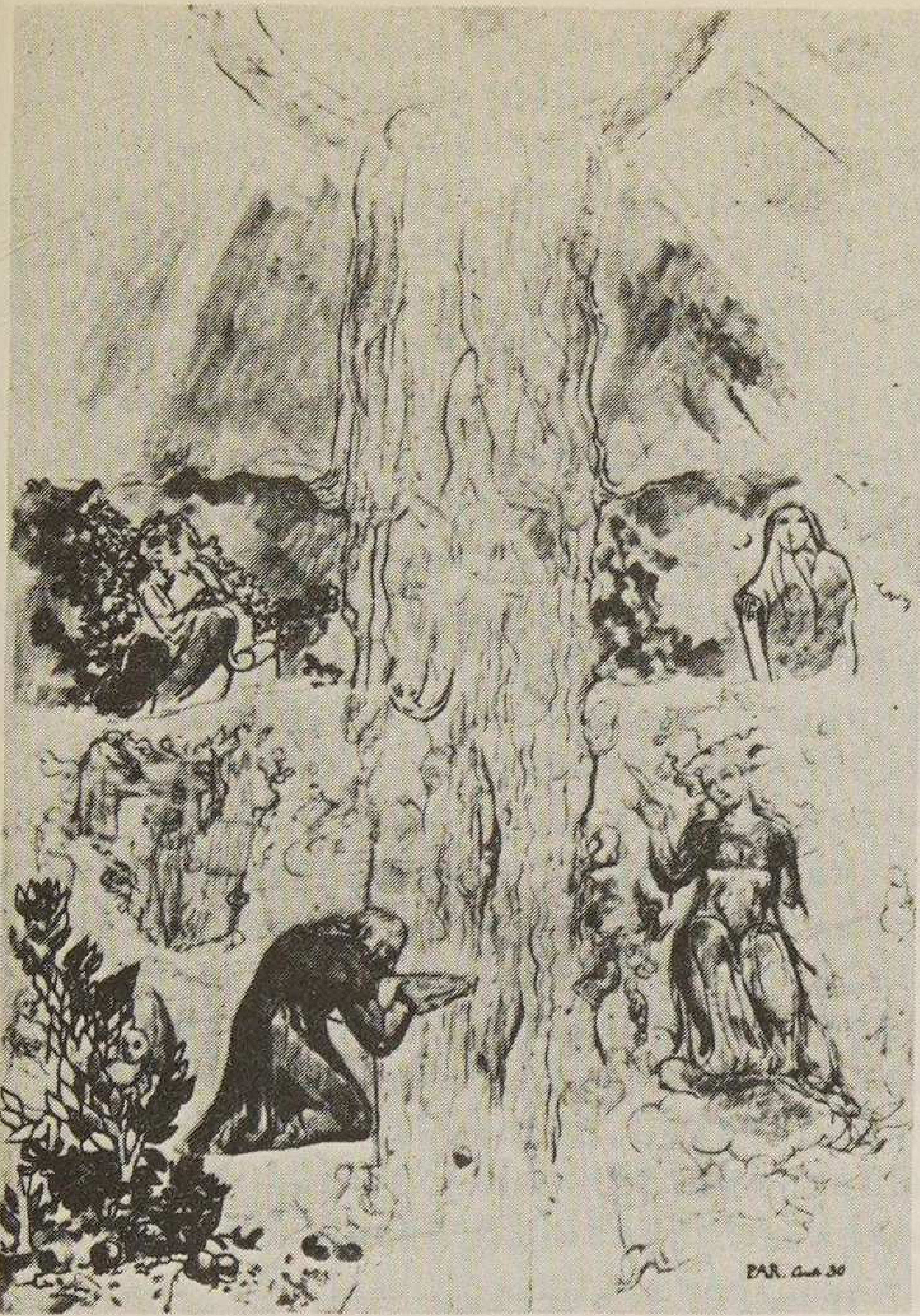
many difficulties that we have with our mothers, and that mothers have with their children, spring exactly from this, that they can't let go; and apparently it is much more difficult for a mother to give birth to a teenager than to a baby. But this giving up is not restricted to mothers; we must all mother each other, whether we are men or women. I think mothering is just like dying, in this respect; it is something that we must do all through life. And whenever we do give up a person or a thing or a position, when we truly give it up, we die—yes, but we die into greater aliveness. We die into a real oneness with life. Not to die, not to give up, means to exclude ourselves from that free flow of life.

But giving up is very different from letting someone down; in fact, the two are exact opposites. It is an upward gesture, not a downward one. Giving up the child, the mother upholds and supports him, as friends must support one another. We cannot let down responsibilities that are given to us, but we must be ready to give them up, and this is the risk of living, the risk of the give and take. There is a tremendous risk involved, because when you really give up, you don't know what is going to happen to the thing or to the child. If you knew, the sting would be taken out of it, but it wouldn't be a real giving up. When you hand over responsibility, you have to trust. That trust in life is central to all the religious traditions. It is called by different names; Christians know it as faith, and in Zen Buddhism, to my surprise, it is also called faith, though with a connotation different from the one it has in the Biblical tradition. It isn't faith in anything or anyone, but there is a lot of emphasis in Buddhist monasteries on the tension between faith and doubt, faith always being a nose's length ahead of doubt. The greater your doubt, the greater your faith will be—faith in ultimate reality, faith in yourself, if you wish, your true Self. But in the Buddhist as well as in the Christian tradition faith is courage —the courage to take upon yourself the risk of living, and dying, because the two are inseparable.

Thus, one could distinguish between two ways of dying: a mere giving in, which means you are being killed without really dying; and a vital way of dying, a giving up, which is this giving of yourself and so dying into deeper life. But that takes a great deal of courage, because it is always a risk, a step into something unknown. It also takes a great deal of vitality, and that is why I am a little reluctant to accept what Karl Rahner and Ladislas Boros have to say about death. They are two German Catholic theologians who have written with a great deal of insight on death, but both put much weight on their ideas of what happens in a person's last moments. I would much rather say: Die when you are alive, because you don't know how well you will be able to do something that takes all your energy when you are senile, weak, or very sick.

Here again is one of the points where I think birth and death come very close to one another: neither of the two events can be precisely pinned down to a moment in time. We don't really know when a person is born. We can point to the physical fact of the umbilical cord being cut, but some people come to life maybe after forty years, or even later. When does a person come to life? I can imagine that the very moment in which someone comes to life is also the moment in which he really dies. And everything that led up to that, for forty-five years perhaps, is time spent in practicing for the important moment; and everything that follows is time spent letting nature run its course. Maybe in some people's lives this happens all of a sudden, at one moment, while with others it is a gradual thing that goes laboriously through many stages.

Most of what I have said simply means: let's learn to die so that, when our last hour comes and if we are still alert to it, we will be able to die well. But at any rate let's learn it, and that means let's learn to give ourselves over and over again to that which takes us; let go of things, or rather



give up as a mother gives up. *Let go* is a little too passive, it comes too close to *letting down; giving up* is the truly sacrificial gesture. So in many traditions you have this notion that throughout our lives we train for a right dying; and that means to train for flowing with life, for giving ourselves. And this suggests some more symptomatic idioms of taking and giving that show ways we can make the inner gesture of dying: *giving thanks* instead of *taking for granted; giving up* rather than *taking possession;for-giving* as opposed to *taking offense.* What we take for granted does not make us happy; what we hold on to deteriorates in our grasp; what we take offense at we make into a hurdle we can't get past. But in giving thanks, giving up, forgiving, we die here and now and become more fully alive.

We speak, for instance, of a good death versus a bad death: I suppose the death we call bad is the one in which we struggle and cannot die peacefully. There are many cases when the doctor says: "I don't know how this patient keeps on living," but perhaps he never learned to let go, so he hangs on for *dear life,* as we say. He will eventually be killed, but he has not learned to give himself freely. After all, it is not a dogma or a theory but something that anyone can check out and experience in his own life, that when we really give up and actively die, we die not into death but into a richer life; and when we drag on and hang on to something that we should have already let go of, we are dead and decaying. Thus we know—not from any revelation but from our own personal daily experience—that the fruit of a good death, a death to which we give ourselves, is greater fullness of life, and the fruit of a death against the grain, in which we are just killed and do not give ourselves, is destruction, or what the Bible calls the second death.

Now the difficulty that comes in here is that when it is a matter of our final physical death, what is given up by us is all of life. I feel rather strongly that we sometimes fail—especially, I think, people who speak from a religious perspective—to stress the seriousness of dying. It may be a beautiful image, but it just won't do to say that "we fall asleep." Death is no falling asleep; there is a rather drastic difference. Nor is it the same as going into a tunnel and coming out on the other side. I do not like to speak of "afterlife." I have seen this book, *Life After Life;* it is interesting, and I think that there may be whole dimensions, a whole world of things going on after what we observe as dying; but I am not concerned with all that. As I have said, I am convinced that we cannot pinpoint our real death. It is that real death, however, which concerns us here: the event through which all we know of life comes to an end, in every respect. To speak of life after death makes no sense if death is the end of time for the one who dies. And that is just what I mean. Death is the event which has no *after.* To blur this fact means losing sight of the seriousness of dying.

It is an all too harmless picture of death if we think that the body dies but the soul lives. Is there really an independent soul over against a body with its own independent existence? Concretely we experience ourselves as body-soul beings. The total person, experienced from the outside, is body. Experienced from the inside, that same total person is soul. In that event we call death, the total person comes to an end. But the total person that sits here now and talks, knows that whenever in his life anything truly died, it did not mean destruction, but always a step into greater life; and therefore, that total person can take the leap of faith and can say yes, I believe that in this ultimate death also, what I am going toward is ultimate life. And that is faith in the resurrection, in the Christian context, because resurrection is not survival; it is not revivification, or coming back to life, or any sort of reversal at all. The flow of life cannot ever be reversed. By faith we die *forward* into fullness of life.

This is why eminent Christian theologians today can dispense with the notion of an immortal soul without jeopardizing the Good News of resurrection and eternal life. In fact, as soon as we no longer feel obliged to hold on to such intellectual abstractions as the notion of an immortal soul, we are able to enter more freely and more fully into the existential approach on which Biblical statements about the resurrection are based. We might be surprised to discover that even the Christian belief in the resurrection of the body is simply based on the experience that soul and body are existentially one in the human person. It is not possible to speak of a disembodied human being, because that is no longer a human being. The body absolutely belongs to it. Therefore, when St. Paul speaks of resurrection life—life *beyond* death as I would call it, rather than *after* death (if death is the end of time, then what's after it?)—he speaks about life that must be embodied. What happens in the course of our lives is that we become somebody. Who we become will depend on the decisions we make and somehow bodily enact. It will depend on the responses we give to God's calling which reaches us in many different forms, and these responses, too, will be bodily enacted. That in this way we become somebody is obviously as much a statement about our bodies as it is a statement about our souls. But the body we call our own in this sense is not limited by our skins. It comprises all those elements of the cosmos by which we have expressed our own personal uniqueness; it is the total person, seen from the outside. But if the total person has died, resurrection of life, as St. Paul sees it, must be a new creation of the total person—soul and body—by God who alone provides the continuity between the old and the new life. All St. Paul can say about our immortal life, the Christ-life within us, is that it is "hidden with Christ in God" (*Cor.* 3:3). This holds true whether we have died or not. In either case, "your real life is Christ," as St. Paul puts it in the same passage.

Passages like these make it clear that the Christian vision of immortal life is far closer to what has been branded as "Eastern"notions than it is to those popular Western beliefs tied to an immortality of the soul. When Christians practising under some guru from the East learn to realize "I am not my body, I am not my mind," they are making room for an understanding of St. Paul's words: "Your real life is Christ." All too often this understanding is blocked by the misconception "I am not my body, but I am my mind," a misconception perpetuated by the doctrine of the immortal soul.

This is closely connected with another area in which current Eastern influences tend to help Christians recover their own authentic tradition regarding life beyond life. It sometimes appears as a threat to Christians that Oriental thought seems to challenge the Western emphasis on individual survival. But

is that popular emphasis really in tune with the Christian message? The one thing that is certainly true about it is that *personhood*, what we have made of ourselves in becoming somebody, is something that will never be lost; but that is a different thing from individuality. We are born as individuals and we become persons, laboriously so. We become persons through relationships with others—interrelationship is what defines you as a person. What separates us defines us as individuals, but what relates us to others makes us persons. It is in the relationship of a deep love that we become most truly persons. When we give and lose ourselves, we paradoxically find our true self. What St. Paul calls our real life, the Christ-self within us, is universal interrelatedness in love; and it is not difficult to see that this is more readily compatible with "Buddha nature" or "Atman" than with insistence on perpetuating individual separateness.

But now St. Paul says of that Christ-self, which is our real immortal life, not only that it is hidden with Christ in God, but that "when Christ appears, then you too will appear with Him and share His glory." This seems so central to the Christian message that I for one feel that I cannot be agnostic about it. I cannot say: "Well, just give me the rest of Christian life and teaching and forget about eschatology." To do something right we must start out with the end clearly in mind. If not even a meal will turn out right if we start with the ingredients instead of a clearly planned menu, we had better keep our eyes on the end of our spiritual life also, which means we ought to clarify our eschatology. Our problem at the moment seems to be that we have outgrown our child-like integrity in dealing with eschatological myths, but have not yet achieved the integrity of mature minds capable of accepting these myths more fully than the child could. We are like awkward adolescents who laugh at fairy tales that were deeply meaningful to them not long ago and will be more meaningful still a short time hence.

We might do well to take a fresh look at what we might call the Christian mythology of heaven, hell, purgatory, judgment, and so on. It is more important than we might guess. We cannot assume that it is just something we have outgrown; we have only seen that certain images must not and cannot be taken literally any longer. On the other hand, a Christian can still fully believe in the reality these images try to depict. I can say that I believe in the resurrection of the body and in the last judgment; I do believe in these truths, but I wouldn't press the imagery. I believe in the reality that stands behind it and I take the expression very lightly. It is meant to be an image, a beautiful poetic image, but no more. Actually the myth of purgatory comes very close to the myth of reincarnation; it tries in general to answer the same questions and it comes up with largely the same answers —that there is justice and that you have to work out your karma. But just as I would not press the image of purgatory as if there were actually a fire burning somewhere with so many degrees of heat, so I personally would not press the imagery of reincarnation. But I can say that I do believe in both.

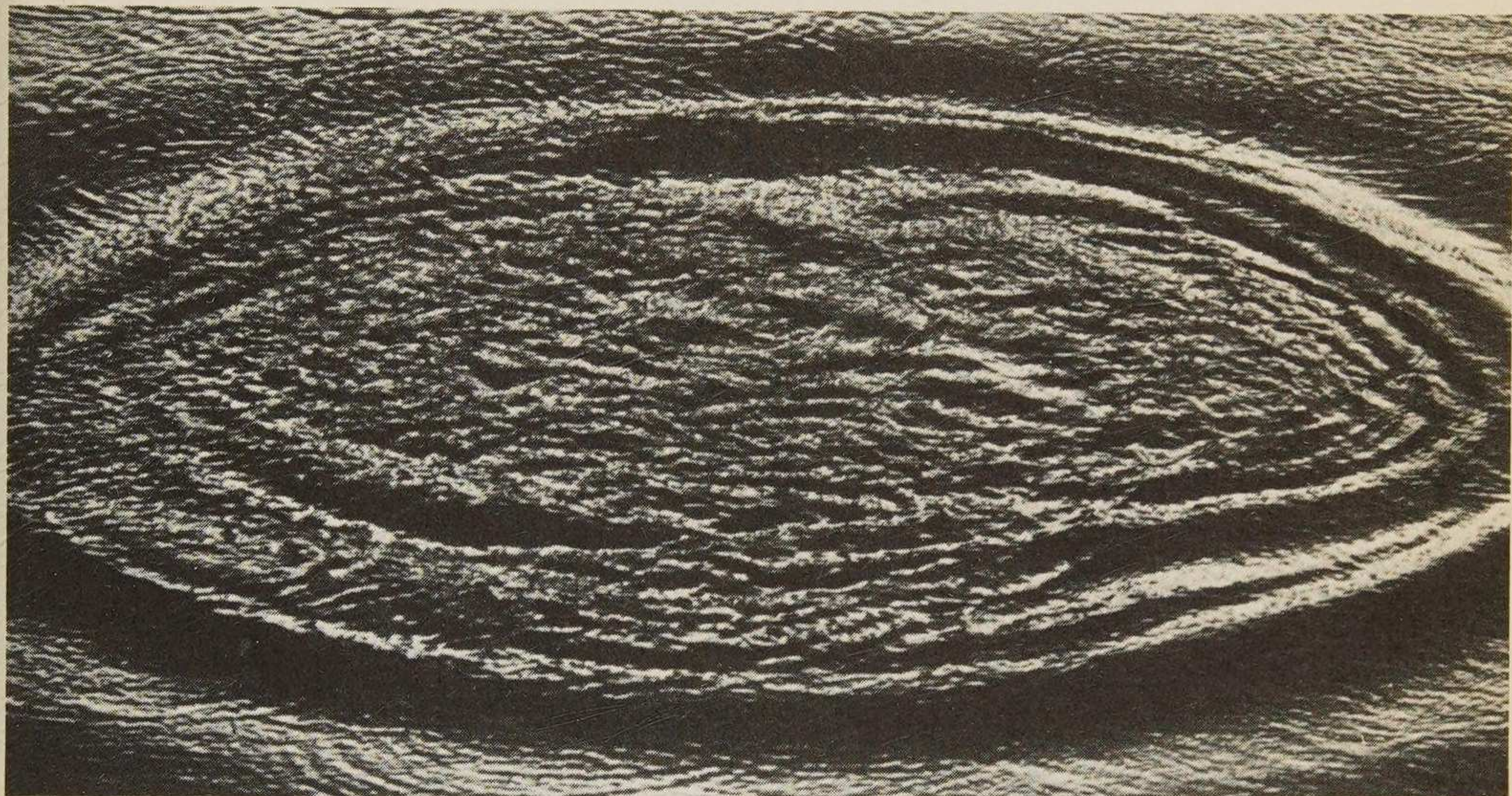
One reason why Christian tradition has always steered me away from preoccupation with reincarnation has not so much to do with doctrine as with spiritual practice. The finality of death is meant to challenge us to decision, the decision to be fully present here now, and so begin eternal life. For eternity rightly understood is not the perpetuation of time, on and on, but rather the overcoming of time by the *now* that does not pass away. But we are always looking for opportunities to postpone the decision. So if you say: "Oh, after this I will have another life and another life," you might never *live*, but keep dragging along half dead because you never face death. Don Juan says to Carlos Castaneda, "That is why you are so moody and not fully alive, because you

forget you are to die; you live as if you were going to live forever." What remembrance of death is meant to do, as I understand it, is to help us make the decision. Don Juan stresses death as the adviser. Death makes us warriors. If you become aware that death is right over your left shoulder and if you turn quickly enough you can see him there, that makes you alive and alert to decisions.

As human beings, here and now, not as believers of this or that doctrine, we all know what life beyond time means. If we can say *now*, and know what we mean when we say *now*, we are speaking about a reality that is not in time. The *now* is; time is only possibility for becoming. Dying in all its forms and stages is our opportunity to pass from time into the *now* that does not pass away, from the mere possibility of becoming to being real.

In our human experience time is, to use a fine expression I heard somewhere, a measure for the energy it takes to grow. In that sense it has nothing to do with minutes and hours, years and eons, with clock time. And growing means to die to what we are in order to become what we are not yet. The seed has to die to become a plant, and we have to die to being children in order to become adolescents, and so on. But our most important death has to do with dying to our independence, as individuals, and so coming to life as persons in our interdependence. We find this terribly difficult because we always want to retain our independence, the feeling that "I don't owe anybody anything." Then comes the moment of death, whether it is the ultimate death or a moment in the middle of life, and we give up our independence and come to life in interdependence, which is the joy of belonging and of being together. This is what we really most want, but except for such moments we hang on to something which we don't really want and yet are afraid to let go of—our independence and the isolation which necessarily goes with it. The moment we let it go, we die into the joy of interdependence. The importance of our physical death fades away in comparison with this dying into what St. Paul calls the real life, Christ in us. He says in another passage: "I live, yet not I; Christ lives in me." This is not a private statement about himself; he means that each one of us ought to be able to say that. As believers, you and I can say that as well as St. Paul; and that means that it is the true Self that lives in all of us; I—"yet not I; Christ lives in me." The face we had before we were born, as the Buddhists put it, is the Christ-reality. That doesn't mean, narrowly, Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth; it means *the Christ*. It is not separated from Jesus of Nazareth but is not limited to him. It comes very close to what Buddhists call Buddha nature, and Hindus call Atman, the lasting reality. But we are still afraid of losing our individuality in this all-embracing unity. I think we could overcome this fear by seeing that Divine Oneness is not achieved by the imposition of uniformity, but by the embracing of limitless variety; there is room for all our personal differences within it.

One time I talked with Eido Roshi about the question of the personality or impersonality of this ultimate reality, for here there seems to be what is generally thought of as an important difference of concepts between East and West, or between the Buddhists and the Christians. The Buddhists use the image of waves on the sea; each of us is just one



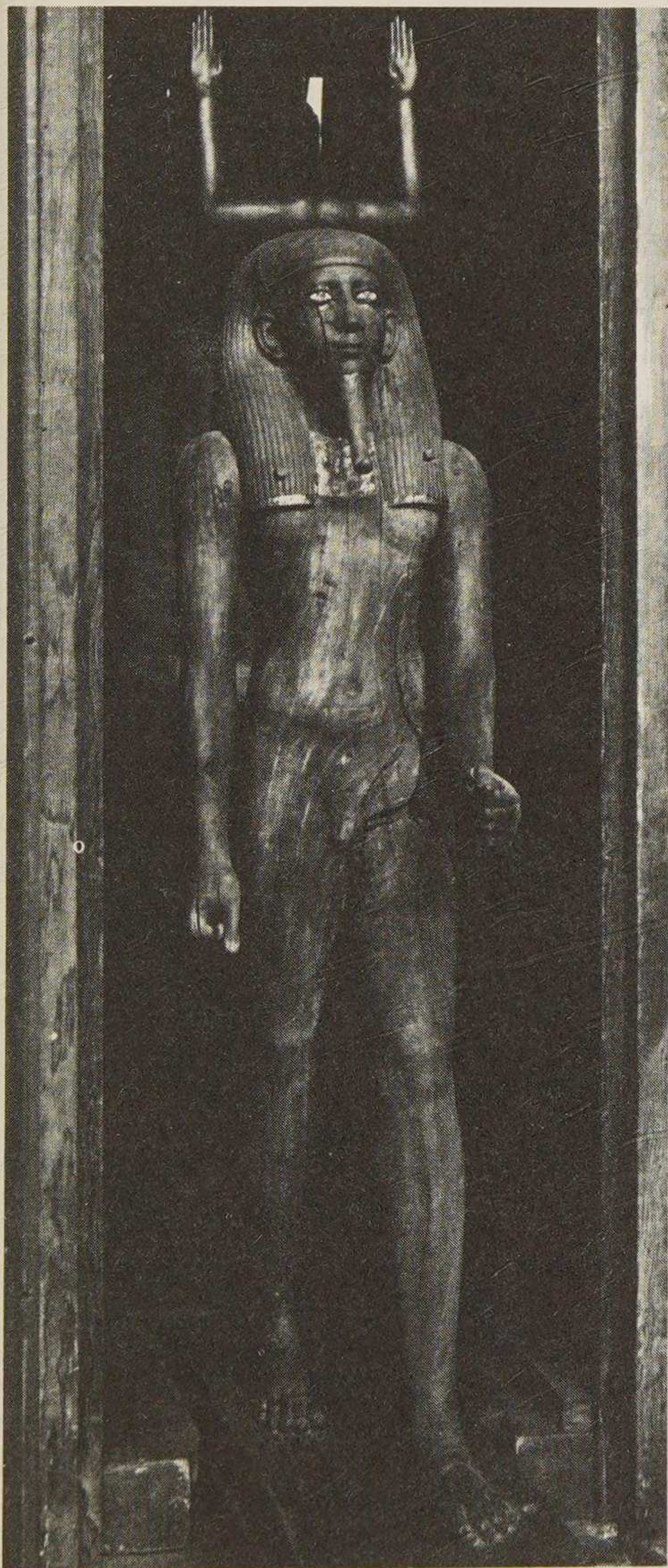
wave that comes out and goes back into the sea. I told him that a Westerner does not readily accept this; he says, "I am somebody with self-consciousness, awareness, and self-possession. Am I just going back into some cosmic custard? If that sea out of which I came is impersonal and I am personal, then I would be more than the sea." The answer Eido Roshi gave me was simple enough: "If the sea did not have all the perfection of personhood, from where would the waves have gotten it?" That is a beautiful Buddhist answer, and it does full justice to the Christian concern. But we could also say: All right, the wave goes back into the ocean, and that is a beautiful picture; but that high point, when the wave was cresting, the moment when it was most alive, that, as T.S. Eliot said, is a moment that was not only in time but "in and out of time." It was one of those *now* moments that does not pass away, that is eternity. And therefore anything that happens, at that moment of the fullest personhood, simply is; it does not belong to *was* or *will be* but to that which can never again be lost; maybe because it never was unrealized, maybe because it is a bursting forth of the eternal *now* into time. I experience it as being realized, but perhaps it is my homecoming.

I like the suggestion too that the virgin energy of a life in which personhood was never developed simply returns to the source, a wave that never crested. This image somehow connects with the idea of time running out. But the turning point of the spiritual life is the moment when time running out is turned into time being fulfilled. It rests with us whether death will be a fizzling out when our time runs out or an explosion of the fullness of time into the *now* of eternity. In the book of *Deuteronomy* God says: "I place before you today life and death; choose life." Choose life! Life is something we have to choose. One isn't alive simply vegetating; it is by choosing, making a decision, that you become alive. In every spiritual tradition life is not something that you automatically have, it is something that you must choose, and what makes you choose life is the challenge of death—learning to die, not eventually, but here and now.

The Nature of Death

Parabola here gives what can be no more than a sampling of the insights into death expressed by great men or inspired by great teachings which have appeared throughout history all over the world. Some are ancient sacred texts; others are modern commentaries. These passages appear at first to be very different; but behind the variety of expression and symbolism, it is soon clear that there is a deep common understanding that the process we call life is much larger and longer than our eyes can see. Whether the statement comes from a single seer, as in the case of Rumi, or Ezekiel, or Paul, or from a composite of unknown voices as in the Tibetan and Egyptian Books of the Dead, we hear the resonance of one and the same truth, a great impersonal knowledge in which contradiction and difference are dissolved. These formulations can further our search for meaning, not by answering our personal questions but by helping us to ask them more profoundly.

Portrait of the Spirit (Ka) of King Hor. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.



From *The Egyptian Book of the Dead:*
The Papyrus of Ani

The story of the great Egyptian god Osiris is told elsewhere in this issue. The myth of his life, death, and return represented the hope of resurrection and eternal life; as a symbol of that hope, the soul of the deceased was called by his name and ritually addressed as "Osiris" or, in the case of the scribe Ani, whose passage to the world of the dead is described here, as "Osiris Ani."

The Egyptian Book of the Dead is a collection of texts dating from about 4500 B.C., which were inscribed on the walls of tombs, on sarcophagi, and on papyrus scrolls, in various versions. The Papyrus of Ani, now in the British Museum, is about 3500 years old. It was translated and annotated by E. A. Wallis Budge in 1895.

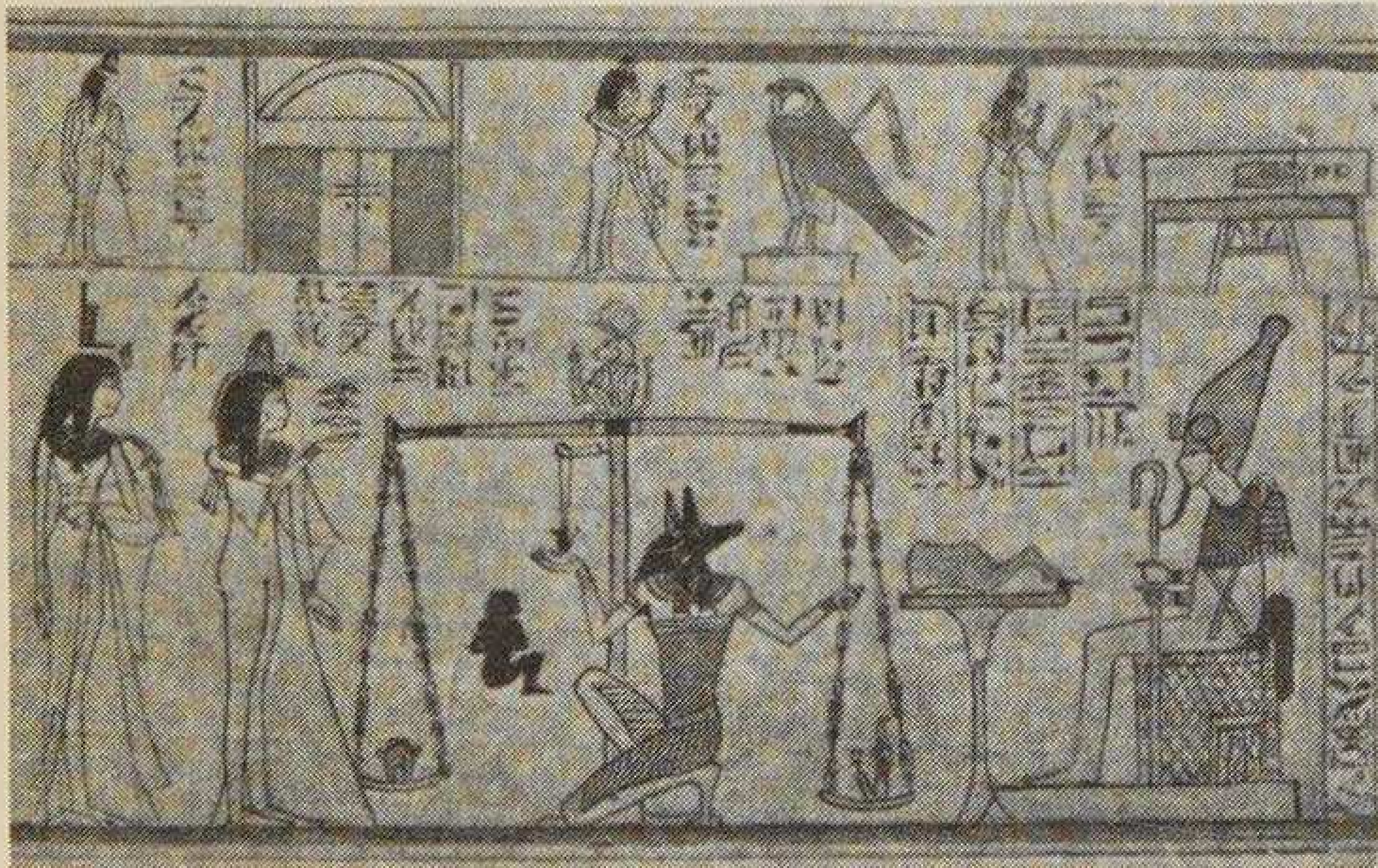
Scene of the weighing of the Heart of the Dead. Ani and his wife enter the Hall of Double Law or Truth, wherein the heart, emblematical of the conscience, is to be weighed in the balance against the feather, emblematical of law. Above twelve gods, each holding a scepter, are seated upon thrones before a table of offerings of fruit, flowers, etc. . . .

Osiris, the scribe Ani, saith: "My heart my mother, my heart my mother, my heart my coming into being! May there be nothing to resist me at (my) judgment; may there be no opposition to me from the four gods of the cardinal points, may there be no parting of thee from me in the presence of him who keepeth the scales! Thou art my *ka*[1] within my body (which) knitteth and

[1] The invisible "double" or spirit of each man; image, character, genius.

strengtheneth my limbs. Mayest thou come forth to the place of happiness to which I am advancing. May the *Shenit*, divine ones, not cause my name to stink, and may no lies be spoken against me in the presence of the god!. . ."

Thoth, the righteous judge of the great company of the gods who are in the presence of the god Osiris, saith: "Hear ye this judgment. The heart of Osiris Ani hath in very truth been weighed, and his soul hath stood as a witness for him; it hath been found true by trial in the Great Balance. There hath not been found any wickedness in him; he hath not done harm by his deeds; and he uttered no evil reports while he was upon earth."



The Weighing of the Heart

Ani saith: "I know my heart, I have gotten the mastery over my heart; I have gotten the mastery over my two hands and arms; I have gotten the mastery over my feet, and I have gained the power to do whatsoever my *ka* pleaseth. My soul shall not be shut off from my body at the gates of the underworld; but I shall enter in peace, and I shall come forth in peace. . ."

Saith Osiris Ani, triumphant: "I am the swallow, the swallow, the scorpion, the daughter of Ra. Hail, ye gods, whose scent is sweet; hail, ye gods, whose scent is sweet! Hail, thou Flame, which comest forth from the horizon! Hail, thou who art in the city. . . . Let the doors be opened unto me. How shall I tell what I have seen therein? . . . I stretched out my hands and arms unto Osiris. I have passed on to judgment, and I have come that I may speak; grant that I may pass on and deliver my message. I enter in, having been judged; I come out at the door of Neb-er-tcher magnified and glorified. I am found pure at the great place of passage. I have put away my faults. I have done away my offences. I have cast out the sins which were a part of me. I, even I, am pure; I, even I, am mighty. O ye doorkeepers, I have made my way (unto you). I am like unto you. I have come forth by day. I have walked with my legs, and I have gotten the power of the footstep wherewith do walk the shining ones of light. I, even I, know the hidden ways to the doors of the Field of Aaru; and, though my body be buried, yet let me rise up; and may I come forth and overthrow all my foes upon earth. . .

"I am pure. I am pure. I am pure. . . . I behold the eye of the sun wax full in Annu. May no evil happen unto me in this land in the Hall of Double Right and Truth, because I know, even I, the names of the gods who live therein and who are the followers of the great god."

A lake of fire, at each corner of which is seated a dog-headed ape.

Osiris Ani, triumphant, is girt about with fine raiment, he is shod with white sandals, and he is anointed with very precious ānta ointment; and a bull, and herbs, and incense, and ducks, and flowers, and ale, and cakes have been offered unto him. And behold, thou shalt limn upon a clean tile the image of a table of offerings in clean colours, and thou shalt bury it in a field whereon swine have not trampled. If this word then be written upon it, he himself shall rise again, and his children's children shall flourish even as Rā flourisheth without ceasing. He shall dwell in favour in the presence of the king among the chiefs, and cakes and cups of drink and portions of meat shall be given unto him upon the table of the great god. He shall not be thrust from any door in Amentet; he shall travel on together with the kings of the north and of the south, and he shall abide with the followers of Osiris near unto Un-nefer, for ever, and for ever, and for ever.

From The Egyptian Book of the Dead, *trans. by E. A. Wallis Budge. © 1965, by Dover Publications. Reprinted by permission.*

From Plato

The Death of Socrates

Socrates, who was Plato's teacher, was condemned to death by the governors of Athens for corrupting the young by opening too many questions. On the day which at sunset was to end his life, his conversation with his friends was recorded by Plato in the dialog known as the Phaedo. *The part we have taken from it begins with Socrates speaking to Simmias and Cebes:*

I am quite ready to admit, Simmias and Cebes, that I ought to be grieved at death, if I were not persuaded in the first place that I am going to other gods who are wise and good (of which I am as certain as I can be of any such matters), and secondly (though I am not so sure of this last) to men departed, better than those whom I leave behind; and therefore I do not grieve as I might have done, for I have good hope that there is yet something remaining for the dead, and as has been said of old, some far better thing for the good than for the evil.

And now I desire to prove to you that the real philosopher has reason to be of good cheer when he is about to die, and that after death he may hope to obtain the greatest good in the other world.

Would you not say that the true philosopher is entirely concerned with the soul and not with the body? He would like, as far as he can to get away from the body and to turn to the soul. He who has got rid, as far as he can, of eyes and ears and, so to speak, of the whole body, these being in his opinion distracting elements which when they infect the soul hinder her from acquiring truth and knowledge—who, if not he, is likely to attain to the knowledge of true being?

And when real philosophers consider all these things, "have we not found," they will say, "a path of thought which seems to bring us and our argument to the conclusion, that while we are in the body, and while the soul is infected with the evils of the body, our desire will not be satisfied, and our desire is of the truth? For the body is a source of endless trouble to us by reason of the mere requirement of food; and is liable also to diseases which overtake and impede us in the search after true being: it fills us full of loves, and lusts, and fears, and fancies of all kinds, and endless foolery, and in fact, as men say, takes away from us the power of thinking at all. Thus, having got rid of the foolishness of the body we shall be pure and hold converse with the pure, and know of ourselves the clear light everywhere, which is no other than the light of truth."

O my friend, if this be true, there is great reason to hope that, going whither I go, when I have come to the end of my journey, I shall attain that which has been the pursuit of my life. And therefore I go on my way rejoicing, and not I only, but every other man who believes that his mind has been made ready and he is in a manner purified. And what is purification but the separation of the soul from the body, as I was saying before?

Still I suspect that you and Simmias would be glad to probe the argument further. Like children, you are haunted with a fear that when the soul leaves the body, the wind may really blow her away and scatter her; especially if a man should happen to die in a great storm and not when the sky is calm.

Cebes answered with a smile: Then, Socrates, you must argue us out of our fears —and yet, strictly speaking, they are not our fears, but there is a child within us to whom death is a sort of hobgoblin: him too we must persuade not to be afraid when he is alone in the dark.

Socrates said: Shall we believe that the soul, which is invisible, and which goes hence to a place that is like herself, glorious, and pure, and invisible, to Hades, which is rightly called the unseen world, to dwell with the good and wise God (whither, if it be the will of God, my soul too must shortly go)—shall we believe that the soul, whose nature is so glorious, and pure, and invisible, is blown away by the winds and perishes as soon as she leaves the body, as the world says? Nay, dear Cebes and Simmias, it is not so. I will tell you what happens to a soul which is pure at her departure, and which in her life has had no intercourse that she could avoid with the body, and so draws after her, when she dies, no taint of the body, but has shunned it, and gathered herself into herself, for such has been her constant study;—and that only means that she has loved wisdom rightly, and has truly practised how to die. Is not this the practice of death? A soul, Simmias and Cebes, that has been so nurtured, and so trained, will never fear lest she should be torn in pieces at her departure from the body, and blown away by the winds, and vanish, and utterly cease to exist.

"Death of Socrates," by David

You, Simmias and Cebes, and all other men, will depart at some time or other. Me already, as a tragic poet would say, the voice of fate calls. Soon I must drink the poison; and I think that I had better repair to the bath first, in order that the women may not have the trouble of washing my body after I am dead.

When he had done speaking, Crito said: And have you any commands for us, Socrates—anything to say about your children, or any other matter in which we can serve you?

Nothing particular, Crito, he replied: only, as I have always told you, take care of yourselves; that is a service which you may be ever rendering to me and mine and to all of us, whether you promise to do so or not. But if you have no thought for yourselves, and care not to walk according to the rule which I have prescribed for you, not now for the first time, however much you may profess or promise at the moment, it will be of no avail.

We will do our best, said Crito: And in what way shall we bury you?

In any way that you like; but you must get hold of me and take care that I do not run away from you. Then he turned to us, and added with a smile:—I cannot make Crito believe that I am the same Socrates who has been talking and conducting the argument; he fancies that I am the other Socrates whom he will soon see, a dead body—and he asks, How shall he bury me? And though I have spoken many words in the endeavour to show that when I have drunk the poison I shall leave you and go to the joys of the blessed,—these words of mine, with which I was comforting you and myself, have had, as I perceive, no effect upon Crito.

I would not have him sorrow at my hard lot, or say at the burial, Thus we lay out Socrates, or, Thus we follow him to the grave or bury him; for false words are not only evil in themselves, but they inflict the soul with evil. Be of good cheer then, my dear Crito, and say that you are burying my body only, and do with that whatever is usual, and what you think best.

When he had spoken these words, he arose and went into a chamber to bathe; Crito followed him and told us to wait. So we remained behind, talking and thinking of the subject of discourse, and also of the greatness of our sorrow; he was like a father of whom we were being bereaved, and we were about to pass the rest of our lives as orphans. When he had taken the bath his children were brought to him (he had two young sons and an elder one); and the women of his family also came, and he talked to them and gave them a few directions in the presence of Crito; then he dismissed them and returned to us.

Now the hour of sunset was near, for a good deal of time had passed while he was within. When he came out, he sat down with us again after his bath, but not much was said. Soon the jailer, who was the servant of the Eleven, entered and stood by him, saying:—To you, Socrates, whom I know to be the noblest and gentlest and best of all who ever came to this place, I will not impute the angry feeling of other men, who rage and swear at me, when, in obedience to the authorities, I bid them drink the poison—indeed, I am sure that you will not be angry with me; for others, as you are aware, and not I, are to blame. And so fare you well, and try to bear lightly what must needs be—you know my errand. Then bursting into tears he turned away and went out.

Socrates looked at him and said: I return your good wishes, and will do as you bid. Then turning to us, he said, How charming the man is: since I have been in prison he has always been coming to see me, and at times

he would talk to me, and was as good to me as could be, and now see how generously he sorrows on my account. We must do as he says, Crito; and therefore let the cup be brought, if the poison is prepared: if not, let the attendant prepare some.

Yet, said Crito, the sun is still upon the hill-tops, and I know that many a one has taken the draught late, and after the announcement has been made to him, he has eaten and drunk, and enjoyed the society of his beloved: do not hurry—there is time enough.

Socrates said: Yes, Crito, and they of whom you speak are right in so acting, for they think that they will be gainers by the delay; but I am right in not following their example, for I do not think that I should gain anything by drinking the poison a little later; I should be ridiculous in my own eyes for sparing and saving a life which is already forfeit. Please then to do as I say, and not to refuse me.

Crito made a sign to the servant, who was standing by; and he went out, and having been absent for some time, returned with the jailer carrying the cup of poison. Socrates said: You, my good friend, who are experienced in these matters, shall give me directions how I am to proceed. The man answered: You have only to walk about until your legs are heavy, and then to lie down, and the poison will act. At the same time he handed the cup to Socrates, who in the easiest and gentlest manner, without the least fear or change of colour or feature, looking at the man with all his eyes, Echecrates, as his manner was, took the cup and said: What do you say about making a libation out of this cup to any god? May I, or not? The man answered: We only prepare, Socrates, just so much as we deem enough. I understand, he said: but I may and must ask the gods to prosper my journey from this to the other world—even so—and so be it according to my prayer. Then raising the cup to his lips, quite readily and cheerfully he drank off the poison. And hitherto most of us had been able to control our sorrow; but now when we saw him drinking, and saw too that he had finished the draught, we could no longer forbear, and in spite of myself my own tears were flowing fast; so that I covered my face and wept, not for him, but at the thought of my own calamity in having to part from such a friend. Nor was I the first; for Crito, when he found himself unable to restrain his tears, had got up, and I followed; and at that moment, Apollodorus, who had been weeping all the time, broke out in a loud and passionate cry which made cowards of us all. Socrates alone retained his calmness: What is this strange outcry? he said. I sent away the women mainly in order that they might not misbehave in this way, for I have been told that a man should die in peace. Be quiet then, and have patience. When we heard his words we were ashamed, and refrained our tears; and he walked about until, as he said, his legs began to fail, and then he lay on his back, according to directions, and the man who gave him the poison now and then looked at his feet and legs; and after a while he pressed his foot hard, and asked him if he could feel; and he said, No; and then his leg, and so upwards and upwards, and showed us that he was cold and stiff. And he felt them himself, and said: When the poison reaches the heart, that will be the end. He was beginning to grow cold about the groin, when he uncovered his face, for he had covered himself up, and said—they were his last words—he said: Crito, I owe a cock to Asclepius; will you remember to pay the debt? The debt shall be paid, said Crito; is there anything else? There was no answer to this question; but in a minute or two a movement was heard, and the attendants uncovered him; his eyes were set, and Crito closed his eyes and mouth.

Such was the end, Echecrates, of our friend; concerning whom I may truly say, that of all men of his time whom I have known, he was the wisest and justest and best.

The *Phaedo* of Plato. Trans. by Benjamin Jowett. Washington Square Press. © 1950. by Simon & Schuster, Inc.
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The Bhagavad Gita (The Lord's Song) is a dialog between the hero Arjuna and the divine Krishna who is playing the part of his charioteer in the battle Arjuna and his brothers, the Pāndavas, are about to wage with their usurping relatives, the Kauravas. When the battle lines are drawn, Arjuna is overwhelmed with grief and pity for his kinfolk, and refuses to fight. Krishna's answer to him begins as follows:

The Blessed Lord said:

Thou grievest for those that should not be grieved for, yet speakest words of wisdom. The wise grieve neither for the living nor for the dead. Nor at any time verily was I not, nor thou, nor these princes of men, nor verily shall we ever cease to be, hereafter. As the dweller in the body experienceth in the body childhood, youth, old age, so passeth he on to another body; the steadfast one grieveth not thereat. The contacts of matter, O son of Kuntī, giving cold and heat, pleasure and pain, they come and go, impermanent; endure them bravely, O Bhārata. The man whom these torment not, O chief of men, balanced in pain and pleasure, steadfast, he is fitted for immortality. The unreal hath no being; the real never ceaseth to be; the truth about both hath been perceived by the seers of the Essence of things. Know THAT to be indestructible by whom all this is pervaded. Nor can any work the destruction of that imperishable One. These bodies of the embodied One, who is eternal, indestructible and immeasurable, are known as finite. Therefore fight, O Bhārata.

He who regardeth this as a slayer, and he who thinketh he is slain, both of them are ignorant. He slayeth not, nor is he slain; he is not born, nor doth he die; nor having been, ceaseth he any more to be; unborn, perpetual, eternal and ancient, he is not slain when the body is slaughtered. Who knoweth him indestructible, perpetual, unborn, undiminishing, how can that man slay, O Pārtha, or cause to be slain? As a man, casting off worn-out garments, taketh new ones, so the dweller in the body, casting off worn-out bodies, entereth into others that are new. Weapons cleave him not, nor fire burneth him, nor waters wet him, nor wind drieth him away. Uncleavable he, incombustible he, and indeed neither to be wetted nor dried away; perpetual, all-pervasive, stable, immovable, ancient, unmanifest, unthinkable, immutable, he is called; therefore knowing him as such, thou shouldst not grieve. Or if thou thinkest of him as being constantly born and constantly dying, even then, O mighty-armed, thou shouldst not grieve. For certain is death for the born, and certain is birth for the dead; therefore over the inevitable, thou shouldst not grieve. Beings are unmanifest in their origin, manifest in their midmost state, O Bhārata, unmanifest likewise are they in dissolution. What room then for lamentation? As marvellous one regardeth him; as marvellous another speaketh thereof; as marvellous another heareth thereof; yet having heard, none indeed understandeth. This dweller in the body of everyone is ever invulnerable, O Bhārata; therefore thou shouldst not grieve for any creature.

Bhagavad Gita II, 11–30

From *Bhagavad Gita*, trans. by Annie Besant. © 1895, by Theosophical Publishing House. Reprinted by permission.

The Upanishads, a part of the Vedic writings, are a collection of discourses on the nature of man and God; the name in Sanskrit means "sitting at the feet" (of a teacher), and hence, the transmission of the esoteric doctrine. The date of the earliest is about the sixth century B.C.

From The Khândogya-Upanishad

All this is Brahman. Let a man meditate on that (visible world) as beginning, ending, and breathing in it (the Brahman).

Now man is a creature of will. According to what his will is in this world, so will he be

when he has departed this life. Let him therefore have this will and belief:

The intelligent, whose body is spirit, whose form is light, whose thoughts are true, whose nature is like ether (omnipresent and invisible), from whom all works, all desires, all sweet odours and tastes proceed; he who embraces all this, who never speaks, and is never surprised,

He is my self within the heart, smaller than a corn of rice, smaller than a corn of barley, smaller than a mustard seed, smaller than a canary seed or the kernel of a canary seed. He also is my self within the heart, greater than the earth, greater than the sky, greater than heaven, greater than all these worlds.

He from whom all works, all desires, all sweet odours and tastes proceed, who embraces all this, who never speaks and who is never surprised, he, myself within the heart, is that Brahman (n.) When I shall have departed from hence, I shall obtain him (that Self). He who has this faith has no doubt.

The Upanishads, trans. by F. Max Müller.
The Sacred Books of The East. Vol. XV.
Dover Publications.
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ON THE BUDDHIST TRADITION

From the **Tibetan Book of the Dead**

The Tibetan Book of the Dead represents an ancient, perhaps even in part a pre-Buddhist, teaching, which was first committed to writing about the eighth century A.D. It is a detailed treatise on the proper approach to death and the intermediate state, or Bardo, between death and rebirth, giving instructions on how the person making this passage may be helped on his journey.

This Great Doctrine of Liberation by Hearing, which conferreth spiritual freedom on devotees of ordinary wit while in the Intermediate State, hath three divisions: the preliminaries, the subject-matter, and the conclusion. . .

Devotees of ordinary wit ought most certainly to be freed thereby; but should they not be freed, then, while in the Intermediate State during the experiencing of Reality, they should persevere in the listening to this Great Doctrine of Liberation by Hearing. . .

THE READING OF THIS THODOL

If the Transference hath been effectually employed, there is no need to read this *Thödol*, but if the Transference hath not been effectually employed, then this *Thödol* is to be read correctly and distinctly, near the dead body.

If there be no corpse, then the bed or the seat to which the deceased had been accustomed should be occupied by the reader who ought to expound the power of the Truth. Then, summoning the spirit of the deceased, imagine it to be present there listening, and read. During this time no relative or fond mate should be allowed to weep or to wail, as such is not good for the deceased; so restrain them.

If the body be present, just when the expiration hath ceased, either a *lama* who hath been as a guru to the deceased, or a brother in the Faith whom the deceased trusted, or a friend for whom the deceased had great affection, putting the lips close to the ear of the body without actually touching it should read this Great *Thödol*.

THE FIRST STAGE OF THE *CHIKHAI BARDO*: THE PRIMARY CLEAR LIGHT SEEN AT THE MOMENT OF DEATH

The first, the setting-face-to-face with the Clear Light, during the Intermediate State of the Moments of Death, is:

O nobly-born (so and so by name), the time hath now come for thee to seek the Path. Thy breathing is about to cease. Thy guru hath set thee face to face before with the Clear Light; and now thou art about to experience it in its Reality in the Bardo state, wherein all things are like the void and cloudless sky, and the naked, spotless intellect is like unto a transparent vacuum without circumference or centre. At this moment, know thou thyself; and abide in that state. I, too, at this time, am setting thee face to face.

Having read this, repeat it many times in the ear of the person dying, even before the expiration hath ceased, so as to impress it on the mind of the dying one.

When all the symptoms of death are about to be completed, then enjoin upon the one dying this resolution, speaking in a low tone of voice in the ear:

O nobly-born, that which is called death being come to thee now, resolve this: "O this now is the hour of death. By taking advantage of this death, I will so act, for the good of all sentient beings, peopling the illimitable expanse of the heavens, as to obtain the Perfect Buddhahood, by resolving on love and compassion towards them, and by directing my entire effort to the Sole Perfection."

Shaping the thoughts thus, especially at this time when the Dharma-Kāya of Clear Light in the state after death can be realized for the benefit of all sentient beings, know that thou art in that state; and resolve that thou wilt obtain the best boon of the State of the Great Symbol, in which thou art, as follows:

"Even if I cannot realize it, yet will I know this Bardo, and, mastering the Great Body of Union in Bardo, will appear in whatever shape will benefit all beings whomsoever: I will serve all sentient beings, infinite in number as are the limits of the sky."

Keeping thyself unseparated from this resolution, thou shouldst try to remember whatever devotional practices thou wert accustomed to perform during thy lifetime.

In saying this, the reader shall put his lips close to the ear, and shall repeat it distinctly, clearly impressing it upon the dying person so as to prevent his mind from wandering even for a moment.

After the expiration hath completely ceased, press the nerve of sleep firmly. . .

O nobly-born (so-and-so), listen. Now thou art experiencing the Radiance of the Clear Light of Pure Reality. Recognize it. O nobly-born, thy present intellect, in real nature void, not formed into anything as regards characteristics or colour, naturally void, is the very Reality, the All-Good.

Thine own intellect, which is now voidness, yet not to be regarded as of the voidness of nothingness, but as being the intellect itself, unobstructed, shining, thrilling, and blissful, is the very consciousness, the All-good Buddha.

Thine own consciousness, not formed into anything, in reality void, and the intellect, shining, thrilling, and blissful—these two—are inseparable. The union of them is the Dharma-Kāya state of Perfect Enlightenment.

Thine own consciousness, shining, void, and inseparable from the Great Body of

Radiance, hath no birth, nor death, and is the Immutable Light–Buddha Amitābha.

Knowing this is sufficient. Recognizing the voidness of thine own intellect to be Buddhahood, and looking upon it as being thine own consciousness, is to keep thyself in the state of the divine mind of the Buddha.

THE SECONDARY CLEAR LIGHT SEEN IMMEDIATELY AFTER DEATH

Thus the primary Clear Light is recognized and Liberation attained. But if it be feared that the primary Clear Light hath not been recognized, then it can certainly be assumed there is dawning upon the deceased that called the secondary Clear Light, which dawneth in somewhat more than a meal-time period after that the expiration hath ceased.

According to one's good or bad *karma*, the vital-force floweth down into either the right or left nerve and goeth out through any of the apertures of the body. Then cometh a lucid condition of the mind.

To say that the state of the primary Clear Light endureth for a meal-time period would depend upon the good or bad condition of the nerves and also whether there hath been previous practice or not in the setting-face-to-face.

When the consciousness-principle getteth outside the body, it sayeth to itself, "Am I dead, or am I not dead?" It cannot determine. It seeth its relatives and connexions as it had been used to seeing them before. It even heareth the wailings. The terrifying *karmic* illusions have not yet dawned. Nor have the frightful apparitions or experiences caused by the Lords of Death yet come.

During this interval, the directions are to be applied:

O thou of noble-birth, meditate upon thine own tutelary deity. [Here the deity's name is to be mentioned by the reader]. Do not be distracted. Earnestly concentrate thy mind upon thy tutelary deity. Meditate upon him as if he were the reflection of the moon in water, apparent yet inexistent in itself. Meditate upon him as if he were a being with a physical body. . .

Meditate upon the Great Compassionate Lord. . . . .

While on the second stage of the *Bardo*, one's body is of the nature of that called the shining illusory-body.

Not knowing whether he be dead or not, a state of lucidity cometh to the deceased. If the instructions be successfully applied to the deceased while he is in that state, then, by the meeting of the Mother-Reality and

the Offspring-Reality, *karma* controlleth not. Like the sun's rays, for example, dispelling the darkness, the Clear Light on the Path dispelleth the power of *karma*.

That which is called the second stage of the *Bardo* dawneth upon the thought-body. The Knower hovereth within those places to which its activities had been limited. If at this time this special teaching be applied efficiently, then the purpose will be fulfilled; for the *karmic* illusions will not have come yet, and, therefore, he [the deceased] cannot be turned hither and thither from his aim of achieving Enlightenment.

THE THIRD STAGE OF THE *BARDO*, CALLED THE *CHÖNYID BARDO*, WHEN THE *KARMIC* APPARITIONS APPEAR

But even though the Primary Clear Light be not recognized, the Clear Light of the second *Bardo* being recognized, Liberation will be attained. If not liberated even by that, then that called the third *Bardo* or the *Chönyid Bardo* dawneth.

In this third stage of the *Bardo*, the *karmic* illusions come to shine. It is very important that this Great Setting-face-to-face of the *Chönyid Bardo* be read: it hath much power and can do much good.

About this time the deceased can see that the share of food is being set aside, that the body is being stripped of its garments, that the place of the sleeping-rug is being swept; can hear all the weeping and wailing of his friends and relatives, and, although he can see them and can hear them calling upon him, they cannot hear him calling upon them, so he goeth away displeased.

At that time, sounds, lights, and rays—all three—are experienced. These awe, frighten, and terrify, and cause much fatigue. At this moment, this setting-face-to-face with the *Bardo* during the experiencing of Reality is to be applied. Call the deceased by name, and correctly and distinctly explain to him, as follows:

O nobly-born, thou wilt experience three Bardos, *the* Bardo *of the moment of death, the* Bardo *during the experiencing of Reality, and the* Bardo *while seeking rebirth. Of these three, up to yesterday, thou hadst experienced the* Bardo *of the moment of death. Although the Clear Light of Reality dawned upon thee, thou wert unable to hold on, and so thou hast to wander here. Now henceforth thou art going to experience the other two, the* Chönyid Bardo *and the* Sidpa Bardo.

Thou will pay undistracted attention to that with which I am about to set thee face to face, and hold on:

O nobly-born, that which is called death hath now come. Thou art departing from this world, but thou art not the only one; death cometh to all. Do not cling, in fondness and weakness, to this life. Even though thou clingest out of weakness, thou hast not the power to remain here. Thou wilt gain nothing more than wandering in this Sangsāra. *Be not attached to this world; be not weak. Remember the Precious Trinity. . .*

O nobly-born, when thy body and mind were separating, thou must have experienced a glimpse of the Pure Truth, subtle, sparkling, bright, dazzling, glorious, and radiantly awesome, in appearance like a mirage moving across a landscape in spring-time in one continuous stream of vibrations. Be not daunted thereby, nor terrified, nor awed. That is the radiance of thine own true nature. Recognize it.

From the midst of that radiance, the natural sound of Reality, reverberating like a thousand thunders simultaneously sounding, will come. That is the natural sound of thine own real self. Be not daunted thereby, nor terrified, nor awed.

The body which thou hast now is called the thought-body of propensities. Since thou hast not a material body of flesh and blood, whatever may come—sounds, lights, or rays—are, all three, unable to harm thee: thou art incapable of dying. It is quite sufficient for thee to know that these apparitions are thine own thought-forms. Recognize this to be the Bardo.

O nobly-born, if thou dost not now recognize thine own thought-forms, whatever of meditation or of devotion thou mayst have performed while in the human world–if thou hast not met with this present teaching–the lights will daunt thee, the sounds will awe thee, and the rays will terrify thee. Shouldst thou not know this all-important key to the teachings–not being able to recognize the sounds, lights, and rays–thou wilt have to wander in the Sangsāra.

THE DAWNING OF THE PEACEFUL DEITIES, FROM THE FIRST TO THE SEVENTH DAY

[Assuming that the deceased is *karmically* bound—as the average departed one is—to pass through the forty-nine days of the *Bardo* existence, despite the very frequent settings-face-to-face, the daily trials and dangers which he must meet and attempt to triumph over, during the first seven days, wherein dawn the Peaceful Deities, are next explained to him in detail; the first day, judging from the text, being reckoned from the time in which normally he would be expected to wake up to the fact that he is dead and on the way back to rebirth, or about three and one-half to four days after death.]

THE FIRST DAY

O nobly-born, thou hast been in a swoon during the last three and one-half days. As soon as thou art recovered from this swoon, thou wilt have the thought, "What hath happened!"

Act so that thou wilt recognize the Bardo. *At that time, all the* Sangsāra *will be in revolution; and the phenomenal appearances that thou wilt see then will be the radiances and deities. The whole heavens will appear deep blue.*

Then, from the Central Realm, called the Spreading Forth of the Seed, the Bhagavān Vairochana, white in colour, and seated upon a lion-throne, bearing an eight-spoked wheel in his hand, and embraced by the Mother of the Space of Heaven, will manifest himself to thee.

It is the aggregate of matter resolved into its primordial state which is the blue light.

The Wisdom of the Dharma–Dhātu, *blue in colour, shining, transparent, glorious, dazzling, from the heart of Vairochana as the Father-Mother, will shoot forth and strike against thee with a light so radiant that thou will scarcely be able to look at it.*

Along with it, there will also shine a dull white light from the devas, which will strike against thee in thy front.

Thereupon, because of the power of bad karma, *the glorious blue of the Wisdom of* the Dharma–Dhātu *will produce in thee fear and terror, and thou wilt wish to flee from it. Thou wilt beget a fondness for the dull white light of the devas.*

At this stage, thou must not be awed by the divine blue light which will appear shining, dazzling, and glorious; and be not startled by it. That is the light of the Tathāgata called the Light of the Wisdom of the Dharma–Dhātu. *Put thy faith in it, believe in it firmly, and pray unto it, thinking in thy mind that it is the light proceeding from the heart of the Bhagavān Vairochana coming to receive thee while in the dangerous ambuscade of the Bardo. That light is the light of the grace of Vairochana.*

Be not fond of the dull white light of the devas. Be not attached to it; be not weak. If thou be attached to it, thou wilt wander into the abodes of the devas and be drawn into the whirl of the Six Lokas. That is an interruption to obstruct thee on the Path of Liberation. Look not at it. Look at the bright blue light in deep faith. Put thy whole thought earnestly upon Vairochana and repeat after me this prayer:

"Alas! when wandering in the Sangsāra, *because of intense stupidity,*
On the radiant light-path of the
Dharma-Dhātu *Wisdom*
May I be led by the BhagavānVairochana,
May the Divine Mother of Infinite Space be my rearguard;
May I be led safely across the fearful ambush of the Bardo;
May I be placed in the state of the All-

Perfect Buddhahood."

Praying thus, in intense humble faith, thou wilt merge, in halo of rainbow light, into the heart of Vairochana, and obtain Buddhahood in the Sambhoga-Kāya, *in the Central Realm of the Densely-Packed.*

[Each day, in a similar way, a different deity dawns: on the second day, the accompanying light of wisdom is white and associated with the element water, and with it comes a dull smoke-colored light from Hell. On the third day the light of Wisdom is yellow, associated with earth, and with it comes a dull bluish-yellow light from the human world. On the fourth day, the light of wisdom is red (fire) and comes with the dull red light of the *Preta Loka*, the world of ghosts. On the fifth day, it is green (air) accompanied by the dull green light of the *Asura Loka* (the Titan world). On the sixth, the lights of all four elements appear simultaneously, and side by side with them the impure, illusory lights of the six *Lokas* or worlds.

On the seventh day come the five Knowledge Holding Deities with a fire-colored radiance, and at the same time, a dull blue light from the brute world.

From the eighth to the fourteenth day, the wrathful Blood-Drinking Deities dawn. At any moment, if they are recognized as thought forms, liberation may be attained.

After this comes the Third Bardo: The *Sidpa Bardo*, the State of Seeking Rebirth and The Process of Rebirth.]

At whatever distance one may be wandering in the *Bardo*, one heareth and cometh, for one possesseth the slender sense of supernormal perception and foreknowledge; and, recollecting and apprehending instantaneously, the mind is capable of being changed. Therefore is the Teaching of great use here. It is like the mechanism of a catapult. It is like the moving of a big wooden beam which a hundred men cannot carry, but which by being floated upon water can be towed wherever desired in a moment. It is like the controlling of a horse's mouth by means of a bridle.

Therefore, going near one who hath passed out of this life—if the body be there—impress this vividly, again and again, until blood and the yellowish water-secretion begin to issue from the nostrils. At that time the corpse should not be disturbed. The rules to be observed for this are: no animal should be slain on account of the deceased; nor should relatives weep or make mournful wailings near the dead body; perform virtuous deeds as far as possible.

The Doctrine is one which liberateth by being seen, without need of meditation or of *sādhanā*; this Profound Teaching liberateth by being heard or by being seen. This Profound Teaching liberateth those of great evil *karma* through the Secret Pathway. One should not forget its meaning and the words, even though pursued by seven mastiffs.

By this Select Teaching, one obtaineth Buddhahood at the moment of death. Were the Buddhas of the Three Times to seek, They could not find any doctrine transcending this.

Thus is completed the Profound Heart-Drops of the *Bardo* Doctrine, called *The Bardo Thödol*, which liberateth embodied beings.

[Here endeth the Tibetan
Book of the Dead]

From *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, trans. by W. Y. Evans-Wentz. © 1960, by Oxford University Press. Reprinted by permission.

From **Jalal al-din Rumi**

Jalal al-din Rumi (1207-1273), Sufi master and poet, founder of the Mevlevi dervish sect:

Die now, die now, in this Love die; when you have died in this Love, you will all receive new life.

Die now, die now, and do not fear this death; it is because of life that you are fleeing from the silent one.

Die now, die now, and break away from this carnal soul, for this carnal soul is as a chain and you are as prisoners.

Take an axe to dig through the prison; when you have broken the prison you will all be kings and princes.

Die now, die now before the beauteous King; when you have died before the King, you will all be kings and renowned.

Die now, die now, and come forth from this cloud; when you come forth from this cloud, you will all be radiant full moons.

Be silent, be silent; silence is the sign of death; it is because of life that you are fleeing from the silent one.

The Mystical Poems of Rumi, trans. by A. J. Arberry. The University of Chicago Press. © 1968 by A. J. Arberry. Reprinted by permission.

From **Al-Ghazzali**

Al-Ghazzali, twelfth-century Sufi mystic and writer:

Do you not see how, when you are asleep, you believe things and imagine circumstances, holding them to be stable and enduring, and, so long as you are in that dream-condition, have no doubts about them? And is it not the case that when you awake you know that all you have imagined and believed is unfounded and ineffectual? Why then are you confident that all your waking beliefs, whether from sense or intellect, are genuine? They are true in respect of your present state; but it is possible that a state will come upon you whose relation to your waking consciousness is analogous to the relation of the latter to dreaming. In comparison with this state your waking consciousness would be like dreaming! When you have entered into this state, you will be certain that all the suppositions of your intellect are empty imaginings. It may be that that state is what the Sufis claim as their special "state" (sc. mystic union or ecstasy), for they consider that in their "states" (or ecstasies), which occur when they have withdrawn into themselves and are absent from their senses, they witness states (or circumstances) which do not tally with these principles of the intellect. Perhaps that "state" is death; for the Messenger of God (God bless and preserve him) says: "The people are dreaming; when they die, they become awake." So perhaps life in this world is a dream by comparison with the world to come; and when a man dies, things come to appear differently to him from what he now beholds, and at the same time the words are addressed to him: "We have taken off thee thy covering, and thy sight today is sharp" (Q. 50, 21).

The Faith and Practise of Al-Ghazzali trans. by W. Montgomery Watt. George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

From Shaikh Ahmad Ahsa'i, 17?-1826, renewer of the Shiite tradition and founder of the Shaikhi school which continues in the present time. He explains the teaching of four bodies:

The physical body	—	*jasad A*
The spiritual body	—	*jasad B*
The astral body	—	*jism A*
The supracelestial body	—	*jism B*

The physical body (jasad A) and the spiritual body (jasad B) are separated at death; the physical body dissolves, but the spiritual body survives in the tomb. The "I-spirit" is separated from both these bodies at death, and inhabiting the astral body (jism A) it makes its appearance in the intermediate world or barzakh *(cf.* bardo *in the Tibetan teaching). The "I-spirit" remains in this vehicle until the first sounding of the trumpet. It is then finally purified and separated from jism A, the astral body; then it "disappears" in the "cosmic pause" between the two soundings of the trumpet. At the second trumpet blast it descends toward the tomb where "all its treasures blend together" and the "I-spirit" penetrates into the spiritual body (jasad B).*

Do you not see how it may happen to Zayd, for instance, to be consumed by disease; he wastes away to the point where one cannot believe there is one ounce of flesh left on him. Yet he is certainly Zayd; he retains his identity. Spontaneously and without doubt you recognize him as still Zayd the rebel; not one particle of his rebellion has disappeared. If what disappeared as the result of his wasting away had been capable of producing the disappearance of his rebellion, then the latter would have almost entirely disappeared, because in that case it would have lost both its support and its source. The same could be said about Zayd the faithful. Not one particle of his fidelity will have disappeared, since his fidelity has no connection whatever with that part of him which has disappeared, neither the connection of an effect with its cause, nor that of a derivative with its source—no interdependence exists of any kind whatsoever. If that which the sickness has caused to disappear in Zayd had really been a part of him, its disappearance would have been accompanied by the disappearance of the good and evil proper to Zayd's person. Inversely, if he puts on weight, Zayd remains the same Zayd; just as in the previous case when there was no decrease, so here there is no increase, so far as his essence and qualities are concerned, nor any increase of fidelity or rebellion.

In short, this *jasad, this body of flesh consisting of terrestrial Elements,* is not a part of Zayd. It is homologous to the opacity that exists in silica and potash. When these are fused together, liquified, they turn into glass. The glass is certainly the same silica and the same potash that were completely dense and opaque. But after the fusion, the opacity disappeared. This means that the opacity is not a property of the earth itself. The earth itself is subtle and transparent; its opacity is caused by the clash between the Elements. When water is still and pure, you see everything in its depths. But if you stir it up, you can no longer distinguish anything in it so long as it is in movement, because of the collision between its parts and the rarefaction of the element air. What then happens when the four elemental Natures come into collison! This *jasad [jasad A],* this body of flesh made of terrestrial elements, is comparable to the density that makes silica and potash opaque, although this is not a part of their essence, of their ipseity.

This body *(jasad B)* is the reality of the human being which, without increase or decrease, survives "in the tomb" after the body of flesh made of terrestrial elements, that is to say, the opaque density and accidentals, have been separated from it and dissolved. When these accidentals, the totality of which is named the elementary body of flesh *(jasad 'unsurī, jasad A),* have thus been separated from the human being, the fleshly eyes, the organs of optical percep-

tion, no longer see him. When it is thus decomposed and destroyed, there is finally nothing of it to be found, so that some people affirm that the human being is annihilated. Not at all! Not so! But if we say that there is a body that survives "in the tomb," that body is nonetheless *invisible* to earthly beings, to the people of this world, on account of the opacity that darkens their fleshly eyes and prevents them from *seeing* what is not of the same kind as themselves. this is why the Imām Ja'far again compares this invisible body to the gold dust in the goldsmith's crucible. This, likewise, the eyes do not see. But the goldsmith, having washed it with water and purified it of the earth with which it was mixed, causes it to become visible.

The same applies to the body of "spiritual flesh" *(jasad B)* that survives "in the tomb." When God wishes to bring his creatures back to life he causes a rain coming from the the ocean situated below the Throne to spread out over the Earth, the water of this rain being colder than snow. . . . This is alluded to in a verse in the Qur'ān ("and His Throne rested on the Waters," 11:9). Then the face of the Earth becomes blended into a single ocean. The waves dash against one another under the vehemence of the winds. A universal refining process takes place. The members of the spiritual body *(jasad B)* of each individual join together to form an organism in perfect "shape," that is to say conforming to the structure the body had in this world. . .

As for the second *jasad (jasad B,* the *caro spiritualis* of the Elements of the spiritual world), this body survives, for the "clay" from which it was constituted survives "in the tomb," when the Earth has devoured the elementary terrestrial body of flesh *(jasad A)*, and when every part of the latter has dissolved into its source: the fiery parts going back to Fire, the airy parts to Air, the watery parts to Water, the earthy parts to Earth; whereas the "body of celestial flesh" survives and retains its perfect "shape," as the Imām Ja'far Sādiq says. On the other hand, the answer we heard read a moment ago, given by the First Imām to an Arab, referred precisely to the first *jasad*, to the corruptible body of flesh made from terrestrial elements. But the body of spiritual flesh *(jasad B)* is, on the contrary, the one referred to in the saying of the Imām Ja'far, when he states that the "clay" of which it is made survives "in the tomb" and retains its shape intact and perfect.

As for the two *jism* (that is *jism A*, or astral subtle body, and *jism B*, the supracelestial archetypal body), the first *(jism A)* is the body in which the Spirit departs from its body of terrestrial flesh (i.e., *jasad A*). The "astral subtle body" (*jism A*) remains with the Spirit, whereas the Spirit is separated from its "subtle body of spiritual flesh" *(jasad B)* at the moment when death intervenes between them. It is in the astral body *(jism A)* that the spirit makes its appearance in the *barzakh* (the intermediate world). This astral body is the vehicle *(markab, okhēma)* and habitation of the Spirit until the "first sounding" of the Trumpet. At that moment it receives a last purification, and the density which we call the first *jism (jism A*, or astral body) also departs from it. When the archangel Seraphiel sounds the "Trumpet of Resurrection" (i.e., "the second blast" of the Trumpet), the Spirit descends toward the tomb. All its treasures blend together, it penetrates into the subtle *jasad (jasad B, caro spiritualis)*; they are then "reassembled," that is, resuscitated. . .

So we shall still add the following: When the "I"-spirit, that which the Angel of Death gathers up and carries away, has finally shed its astral body *(jism A)*, it also will disappear, but only during the interval (the "cosmic pause") between the two "blasts of the Trumpet." When we speak of its disappearance, what we in fact mean is that when the Angel of Death gathers up the "I"-spirit from its material body *(jasad A)*, this spirit "goes away" though keeping its original preterrestrial structure *(jism B)* intact, and that it survives in the *barzakh* in the waking state and in full consciousness.

Shaikh Ahmad Ahsa'i quoted in Henri Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, trans. Nancy Pearson. Bollingen Series XCI:2. © April 1977 by Princeton University Press. Reprinted by permission.

ON THE JUDAIC TRADITION

From The Zohar

The Zohar is a commentary on the Torah, which is the most sacred of all Jewish scriptures and consists of the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch. The Zohar probably dates only from about the thirteenth century A.D., but is considered to be a revelation from God and is an important part of the Kabbalistic writings.

THE THREE ASPECTS OF THE SOUL

The names and grades of the soul of man are three: *nefesh* [vital soul], *ruah* [spirit], *neshamah* [innermost soul, super-soul]. The three are comprehended one within the other, but each has its separate abode.

While the body in the grave is decomposing and moldering to dust, *nefesh* tarries with it, and it hovers about in this world, going here and there among the living, wanting to know their sorrows, and interceding for them at their need.

Ruah betakes itself into the earthly Garden of Eden. There, this spirit, desiring to enjoy the pleasures of the magnificent Garden, vests itself in a garment, as it were, of a likeness, a semblance of the body in which it had its abode in this world. On Sabbaths, New Moons and festival days, it ascends up to the supernal sphere, regaling itself with the delights there, and then it goes back to the Garden. As it is written: "And the spirit [*ruah*] returneth unto God who gave it" [Eccles. 12:7], that is, at the special holidays and times we have mentioned.

But *neshamah* ascends forthwith to her place, in the domain from which she emanated, and it is on her account that the light is lit, to shine above. Never thereafter does she descend to the earth. In *neshamah* is realized the One who embraces all sides, the upper and the lower. And until such time as *neshamah* has ascended to be joined with the Throne, *ruah* is unable to be crowned in the lower Garden and *nefesh* cannot rest easy in its place; but these find rest when she ascends.

Now when the children of men, being troubled and sorrowful, betake themselves to the graves of those who are gone, then *nefesh* is wakened, and it goes out to bestir *ruah*, which then rouses the patriarchs, and after, *neshamah*. Whereupon the Holy One, be blessed, has pity on the world. . . .

But if *neshamah* has for some reason been prevented from ascending to her proper place, then *ruah*, coming to the gate of the Garden of Eden, finds it closed against it, and, unable to enter, wanders about alone and dejected; while *nefesh*, too, flits from place to place in the world, and seeing the body in which it once was tenant eaten by worms and undergoing the judgment of the grave, it mourns for it, as the Scripture says: "But his flesh grieveth for him, and his soul mourneth over him" [Job 14:22].

So do they all undergo suffering, until the time when *neshamah* is enabled to reach to her proper place above. Then, however, each of the two others becomes attached to its rightful place; this is because all three are one, comprising a unity, embraced in a mystical bond.

Zohar: The Book of Splendor. Ed. by Gershom G. Scholem. © 1949, by Schocken Books, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

And the dust returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit returneth unto God who gave it (Eccl. XII, 7). He said: 'When the Holy One, blessed be He, created Adam, He took his dust from the site of the Temple and built his body out of the four corners of the world, all of which contributed to his formation. After that He poured over him the spirit of life as it says, "and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Gen. II, 7). Adam then arose and realised that he was both of heaven and of earth, and so he united himself to the Divine and was endowed with mystic Wisdom. Each son of man is, after the same model, a composite of the heavenly and the earthly; and all those who know how to sanctify themselves in the right manner in this world, when they beget a son cause the holy spirit to be drawn upon him from the region whence all sanctities emerge. Such are called the children of the Holy One; and as their bodies were formed in sanctity, so are they given a spirit from the supernal holy region. Observe that the day on which a man is about to depart from this world is a day of reckoning when the body and the soul in combination have to give an account of their works. The soul afterwards leaves him, and the body returns to the earth, both thus returning to their original source, where they will remain until the time when the Holy One will bring the dead to life again. Then God will cause the identical body and the identical soul to return to the world in their former state, as it is written, "Thy dead shall live, my dead bodies shall arise" (Is. XXVI, 19). The same soul is meanwhile stored up by the Holy One, thus returning to its original place, as it is written, "And the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Eccl. XII, 7). And at the time when the Holy One will raise the dead to life He will cause dew to descend upon them from His head. By means of that dew all will rise from the dust, as it says, "for thy dew is as the dew of lights" (Is. XXVI, 19), these being the supernal lights through which the Almighty will in future pour forth life upon the world. For [131a] the tree of life exudes life unceasingly into the universe. Life in the present dispensation is cut short through the influence of the evil serpent, whose dominion is symbolised by the darkened moon. Under the same influence the celestial waters, as it were, fail, and life is not dispensed in the world in proper measure. At that time, however, the evil tempter, who is none other than the evil serpent, will be removed from the world by the Almighty and disappear, as it is written, "and I will cause the unclean spirit to pass out of the earth" (Zech. XIII, 2). After he disappears the moon will no more be obscured, and the waters of the celestial river will flow on perennially. Then will be fulfilled the prophecy, "Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of the seven days, etc." (Is. XXX, 26).'

'Observe that at the time when the Holy One will bring the dead back to life, all the souls mustered before Him will bear each a form identical with the one it bore in this world. The Holy One will bring them down, and will call them by their names, as it says, "He calleth them all by name" (*Ibid*. XL, 26). Every soul will then enter into its own place, and the dead will be fully resurrected, and the world will thus reach its consummation. Of that time it is written, "And the reproach of his people will he take away from off all the earth" (*Ibid*. XXV, 8), which is a reference to the evil tempter, who darkens the faces of men and leads them astray.'

Zohar, II, 131–2

From The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel

The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley and, lo, they were very dry.

And he said unto me, "Son of Man, can these bones live?"

And I answered, "O Lord God, thou knowest."

Again he said unto me, "Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, 'O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones: "Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: and I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord." ' "

Sacred Portal Panel. Beth Alpha Synagogue.

So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them.

Then said he unto me, "Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, Son of Man, and say to the wind, 'Thus saith the Lord God: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." ' "

So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

Then he said unto me, "Son of Man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.' Therefore prophesy and say unto them, 'Thus saith the Lord God: "Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it," saith the Lord.' "

Ezekiel, Chap. 37:1-14

Christ of the Apocalypse. Chartres Cathedral

ON THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

The Christian Bible is divided into the Old Testament, which contains the Pentateuch and other Judaic scriptures, and the New Testament, which gives the life and teachings of Jesus Christ in the four Gospels, and an account of how his followers tried to develop his teaching, in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of Paul and others, and the Apocalypse or Revelation of St. John.

From the Gospels:

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know."

Thomas saith unto him,

"Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?"

Jesus saith unto him,

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him and have seen him."

John 14

From the Apocalypse:

And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.

And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.

And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God.

And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying,

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

And he that sat upon the throne said,

"Behold, I make all things new." And he said unto me, "Write: for these words are true and faithful."

And he said unto me,

"It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the

beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son."

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bore twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face ;and his name shall be in their foreheads.

And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign forever and ever.

Revelation

From the Epistles:

Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

But now is Christ risen from the dead; and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

But some man will say, "How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial, but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one

"Jerusalem," by William Blake— detail.

glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body: it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, "The first man Adam was made a living soul"; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians
Chapter 15

From G. I. Gurdjieff

" 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but, if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.'

"This text has many different meanings. But first of all it is necessary to know the principle contained in this text in its full measure as applied to man.

"There is a book of aphorisms which has never been published and probably never will be published. In relation to what we are speaking of now this book says the following:

" *'A man may be born, but in order to be born he must first die, and in order to die he must first awake.'*

"In another place it says:

" *'When a man awakes he can die; when he dies he can be born.'*

"We must find out what this means.

" 'To awake,' 'to die,' 'to be born.' These are three successive stages. If you study the Gospels attentively you will see that references are often made to the possibility of being born, several references are made to the necessity of 'dying,' and there are very many references to the necessity of 'awakening'—'watch, for ye know not the day and hour. . .' and so on. But these three possibilities of man, to awake or not to sleep, to die, and to be born, are not set down in connection with one another. Nevertheless this is the whole point. If a man dies without having awakened he cannot be born. If a man is born without having died he may become an 'immortal thing.' Thus the fact that he has not 'died' prevents a man from being 'born'; the fact of his not having awakened prevents him from 'dying'; and should he be born without having died he is prevented from 'being.'

"We have already spoken enough about the meaning of being 'born.' This relates to the beginning of a new growth of essence, the beginning of the formation of individuality, the beginning of the appearance of one indivisible I.

"But in order to be able to attain this or at least begin to attain it, a man must die, that is, he must free himself from a thousand petty attachments and identifications which hold him in the position in which he is. He is attached to everything in his life, attached to his imagination, attached to his stupidity, attached even to his sufferings, possibly to his sufferings more than to anything else. He must free himself from this attachment. Attachment to things, identification with things, keep alive a thousand useless I's in a man. These I's must die in order that the big I may be born. But how can they be made to die? They do not want to die. It is at this point that the possibility of awakening comes to the rescue. To awaken means to realize one's nothingness, that is to realize one's complete and absolute mechanicalness and one's complete and absolute helplessness. And it is not sufficient to realize it philosophically in words. It is necessary to realize it in clear, simple, and concrete facts, in one's own facts. When a man begins to know himself a little he will see in himself many things that are bound to horrify him. So long as a man is not horrified at himself he knows nothing about himself. A man has seen in himself something that horrifies him. He decides to throw it off, stop it, put an end to it. But however many efforts he makes, he feels that he cannot do this, that everything remains as it was. Here he will see his impotence, his helplessness, and his nothingness; or again, when he begins to know himself a man sees that he has nothing that is his own, that is, that all that he has regarded as his own, his views, thoughts, convictions, tastes, habits, even faults and vices, all these are not his own, but have been either formed through imitation or borrowed from somewhere ready-made. In feeling this a man may feel his nothingness. And in feeling his nothingness a man should see himself as he really is, not for a second, not for a moment, but constantly, never forgetting it.

"This continual consciousness of his nothingness and of his helplessness will eventually give a man the courage to 'die,' that is, to die, not merely mentally or in theory, but to die in fact and to renounce actually and forever those aspects of himself which are either unnecessary from the point of view of his inner growth or which hinder it. These aspects are first of all his 'false I,' and then all the fantastic ideas about his 'individuality,' 'will,' 'consciousness,' 'capacity to do,' his powers, initiative, determination, and so on.

"But in order to see a thing *always*, one must first of all see it even if only for a second. All new powers and capacities of realization come always in one and the same way. At first they appear in the form of flashes at rare and short moments; afterwards they appear more often and last longer until, finally, after very long work they become permanent. The same thing applies to awakening. It is impossible to awaken completely all at once. One must first begin to awaken for short moments. *But one must die all at once and forever* after having made a certain effort, having surmounted a certain obstacle, having taken a certain decision from which there is no going back. This would be difficult, even impossible, for a man, were it not for the slow and gradual awakening which precedes it."

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One of the seven rites of the Sioux, recounted by the medicine man Black Elk, is that of the Keeping of the Soul. The last part of this rite is called the Releasing of the Soul, of which we give here a shortened version. In 1890 (the year of Wounded Knee) the United States government forbade the Sioux to practise this rite and demanded the release of all souls in their keeping.

The Releasing of the Soul: A Sioux Ceremony

Before the soul is released, all the people gather together, for everybody participates in this great rite, which can best be called The Making of Sacredness. As this time approaches, all the men go hunting for the buffalo, and when many are killed the bones are cracked and boiled, and from this tallow *wasna* is made. The women dry the best part of the meat, which is then called *papa*, and all this is contributed to the rites.

After first consulting with the other holy men of the band, the keeper of the soul appoints the special day, and when this time arrives, the helpers make a large ceremonial lodge from several small tipis and cover the earth inside with sacred sage.

The helper of the keeper of the soul then takes a pipe, and holding it up to the heavens, he cries: "Behold, O *Wakan-Tanka!* [Great Mystery, The Supreme Being] We are now about to do Thy will. With all the sacred beings of the universe, we offer to You this pipe!"

The helper then takes a pinch of the sacred tobacco *kinni-kinnik*, and holding it and the stem of the pipe towards the west, he cries: "With this *wakan* [sacred, mysterious] tobacco, we place You in the pipe, O winged Power of the west. We are about to send our voices to *Wakan-Tanka*, and we wish You to help us!

"This day is *wakan* because a soul is to be released. All over the universe there will be happiness and rejoicing! O You sacred Power of the place where the sun goes down, it is a great thing we are doing in placing You in the pipe. Give to us for our rites one of the two sacred red and blue days which You control!"

This Power of the west, now in the tobacco, is placed in the pipe . . .

Similarly, he prays to the north, the east, the south, and the earth.

When the pipe has thus been filled with all the Powers and with all that there is in the universe, it is given to the keeper of the soul, who takes it and, crying as he walks, goes to the tipi of the keeper of the most sacred pipe. Entering the tipi, and holding out the pipe with its stem pointing towards the south, he places it in the hands of the keeper of the pipe.

"*Hi Ho! Hi Ho!* Thanks!" the holy man says as he takes the pipe, "this pipe which you have brought to me is really as sacred as the original pipe which was given to us by the White Buffalo Cow Woman. Indeed, to one who understands they are really the same. But this pipe which you have now brought is especially sacred, for I see that there has been placed within it the whole universe. What is it that you wish?"

"We wish you to smoke this pipe and then to lead the rites for releasing this soul. We wish you to bring with you the original *wakan* pipe which you are keeping."

"*How, hetchetu welo,* [it is very good]" the holy man replied, "I will come!" He then offers the pipe which has been brought to him to the heavens, to the earth, to the four quarters; then he smokes it. When finished, he carefully saves the ashes, for they too are very *wakan*.

The two men return to the lodge where all has been made ready for the great rite. Entering, they walk around sun-wise and sit at the west of the lodge, opposite the door. The wife of the keeper of the soul then goes to her tipi, crying as she walks, picks up the sacred bundle, and returns to the lodge, where she stands in front of the keeper of the sacred pipe, placing the bundle in his two outstretched hands. "Thanks, thanks!" the holy keeper says, and then he speaks to the soul within the

bundle:

"You, O soul, were with your people, but soon you will leave. Today is your day, and it is *wakan*. Today your Father, *Wakan-Tanka*, is bending down to see you; all your people have arrived to be with you. All your relatives love you, and have taken good care of you. You and the holy woman of the four ages, who brought to us the sacred pipe, are now together here in this lodge; this robe here, which represents the sacred woman and which has covered you, will cover all your people! The sacred pipe which she brought to us has made the people happy. Behold! This is the sacred day! *Hetchetu welo!*"

A round circle is scraped on the ground to represent a buffalo wallow, and on this the sacred bundle is placed. Another round place is then made from the earth taken from the wallow, upon which a cross is drawn from west to east and from north to south. The pipe is placed upon this cross, with its stem to the west and the bowl at the east. Then the sacred bundle is placed beside the pipe, at the bottom of the good red road, for this is the place to which the soul will soon journey.

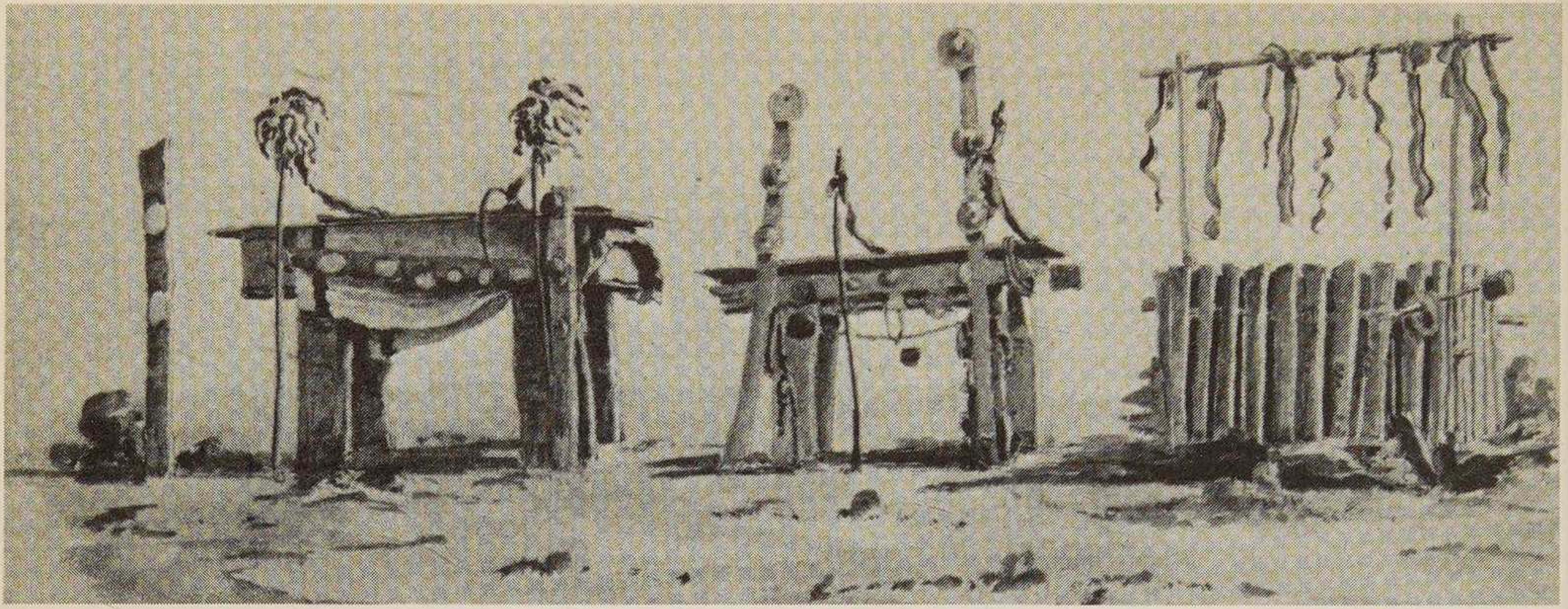
One of the helpers then goes to the fire at the center of the tipi and, with a split stick, picks up a glowing coal and places it in front of the keeper of the pipe. The keeper then holds the pipe in his left hand, and, taking up a pinch of a sacred herb in his right hand, he holds it up towards the heavens and lowers it slowly to the coal, stopping four times and praying: "O Grandfather, *Wakan-Tanka*, on this sacred day of Yours, I send to You this fragrance, which will reach to the heavens above. Within this herb, there is the earth, this great island; within it is my Grandmother, my Mother, and all the four-leggeds, the wingeds, and the two-legged peoples, who are all walking in a *wakan* manner. The fragrance of this herb will cover the entire universe. O *Wakan-Tanka*, be merciful to all!"

The bowl of the pipe is placed over the smoke, in such a way that this smoke passes through the pipe, coming out the end of the stem which is held towards the heaven. In this manner, *Wakan-Tanka* is the first to smoke, and by this act the pipe is purified. As he does this, the "keeper of the pipe" prays.

"O *Wakan-Tanka*, behold the pipe! The smoke from this herb will cover everything upon earth, and will reach even to the heavens. May the way of Thy people be as this smoke. We have offered this pipe to You, and now I place within its bowl the sacred *kinnikinnik*. You have taught us that the round bowl of the pipe is the very center of the universe and the heart of man! O *Wakan-Tanka*, bend down to look upon us today; look upon Thy pipe with which we are about to send a voice, along with the winged peoples, the four-leggeds, and all the fruits of our Mother Earth. All that You have made will join with us in sending this voice!"

As he fills the pipe, the holy keeper makes the ritual offerings of tobacco to the six directions, with prayers. In this manner, the whole universe is placed in the pipe, and then, turning to the people, the keeper of the pipe says: "Since we have done all this correctly, the soul should have a good journey, and it will help our people to increase and to walk the sacred path in a manner pleasing to *Wakan-Tanka*."

And then to the soul he says: "O you soul, my grandchild, you are the root of this great rite; from you there will grow much that is *wakan*. Through this rite our people will learn to be generous, to help those in need, and to follow in every way the teach-



ings of *Wakan-Tanka.* O soul, this is your day. The time has now come!

"There will be four virgins who will always carry with them the power of these rites. You, O soul, will cover them over with your sacred buffalo robe. This is your day; it is one of joy, for much Light has come to our people. . .

(*When the prayer has been completed, the pipe is passed around sun-wise and all the people smoke.*)

After the pipe has been offered up to *Wakan-Tanka,* the keeper begins to cry, and soon all the people are crying.

I should, perhaps, explain to you here, that it is good to cry at this moment, for it shows that we are thinking of the soul and of death, which must come to all created beings and things; and it is also a sign that we are humiliating ourselves before the Great Spirit, for we know that we are as dust before Him, who is everything, and who is all powerful.

All the food that is to be given to the soul is placed outside the lodge; this food the women pick up and enter the lodge. Within the lodge, on the south side, a willow post will have been set up, as high as a man, and around the top of it a piece of buckskin is tied, upon which a face has been painted. On top of this face there is a war bonnet, and around the post there has been placed a buffalo robe. This figure represents the soul, and leaning against him are his bows and arrows, knives, and all his possessions. As the women enter with the food, they pass around the lodge sun-wise. Stopping at the south, they each hug the "soul post"; then, after leaving their food, they walk out of the lodge.

A small bit of each food that has been brought for the soul is put into a wooden bowl, and this is placed in front of the two holy men who are seated at the west. Four pure virgins then enter and take their places at the north of the lodge, for the Power of this direction is purity. The keeper of the pipe then stands and speaks to the soul.

"You, O soul, are the *hokshichankiya* [spiritual influence, or seed]! You are as the root of the *wakan* tree which is at the center of our nation's hoop. May this tree bloom! May our people and the winged and the four-legged peoples all flourish! O soul, your relatives have brought you this food which you will soon eat, and, by this act, goodness will spread among the people. O soul, *Wakan-Tanka* has given to you four relatives who are sitting there at the north; they represent our true relatives: Grandfather and Father, *Wakan-Tanka,* and Grandmother and Mother, *Maka,* the Earth. Remember these four relatives, who are all really One, and, with Them in mind, look back upon your people as you travel upon the great path!"

A small hole is dug at the foot of the "soul post," and the keeper of the pipe holds the wooden bowl, in which is the purified food, towards the hole, saying to the soul: "You are about to eat this *wakan* food. When it is placed in your mouth its influence will spread, and it will cause the fruits of our Mother, the Earth, to increase and prosper. Your Grandmother is *wakan;* upon Her we stand as we place this food in your mouth. Do not forget us when you go forth to *Wakan-Tanka,* but look back upon us!"

The food is placed in the hole, and on top of it the juice of the wild cherry is poured, for this juice is the water of Life. The hole is then covered over with dirt, for the soul has finished its last meal. . .

(*The four virgins are exhorted to remember their sacred function and always to share their food with others; they are then*

fed the sacred meat and drink the juice.)

The keeper of the pipe then walks around to the south and, picking up the "soul bundle," says to it: "Grandchild, you are about to leave on a great journey. Your father and mother and all your relatives have loved you. Soon they will be happy."

The father then embraces the sacred bundle, by holding it to each shoulder, and after he has done this, the keeper says to him: "You loved your son, and you have kept him at the center of our people's hoop. As you have been good to this your loved one, so be good to all other people! The sacred influence of your son's soul will be upon the people; it is as a tree that will always bloom."

He then walks around to the north, and as he touches each virgin with the sacred bundle, he says: "The tree which was selected to be at the center of your sacred hoop is this! May it always flourish and bloom in a *wakan* manner!" Then, holding the bundle up towards the heavens, he cries: "Always look back upon your people, that they may walk the sacred path with firm steps!"

This, the keeper cries four times as he walked towards the door of the lodge, and, as he stops the fourth time just outside the door, he cries with a very shrill voice: "Behold your people! Look back upon them!"

The moment the bundle passes out of the lodge, the soul is released; it has departed on the "spirit trail" leading to *Wakan-Tanka.*

Once the soul has left the bundle containing the lock of hair, it is no longer especially *wakan*, but it may be kept by the family, if they wish, as something of a remembrance. The four holy virgins are each given a buffalo robe, and then they leave the lodge immediately after the keeper of the pipe.

With this, the rite is finished, and then the people all over the camp are happy and rejoice, and they rush up to touch the four virgins who are *lela wakan*, and who will always bear with them this great influence, bringing great strength to the people. Gifts are given out to the poor and unfortunate ones, and everywhere there is feasting and rejoicing. It is indeed a good day. *Hetchetu welo!*

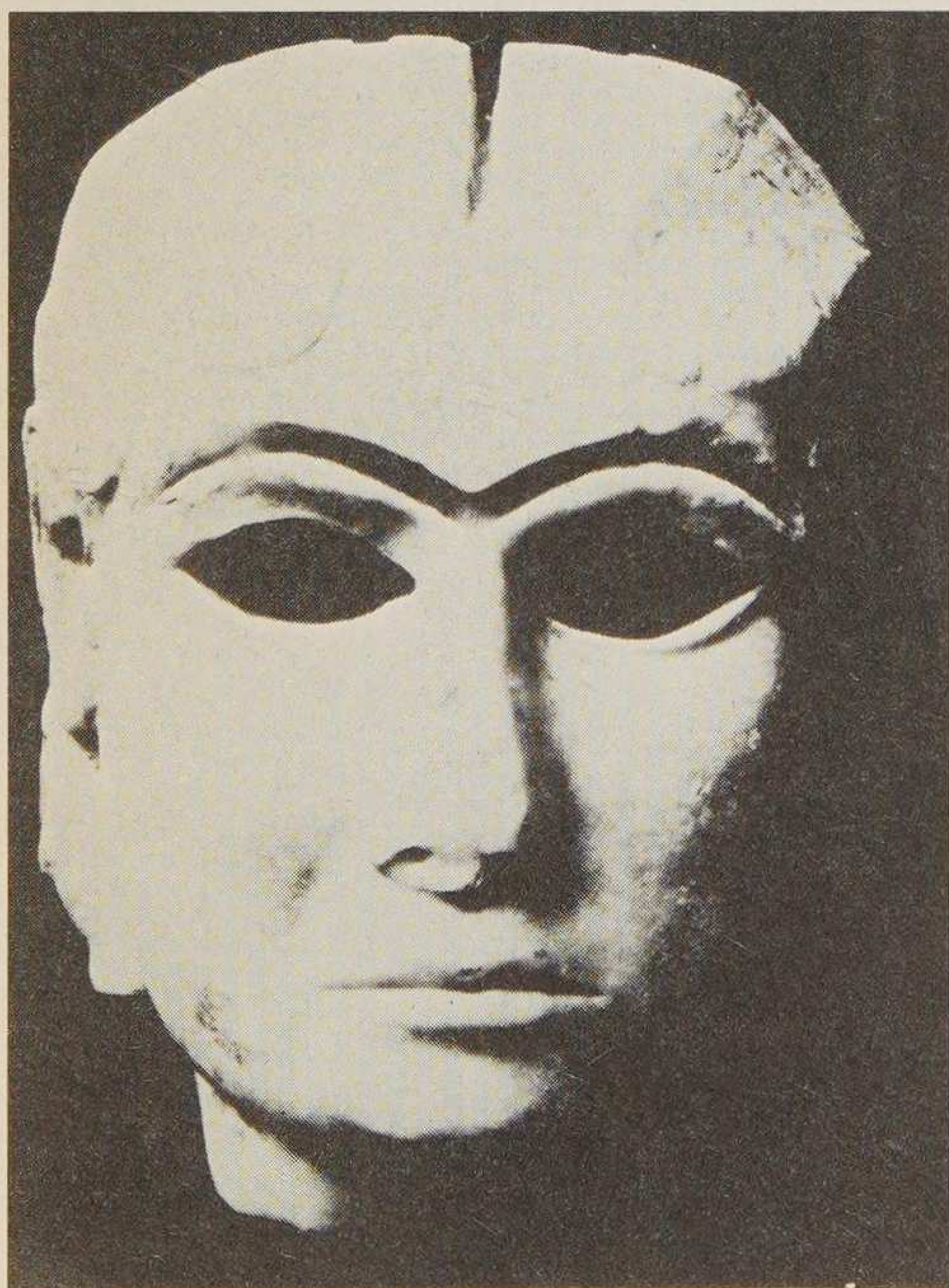
From *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Rites of the Oglala Sioux*, by Joseph Epes Brown. Copyright 1953 by the University of Oklahoma Press. Reprinted by permission.

Although there seems to be a remarkable unity of conviction about the nature of death at the esoteric core of the great religious traditions, at the exoteric, cultural level there is an equally remarkable diversity of concrete beliefs and practices. This collection of views of death and afterlife, presented from an anthropological perspective, indicates that variety, although it does not, of course, pretend to be at all comprehensive.

Since, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith and others have long insisted, religious beliefs, attitudes towards the mysteries of human existence, are finally what persons and communities actually live out, such sketches may tell as much about how people in various times and places have regarded death as the sacred texts presented in a previous part of this issue.

FACES of Death

Most of this material was gathered by William G. Doty.



"The Warka Head", *from the Temple precinct, Uruk, Iraq, 4th millenium B.C. From the Iraq Museum, Baghdad.*

We Are But Bones

Aborigine, Arnhem Land, Australia

Many clans believe death is caused by sorcery, so the bereaved take great care to limit the effect of the magic involved. One must first persuade the spirit of the dead person to return to the sacred water hole from which it came before birth, so that it will not wander about and bring harm to the living. And the belongings of the deceased are distributed to survivors, including, if a male, his rights to sacred knowledge and ritual designs.

Rituals begin when death is near and continue, with much lamentation, as the body is painted one last time with the sacred totemic design of the deceased, and as the corpse is placed on a tree platform or in the ground until the flesh decomposes.

Several months later, further rituals mark the exhumation of the bones, which are painted carefully with ocher clan designs, broken with a stone, and interred in a hollow log. The senior wife may wear the skull of the deceased around her neck for a time to show the depth of her sorrow, and some of the smallest bones are given to near kin, for use in sorcery or as a means of passing on the *mana* of the deceased.

Finally, grave figures and posts are carved and placed at the grave, so that the spirit will know where to return, and not trouble the living. Bark baskets used in the funeral rituals are split and upended over the grave posts to signify the end of the death rituals.[1]

The Husband Makes Amends
Dobu, Eastern New Guinea

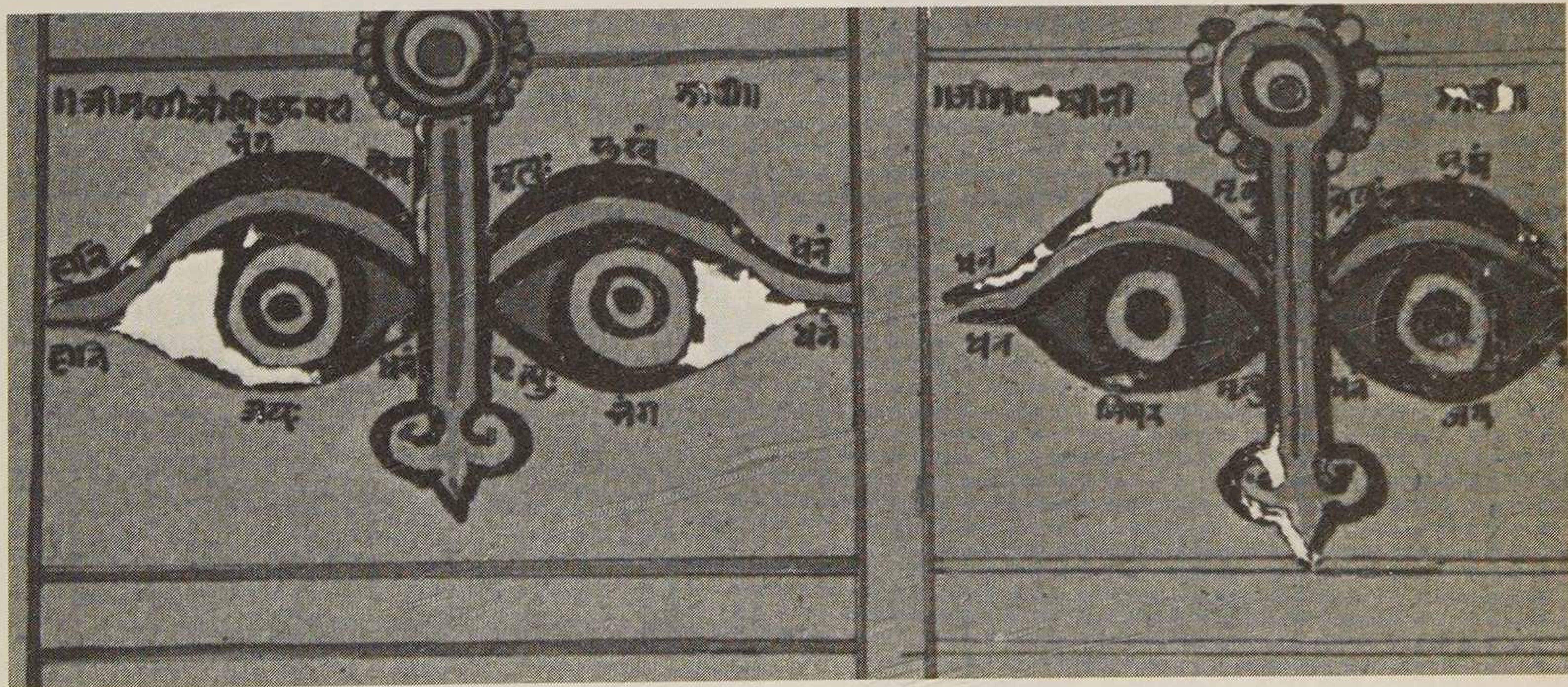
The house of the recently dead wife is left empty and abandoned, never to be used again. The surviving spouse is walled into an enclosure under the raised floor of the house, and his body blackened with charcoal. The black looped rope, symbol of mourning, is hung around his neck.

For one or two months, he remains seated on the ground in this dark enclosure, and later he works in the gardens of his parents-in-law, as he did during his betrothal, for no recompense. He is not allowed to smile, nor take part in any exchange of food, until the skull of the deceased is taken from the grave and the spirit ceremonially sent upon its way to the land of the dead. Payments of cooked and uncooked yams must be made by his kin to the family of his spouse until the balance between the two groups is considered restored.[2]

Meeting Death Calmly
Modjokuto, Central Java

The funeral itself takes place as quickly after death as possible—usually only two to three hours after death. It is followed by commemorative feasts in the home of the survivors, repeated at three, seven, forty, and one hundred days after death, then again on the first and second anniversary of the death, and finally on the thousandth day, when the corpse is considered to have turned to dust, and the separation between living and dead is believed to have become absolute.

The momentum of the whole system aims at carrying the family and other mourners through the grief of separation with as little emotional disturbance as possible. There is a sort of calm, non-demonstrative letting go involved, producing for the individual, *iklas*, a detached state of "not caring," and for the neighborhood group, *rukin*, "communal harmony."[3]



Alive Yet Dead
Baganda, Uganda region

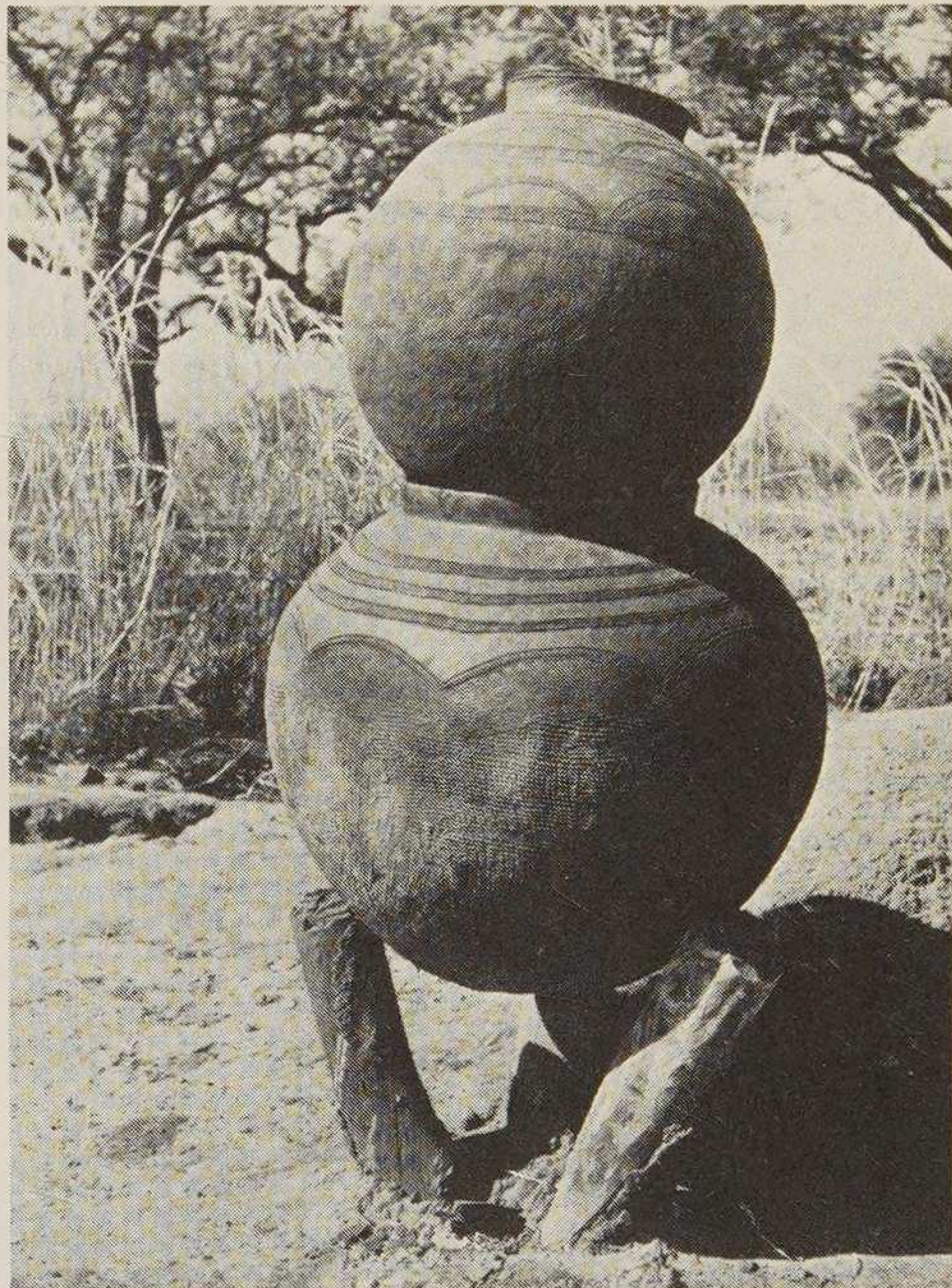
When a person dies, his soul leaves his body and is immediately transformed into a ghost. The ghost is invisible, but has many of the same characteristics as does the living: he may become hungry, cold, angry, etc., and remains a member of the family to which he belonged while alive.

After a visit to Walumbe, the god of death,

he returns to his grave and lives in a small shrine at its head. The surviving wives also live at the grave, continuing to tend his gardens, his domestic animals, and his shrine. If these activities are carried out well, and the ghost is pleased, he will not disturb his living relatives, but will continue—though invisibly—in the same roles he played during his lifetime.

Neglect of the shrine, however, may cause him to become malevolent, in which case he may bring illness, even death to his relatives and friends. Then a shaman is called upon to propitiate the ghost—or in extreme cases, to kill him for good by fire or drowning.

Two years after a person's death, his ghost is reincarnated by entering the body of a newly born member of the same clan and family. When that happens—the sign is that the baby laughs at the name of the ancestor whose spirit is now within him—the dead person's shrine may be abandoned.[4]



Female grave of the Sara tribe, French Equatorial Africa.

Death as a Phase
Ndembu, Zambia

Ku-fwa (death) does not have the note of finality that it possesses in much of Western civilization: for the Ndembu, "to die" often means to reach the end of a particular stage of development, a cycle of growth. After death, the person continues to be active, either as an ancestral spirit who watches the behavior of his living kin and may become manifest through various afflictions, or as partially reincarnated in a kinsman who demonstrates some of his mental and physical characteristics. Thus death, *ku-fwa*, is not thought of as an annihilation but rather as a change in social status, a different mode of existence.

Ku-fwa also stands for fainting, and after treatment, Ndembu may say that they have "died"—cf. the English phrase "to blackout." Death is just such a blackout, a period of powerlessness and passivity between two living states, and its terminology therefore pops up in menstruation, pregnancy, and circumcision rites.[5]

The Seed of Those to Come
Ik, East Africa

Today, with the disintegration of traditional Ik society, the old ceremonies can no longer be performed, but the old people remember: The body was buried with great ritual, both to remind the living of the good things in life, and to speed the soul on its journey to the stars of night.

The body should face the rising sun, folded up into the fetal position to mark its

celestial rebirth. The site of the grave should be a favorite place where, perhaps, the person had enjoyed sitting and relaxing. When the burial was done, a libation of beer was poured over the grave, and the rest drunk by the mourners.

At the next planting time, seeds of all the favorite foods were planted over and around the grave, and again a libation of beer was poured. As the grave was finally abandoned, the seeds germinated and drew life from the dust of the dead and rooted themselves in what had been this person. And anyone passing by would see the crops growing wild, blowing in the wind, seeds being scattered far and wide to create and maintain still other forms of life. Those passing by at the next harvest time would know that death is merely life in another form.[6]

The Many Dead
Edo, Benin Kingdom, Africa

There are many kinds of dead beings, corresponding to political and status categories among living people. "Unincorporated dead" are ghosts who are dangerous, nonbenevolent, and arbitrary, and can only be understood as acting out of anger and resentment against heirs that have neglected to convert them into ancestors and elders in the land of the dead.

The "incorporated dead" are manifold, but can be grouped into three main categories: The first, Fathers, representing the male parent's ancestors, control access of the living head of the clan to the ancient ones. The second group, Elders, represent the more undifferentiated elders of kinship, territorial, and associational groups, and are responsible for the continuation of group traditions. They punish infractions of rules by bringing sickness and disaster, and are thought to own lands that belong to villages as a whole, rather than individual plots, and also ritual paraphernalia and shrines.

Finally, Chiefs, the third group, consists of specific predecessors of living incumbents of hereditary political offices, the sacred kings, who are worshipped at their own separate shrines.[7]

Head of Chipi, deity of Death and Rebirth, Mexico, Oaxaca.

Three Afterworlds
Aztecs, Central Mexico

The souls of most of the dead went to Mictlan, an underworld home of the dead that was dreary and unpleasant. A second group, those who died of drowning, lightning, or diseases, went to a paradise called Tlalocan, the residence of the rain gods (Tlalocs). Here perpetual summer ruled, and the ghosts had all they wanted in the way of food and drink.

Finally, women who died in childbirth, victims sacrificed to the gods, and warriors killed in battle, all went to an even more attractive place, from which they sometimes returned during the day: warriors as humming birds, and mothers who died during

childbirth as moths. Both were thought to accompany the sun on its daily journey.[8]

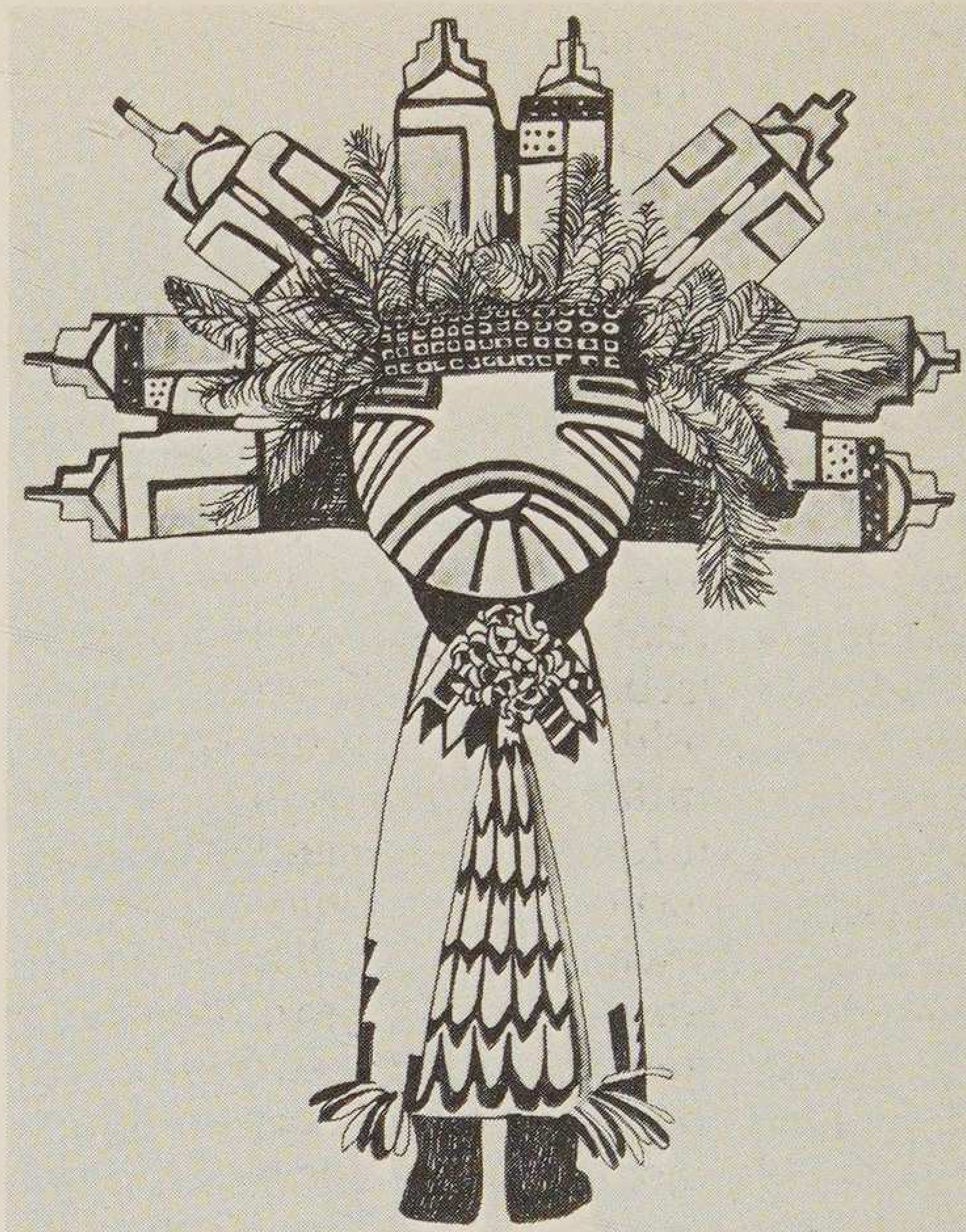
The Dead as Part of the Family
Yaqui and Mayo Indians, Northwestern Mexico

The dead are regarded as continuing members of the family. They return, in special ceremonies, to eat the essences of food prepared for them, and they may intercede with saints and deities on behalf of the family. Books of the names of the dead members of the family are kept on the household altar, and these names are recited in prayers that include a special prayer for those whose names may have been forgotten. To some extent, newly-born children are regarded as reincarnated ancestors, establishing a continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.[9]

Becoming a Cloud or Kachina
Hopi, Southwest U.S.

To the Hopi, dying is a metamorphosis in which the person is changed into (literally, "grows into") a new being, a cloud or *kachina*. At death, the immortal *hi'ksi*, associated with breath, leaves the body to make its way along a road, *puh'tabi*, to the house of the dead, which is in the underworld. While there is no communication with individual, identifiable Hopi who have died, contact is maintained with the dead, especially on ceremonial occasions when *kachinas* and clouds are invoked to foster the livelihood of the Hopi people.

The funerary customs reflect these beliefs. The dead are washed and prepared with cornmeal. They are given new names to identify them in their new home. Prayer feathers are attached to the body to convey the *hi'ksi* to its new home. The *puh'tabi*, or road on which the *hi'ksi* is to travel, is represented by a cotton thread with a feather at one end which is placed at the mouth with the thread extending over the chest to the navel. A "white cloud mask" made of raw cotton is put over the face. The body, wrapped in blankets, is buried in a round grave in a sitting position facing the sunrise. Water and food are placed between the feet of the dead to be carried as an offering to the chiefs of the land of the dead so that they will hasten the rain clouds to the Hopi people.[10]



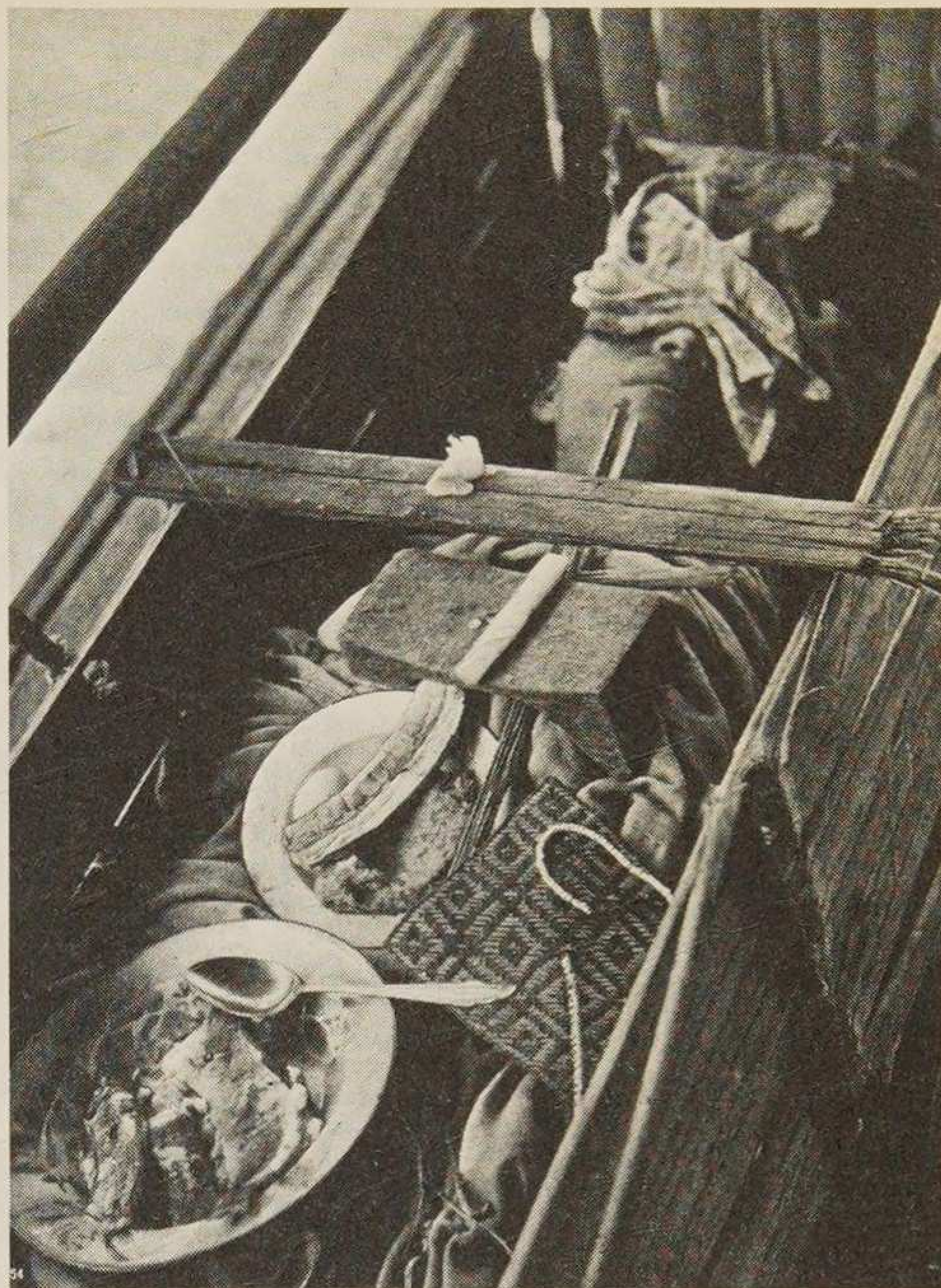
Hopi Kachina drawn by Mary Brenneman.

The Dead as Taboo
Navajo, Southwest U.S.

Navajos are well known for their avoidance of the dead. When death occurs, the traditional practice has been to prepare and dispose of the corpse promptly by a secure and unmarked burial in a remote area. Then,

numerous measures are taken to purify and protect all that came into contact with the dead. Those in charge of burial destroy their clothing, bathe, and remain in isolation for a time. The dwellings in which death occurs are usually burned or abandoned. Navajos have come to depend readily on white traders and missionaries to perform mortuary services so as to be relieved of this polluting task. A wide variety of practices may be observed, perhaps since any and all measures may be taken to prevent unnecessary contact with death and the dead.

Navajos have a keen sense of the propriety of role, status, and species. Proper relationships must be maintained with things in the living world, but there must also be a clear and definite separation from the world of malevolent forces, ghosts and witches. All but the newborn and the very old "generate" ghosts when they die. Therefore, a good life for Navajos is to live to old age and die without generating a ghost. When someone who is neither just born nor quite old dies, Navajos are threatened by the presence of a malevolent force and must take the greatest care to avoid suffering harm from it.[11]



A Cayapa Indian in his coffin: food for a long journey; Bolivia.

The Excess of Mourning

Plains Indians

The disaster of death was emphasized, rather than being ignored, and mourning displays were expected: women gashed their heads and legs, and even cut off fingers. Long lines of women might march through the camp after the death of an important person, their legs bare and bleeding. Blood on their heads and the calves of their legs was allowed to dry and cake in place.

As soon as the corpse was taken out for burial, everything in the lodge was thrown out for anyone to seize. Finally the lodge itself was pulled down and given away, nothing being left to the widow except the blanket around her. The dead man's favorite horses were led to the grave and killed there.

Individual wailing might continue at the grave for some time, and sometimes memorial wailing, individually performed in a dangerous place, might lead to visions and consequent supernatural power.[12]

1. Louis A. Allen, *Time Before Morning: Art and Myth of the Australian Aborigines*, Ch. 6.
2. See Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, 1934, pp. 145–7.
3. See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973, Ch. 6.
4. See Ralph L. Beals and Harry Hoijer, *An Introduction to Anthropology*, 1959, pp. 537–40.
5. See Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 1967, pp. 71–74.
6. See Colin Turnbull, *The Mountain People*, 1972, pp. 194–8.
7. See R.E. Bradbury, "Fathers, Elders, and Ghosts in Edo Religion," in M. Banton, ed., *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, pp. 127–54.
8. See Beals and Hoijer, Op. cit., p. 541.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 558–9.
10. Sam D. Gill.
11. Sam D. Gill.
12. See Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, 1934, p. III.

There is a tendency to think that rituals are ceremonies that other peoples perform, the subjects of anthropological films, or at least events that are somehow grand and exotic. It is easy to miss the elaborate rituals—and specifically, the rites of dying—that occur every day in our midst. This account, based loosely on a recent experience of an "American way of death," opens our eyes to our own culture's ways of negotiating life's final passage.

IRISH WAKE, CATHOLIC FUNERAL, U.S.A.: 1976

William Corcoran Burke, Jr.

The hospital called Mom at 3:45 A.M. to say that Dad had died. As prearranged, Mom called Art, a neighbor, and then Peg, my sister. Art took Mom to the hospital, and Peg called me and my younger brother Tim, who is a pilot and lives in California. The rest of the family still lives in St. Louis.

* * *

The matter of choosing the grave had come up months earlier between Peg and me. Peg has kids of her own, so I agreed to do the selecting. The idea was that when I had found two suitable plots, Peg and I would both go to Mom. All Mom would have to do was ratify the choice and pay the man. She wouldn't have to tramp all over the cemetery.

It turned out, though, that Mom wanted to tramp all over the cemetery. She wanted me along for moral support, but she wanted to *do* it herself.

We told the Queen of Angels salesman that we wanted Dad buried in an older plot dedicated to the Blessed Mother or St. Joseph. Most of the plots in the Blessed Mother areas were spoken for, however, and the cemetery had no St. Joseph area at all. The only Blessed Mother plots left were in the Holy Rosary area, so we went there first. It was ringed with sculpted tableaux, fifteen of them in all, five each for the joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries of the rosary. Imbedded in the ground—its beads as large as melons, the chain joining them as heavy as an anchor's—was a full, fifteen-decade rosary: one decade for each mystery. There was something strong, secret, and massively enclosed about it all, and I liked it. The trouble was, the only available plots were outside the stockade of sculptures, outside the cordon of rosary, almost into the drainage ditch. We drove on.

One small, quiet area was reserved for members of the Third Order—the lay auxiliaries—of St. Francis. Fr. Conan, who regularly visited Dad, was a Franciscan priest, and some of Mom's friends had been urging them to join the Third Order. Mom decided against the Franciscan area in the end. Plots there were substantially more expensive than elsewhere, and plots near the statue of the saint were the most expensive of all.

In the end, we selected two graves near a grove of pine trees at the edge of the St. Pius X area, an area which was itself at the edge of the cemetery. There

was something right about the pine trees, and Mom had a long-standing devotion to Pius X, "the Pope of Little Children." The cemetery's Pius X looked like the disciplinarian he was, a tyrant who had forced all priests to take an oath against "Modernism" and who had excommunicated Alfred Loisy, the most original Catholic thinker of the century. But I only thought of that later. In the cemetery that day, we both remembered the other Pius X, the white-haired, white-robed Holy Father, the man with the children.

* * *

None of us had expected Dad to die at Veterans. We had expected him to die at Woodland Heights Hospital, a hospital founded around 1925 when the Heights itself was still quite distinct from the city and still so solidly Protestant that the hospital sisters had been forbidden to give the place a saint's name or otherwise identify it as Catholic. Over the years, all of that had changed but the secular name "Woodland Heights Hospital" lingered because the influence of the sisters was by now residual. The few religious magazines in the waiting rooms were months old. The small, dusty crucifixes in the rooms were outshone by color photographs of waterfalls and mountain ranges over mottoes that suggested acquiescence in natural processes rather than hope for the miraculous. It didn't seem to be a religious hospital at all.

At Woodland Heights Hospital, however, as at many hospitals, the apparently religious phrase "Only God knows" had acquired a quasi-technical meaning. An "OGK" was a patient who was not recovering but could not be counted on to die within a stated and brief period and so could be dismissed from the hospital at the discretion of its administrators.

At Easter, Dad's physician, "Mac," learned through the hospital grapevine that Dad had been classified OGK and would be dismissed from the hospital in a matter of days. Mac immediately spoke to a representative of the Veterans' Administration about having Dad moved to a veterans' hospital a few miles away where, he had reason to believe, OGKs were allowed to stay longer than at Woodland Heights. But was Dad eligible? Though his discharge papers said that he had been a soldier for five months and twenty-eight days, Mom observed that the induction and discharge dates on the same document seemed to yield a total of 181 days. Six months' service was required for admission.

A day or two later, Tim happened to be in town unexpectedly and paid Dad a visit. While he was in the hospital room, Mac called to say that, to his astonishment, an ambulance was waiting outside the emergency room to take Dad to the VA hospital. Mac himself had just been notified. Rather than take a chance on the army changing its mind or reading the wrong line on the discharge papers, he urged Tim to ride with Dad in the ambulance and see him through admissions at Veterans. Tim agreed to do so; and a few minutes later, an army officer came to the room to give him the necessary documents. The officer spent several minutes joking with Dad—according to Tim—whom he addressed as "this

young whipper-snapper here, always chasing the nurses." When Tim expressed his gratitude, the officer answered, "God bless you, sir. And you just keep an eye on this young whipper-snapper for us."

The admission went without incident, but later we had serious difficulties with the staff at Veterans. The head nurse told Mom that Dad's dietary restrictions could not be observed; the reason, she implied, was that the black kitchen help could not read the menus. As part of his treatment for internal bleeding, Dad was given an antacid so powerful that he suffered almost continual diarrhea. One night, when he had soiled the bed, the night nurse said, "You pig! You shit in your bed, you can lay in it!"

When Tim heard this, his reaction was to write an angry letter not to Veterans Hospital but back to Woodland Heights Hospital.

> Dear Sir:
>
> Thanks to you, my father is now in intensive care at Veterans. The "this is it" crises are coming more frequently: like one a week for the past three. They're like labor pains before a birth for us. You think you can just call him OGK and kick him out. He has to die on a predictable schedule or it's bye-bye. Goodbye hospital, hello nursing home, and no hospital insurance or Medicare. What do you people want? There is no plug to pull. There is only euthinasia, which is against the church and illegal, or suicide, which he is too weak for anyway. He's like Gary Mark Gilmore. And then there was Dr. MacEoin, who you didn't even consult, and now he is disbarred from the case. I guess the new folks are OK, but they won't listen to my Mom that we don't want extraordinary means, like the intravenous and the tube in the nose. In the background of my mind, I feel it is the fact that no one ever faced a lawsuit because they made their patient live too long. My Dad was always patient in life. Now he's helpless in death. The nurses and all are less careful about him because they know he's a goner anyway. They made him stand up for an X-ray, and he fell down. What kind of care is that? They could care. They didn't irrigate his catheder, and now he has an infection. And you call yourself a good Catholic hospital.

My own reaction was to send a book and a letter to Dad through Fr. Conan, asking to read Dad the letter and talk to him about it. The letter read:

> Dear Dad:
>
> Fr. Conan is going to be bringing you a book by a Fr. Henri Nouwen. It's called *Aging*.
>
> There are so many things I could say. Flipping through the book, I come to one part where Fr. Nouwen quotes St. Paul:
>
> > *As for me, my life is already being poured away as a libation, and the time has come for me to be gone. I have fought the good fight to the end. I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith.*
>
> I think these are words you could also say, don't you think?
>
> On page 121, there is a picture of a very sick man. He has a hospital gown on. His mouth is hanging open slightly, as if he might be unconscious or very weak. The words opposite are:
>
> > *Without beauty, without majesty (we saw him) no looks to attract our eyes; a thing despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering, a man to make people screen their faces; he was despised and we took no account of him. And yet ours were the sufferings he bore, ours the sorrows he carried.*
>
> These words are from the prophet Isaiah, but the church has always applied them to Christ. And on top of that, the church has always taught that people who suffer the sort of thing Christ suffered can accomplish what he accomplished. In other words, you can do people great good even when you are weak and helpless and even when no one knows about it.
>
> I'm sure you know that we all remember what you were like when you were younger and stronger and better-looking and full of plans and energy. The people in the hospital only know you as you are now, we remember you as you were. I'm sure you must think sometimes about how much you have lost and notice that what you get now is a lot of politeness and not much admiration or appreciation. But you should know that those who see your life as well

as your death and your death as part
of your life admire you now more
than ever. I think this is a time to
pray for a happy death rather than
for a long life. It's in God's hands;
but when he makes his move, I hope
you will go knowing that you have
never meant more to us than you
have during this long struggle. You
have taught me how to live, and now
you are teaching me how to die. I
hope I remember the lesson.

Love,
Billy

Tim never actually sent his letter. Peg, who knows a lot about medicine, explained to him that the intravenous feeding that seemed to be prolonging Dad's agony was a humanitarian measure. Without it, Dad would die of thirst, his tongue swelling up until it choked him. Though his life was not to be cruelly prolonged, it was not to be *cruelly* shortened either. The tube through his nostrils and into his stomach was also necessary. Without it, he would simply vomit to death. Quicker was not always easier. The truth was that they hadn't made him stand up for the X-ray, he had insisted on it. And as for the urinary infection, he was over it. Peg asked Tim to raise any future objections against the hospital through her.

If Peg had gotten to me in time, she would have talked me out of sending my letter too. She is more intelligent and logical than I am, and she has the intangible advantage of being the oldest child. Peg regards the Catholic notion that vicarious suffering can be redemptive—a notion to which, as she puts it, I "cling"—as both sick and dangerous. Her reaction to any reference to Jesus or the Cross or the Resurrection is to tell stories from the supermarket newspapers. Some of these have become quite familiar to us.

We all know, for example, about George McInerney, 16, who is paralyzed from the neck down, unable to speak above a faint hiss, the victim of teen-aged gunmen who shot him as he bought a Good Humor bar. Because he testified against his assailants, holding to his story through cross-examination in his hospital room, his mother is afraid that her children will be attacked or killed. George himself is atrophying and will die forgotten, whether or not his assailants go to jail.

Or Joshua Swoboda who died of a brain tumor at ten. His illness had lasted three-and-a-half years. A few weeks before the end, he said to his mother in a lucid moment, "Well, I had six-and-a-half good years."

Or Lotte Eisenstein who is dying in a nursing home. She operated a small hotel in the Catskills until she was attacked by burglars who beat her so badly that she suffered permanent, serious brain damage and the loss of one eye. Her last words, presumably, since they have been her only words for three years, will be, "Please don't hit me again."

Peggy knows all these cases by heart. At fifty-nine, Dad was dying, she calculated, twelve years short of the average American male life expectancy. But this was not unfair: some American male somewhere had to die at fifty-nine if any American male was to live to be eighty-three. In the Bronze Age, the life expectancy was seventeen. Dad was a statistic, six million was another statistic. But such statistics were not cold: they were warm, they were kind, they enabled her to draw everyone—George McInerney, Joshua Swoboda, Dad, the Jews, everyone—into a stochastic reckoning of normality and so within reach of the cold comfort of her

modernity.

Was this surprising? Was it obscene? She would ask these questions accusingly, as if to say, "I know what you're thinking," and then proceed to overwhelm objections with the mass horrors of the twentieth century. She knew the gruesome statistics of *The Twentieth-Century Book of the Dead* the way a preacher would know the chapters and verses of the Bible. Her children knew them too. According to the author of that book, there have been 110 million *man-made* deaths in this century, including sixty-two million by various forms of privation (death camps, slave labor, forced marches, etc.), forty-six million from guns and bombs, and two million from chemicals. Against this horrific backdrop, neither personal nor national misfortune stands out in much relief; and the notion that anything is now—or ever has been—accomplished by such suffering, well, it makes Peg by turns furious and ill. She finds her safety in the numbers of her statistical thanatopsis, in—as she puts it, sarcastically—"the courage of those who have it bad, the serenity of those who have it good, and the randomness of the difference."

Peg is relentless in argument, and I found it particularly hard to defend myself against her rejection of my letter to Dad because Dad himself had been terribly upset by it. Mom had always said she wanted Dad to share his feelings with her, but my letter forced out more than she wanted. She would say, "I want him to feel free to cry, it's all right for men to cry, it's not unmanly," etc.—things men frequently hear from women. But when he cried and couldn't stop, it broke her.

I did not intend my letter to have the effect it apparently had. I did not *want* Dad to cry, particularly; tears were all right, but not to be sought. They were, at best, beside the point. For Peg, however, it was all part of the same ghastly Irish-Catholic religio-sentimental disease.
The worst thing was that the letter arrived much nearer the end than any of us guessed. Less than a week later, Dad was

dead. There was no second chance. All I could do against Peg was ask her what I should have done when I heard about the nurse telling Dad, "You shit in your bed, you can lay in it." I can't recall what Peg said, but she had an answer. She always has an answer.

* * *

When I arrived at the hospital, Peg was waiting for me near the entrance. I put my arms around her, surprised as always at how small she was, or as it seemed to me, how small she had become over the years. She pushed her face straight into my chest and wept. I couldn't see her face, and there was almost no sound. It was as if she was hiding in me the way, sometimes years ago, I had hidden in her. Minutes passed. She seemed quiet. I started to pull away, she pulled me back. Finally, she turned and started quickly into the hospital, explaining to me as she walked that Mom had been comforted by Dad's appearance. Dad had not vomited that night. The nurses had been wonderful. One nurse said that she was sure that Mr. Burke had died as she was turning him and propping him up with pillows. Peg doubted that Dad had really died in the nurse's arms, but it was not impossible, of course, and it consoled Mom to believe it. Before Mom arrived, the nurses had put fresh linen on the bed, dressed Dad in fresh pajamas, and folded his hands on the coverlet with his rosary. Peg's voice broke at the word "rosary," but only for a moment. Dad's body had still been quite warm when Mom arrived, and his expression was peaceful. Mom had left for home quieted.

* * *

The Quinn Funeral Home had been a family business for two generations. The founder, long deceased, was Dad's Uncle Del. The present proprietors were Dad's first cousin Eileen and her husband, Pete. In the old days, Uncle Del closed the place every Halloween and had a family costume ball in the parlors. When business was slow, the hearse and flower car—in the old days Del owned his own—were put to various unsolemn uses. I had been a pallbearer at the funeral of an aunt whose wake had been held at the Quinn home. We had all been there before.

Eileen had a number of questions for Mom. Would there be a funeral Mass? What church would it be at? Who would be the celebrant? Would there be any concelebrants? Would there be a sermon? Did she want a singer? Did she have a singer she wanted? The janitor at Eileen's church had a lovely voice and was available. Were there special songs she wanted? Did she want flowers or Mass offerings? Would the cemetery prayers be recited at graveside or, the new way, in the interment chapel? For the death notice, what were the exact names of Dad's brothers, sisters, wife, and children? What would be the hours for the wake? Had she brought the clothing she wanted Dad buried in? Who would ride in the limousine, and where was the limousine to pick them up? Who were to be pallbearers? Would there be a gathering after the burial, and was it to be publicly announced? Did she wish the casket to be draped with the flag? Which of the several styles of memorial card did she wish?

Mom's answers were that there would be a funeral Mass. It would be at Transfiguration church in Woodland Heights. The celebrant would be Fr. Brown. Fr. Conan would preach. Charlie, a nephew who had become a priest, would serve as lector. She would try to reach a male quartet that had sung recently at a friend's funeral; but if the quartet was unavailable, the janitor would be fine. The songs to be sung were: "Ave Maria," "Panis Angelicus," and "Now Thank We All Our God." Mass offerings were to be requested in lieu of flowers, though it was agreed that the family would buy three ribboned floral pieces: one saying "beloved husband," another saying "dear father," and a small, heart-shaped one from the grandchildren saying "Boppa." Cemetery prayers were to be recited at graveside. The hours for the wake would be 4:00 to 9:00 P.M. that day and 2:00 to 9:00 P.M. the following day.

Mom had brought a red double-knit sportcoat and harmonizing shirt and tie that were Dad's favorites. He had bought them on their trip to Florida two years earlier. Uncle Mike, Charlie's father, who lived in Fort Lauderdale, had insisted that Dad buy white patent-leather shoes to complete his Florida outfit; and when Dad gave in, Mike ended up buying a pair himself. It was a story often told. Eileen remembered that Dad had worn the coat when he had lunch with her a year earlier. His

project then was putting together a family tree.

The funeral, it was confirmed, would be on the third day: a little soon, but a three-day wake would have meant postponing the funeral to after Thanksgiving. Mom, Tim, Hilda, Tim's wife, and I would ride in the limousine, which would pick them up at 8:00 A.M. at Mom's house (my girlfriend wanted to ride in the limousine, but I told her it would only raise questions). The pallbearers were still to be selected. There would be a gathering at Mom's house afterward but no formal announcement of it: Peg was to see to the inviting during the wake. The casket would not be draped with the flag. The memorial card selected was a standard one, one Eileen could get printed up overnight. Its front bore a lavender cross with the Greek letters *alpha* and *omega* on the arms. A crimson winding cloth, windblown above the cross, formed with it a version of *chiro,* a monogram for the name *Christ.* An olive branch lay at the foot of the cross. Also on the front were the words: "In the Cross of Christ lies our salvation" (Imitation of Christ). The back of the card, to be printed to order, would read,

In loving memory of
William Corcoran Burke
Passed Away November 22nd, 1976

and give the traditional *Memorare,* "Remember O most gracious Virgin Mary...."

There remained only the selection of the casket. Eileen walked us through two darkened parlors to a large plain room with about fifteen different caskets on display, ranging in price from about $600 to about $900. Most were made of metal, and all were lined with quilted or ruffled satin bedding with a pillow at one end. Their lids closed in two sections, like a Dutch door. Eileen said little while Mom examined them. After about fifteen minutes of discussion, mostly with Peg, Mom settled on a bronze casket whose furnishings, she thought, were not too frilly for Dad's taste. As we walked back through the empty parlors, Eileen put her arm around Mom. Mom started to cry, then stopped and finally made a little joke of some sort about the Halloween parties.

The total cost of the wake and funeral came to about $900, of which $35 was given to Transfiguration church. Several hundred dollars in Mass offerings came in, which Mom divided among the Franciscans, the Jesuits, and the BVM (Blessed Virgin Mary) sisters. Eileen was prepared to offer advice on handling insurance policies, but no advice was needed. No bill was rendered that day, and no money changed hands.

In the funeral parlor, the casket, opened halfway down, stood against one wall with a kneeler before it. Mom stood a few steps away from it and to the left. Mourners, entering from the right, went first to the casket, knelt, crossed themselves, paused a few moments, crossed themselves again, rose, and continued leftward to where Mom was standing. Some stayed only a few minutes. Most stayed for about half an hour. A few stayed for several hours or even for several hours on both days. As they left, they signed the guest book and took a memorial card.

All expressed sympathy. Some asked if they could help. Some said that it was for the best. Some said that Dad was surely in heaven. One or two said that he was in heaven because he had suffered enough: he had had his purgatory on earth. Not a few spoke of him as an intercessor before God, and then always in an admiring and cheerful way. Priests and nuns—there were dozens of nuns—promised their prayers. Older people, particularly, complimented Mom on her children.

Many floral pieces arrived despite the notice in the paper requesting Mass offerings, and the air was heavy with the scent. On the second night of the wake, twenty or thirty people were waiting to speak to Mom at any given moment, with another two hundred or so seated

on folding chairs and couches, often rearranging the chairs in conversational groups. Friends and relatives found one another. A room partition was removed and extra chairs were brought. The room never seemed noisy, but it quickly lost any sense of hush. The buzz of conversation covered the crying.

Mom had asked a priest from Transfiguration to read the wake service on the second evening. Before he arrived, however, Dad's Knights of Columbus brothers arrived in a body, and their chaplain read the prayers in a loud voice. Later, the parish priest arrived bringing a small loudspeaker, and Mom didn't have the heart to stop him. He went through the same prayers and scripture readings all over again, delivering a brief homily over the sound of conversation, including an occasional checked laugh, from the far end of the room.

In the early church, he said, Christianity had meant resurrection. Then, at the time of the Black Death, the church laid great stress on the suffering Lord. Now the time had come to stress the joyful theme of resurrection again. To accept the inevitability of and to recognize the gravity of death was not to accept the finality of it. Christ was more than an example of courage in the face of death, he was the sign of the final victory over it. Reading from leaflets Eileen passed out, the mourners recited the 23rd and 121st Psalms, an Our Father, a Hail Mary, and

Glory be to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning
is now
and ever shall be
world without end. Amen.

* * *

On the morning of the funeral, a sunny morning, the streets around Transfiguration church were lined with cars, and there were cars in the alleys and on the driveways. The limousine with the family arrived as the pallbearers were lifting the casket from the hearse. The doors of the church stood ajar.

In the vestibule, Father Brown waited with three acolytes, who carried two flickering candles and a tall golden cross. The church was filled with mourners.

As the casket was carried into the vestibule and set on a cart, Fr. Brown dipped a silver wand into a container of blessed water, and waved it over the casket, and said:

Come to his aid, O saints of God; hasten to meet him, Angels of the Lord; taking up his soul, presenting it in the sight of the Most High.
May you be received by Christ, who has called you; and may the Angels bring you into the bosom of Abraham.

The cross-and-candle bearers started into the church, down the center aisle, into the sanctuary. There followed, in order, Father Brown, the pallbearers, rolling the casket on its cart, and the family.

When all were seated, Father Brown, facing the congregation from behind the altar, began the Mass:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.
The grace and peace of God our Father and
the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
And also with you.
My brothers and sisters, to prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries,
let us call to mind our sins.

I confess to almighty God, and to you my brothers and sisters, that I have sinned through my own fault, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done, and in what I have failed to do; and I ask blessed Mary, ever virgin, all the angels and saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

May almighty God forgive us our sins and bring us to eternal life.

Amen.

Charlie—Mom's nephew, my nearest cousin—now stepped to a lectern and read a "bidding litany" that Mom had written for the occasion:

Hear us, O Lord, as we offer thanks.
Hear us, O Lord,as we offer thanks.
For the gift of my uncle Bill and the joy he brought to so many lives.
Hear us, O Lord, as we offer thanks.
For the love and comfort of our faith as so clearly shown us by the priests in our lives —the pastor and priests of Transfiguration parish, the Jesuits, and especially for Father Conan and Father Brown, through all these years.
Hear us, O Lord, as we offer thanks.

The litany continued until nearly everyone in the church had been mentioned by name or by group. When it was completed, Father Brown, still standing behind the altar, raised his arms and said:

Almighty God, through whose mercy the souls of the faithful are at rest, hear our prayers for your servant departed Bill, and grant him peace and fullness of life with you, in the company of your saints. Through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, forever and ever.

Charlie then read from the Book of Wisdom:

The souls of the virtuous are in the hands of God, no torment shall ever touch them. In the eyes of the unwise, they did appear to die, their going looked like a disaster, their leaving us, like annihilation; but they are in peace. If they experienced punishment as men see it, their hope was rich with immortality; slight was their affliction, great will their blessings be. God has put them to the test and proved them worthy to be with him; he has tested them like gold in a furnace, and accepted them as a holocaust. This is the Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Then the congregation recited the 23rd Psalm:

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want ....

Charlie then read the Gospel story of the raising of Lazarus, raising his voice when he read Martha's words and, in general, giving a mildly theatrical interpretation; and everyone sat down for Fr. Conan's sermon:

This morning the song of life has a sad and broken melody; a good man has passed from our midst, no more to walk with us with his comforting presence. And yet in the very midst of this sad song, there moves a distinct and haunting theme of beauty that is so comforting and uplifting in this moment of grief.

Fr. Conan praised Dad's cheerfulness and courage. He compared him to Christ and Mom to Mary standing beneath the cross. He concluded by thanking everyone on Mom's behalf and saying:

The melody of Bill's life will never leave our hearts. Let us hum it when we are sad and lonely; let us sing it when we are happy. For Bill is with God, a beautiful song composed by God.

The janitor-singer, who had arrived late, began singing after the creed: first a song no one knew, then the "Ave Maria." Tim brought the plate of communion wafers and the cruet of wine to Father Brown, who blessed them and said other prayers in a quiet voice. The acolytes brought him incense and a thurible of burning charcoal. He spooned the incense onto the coals, and clouds of sweet-smelling smoke filled the sanctuary. The singer had finished, but the organ continued softly playing the "Ave Maria" melody. Fr. Brown descended the several steps that separated the sanctuary from the floor of the church and circled the

casket, swinging the smoking thurible over it and beside it. Tim started to cry. The women had been crying off and on from the start. Handing the thurible to an acolyte, Fr. Brown re-entered the sanctuary, took his place behind the altar, and began the long central prayer of the Mass:

> It is truly right and just, and profitable toward salvation that we always and everywhere give thanks to you, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord. In him the hope of a blessed resurrection has dawned on us, bringing all who surely must die the consoling promise of everlasting life. For those who have believed in you, O Lord, life is not ended but merely changed: and when this earthly abode is dissolved, an eternal dwelling place awaits them in heaven. Therefore with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify your glorious name, evermore praising you and singing:
>
> *Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.*

There was a microphone on the altar; but from this point on, Father Brown spoke almost too softly to be heard. A baby started making noise after a few minutes, and its mother carried it to the vestibule, her high-heeled shoes clicking sharply on the marble floor. Outside, the 10:30 A.M. Tuesday morning air raid siren went off, distant, familiar, unthreatening. We had been in church for nearly ninety minutes.

> Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles: I leave you peace, my peace I give you. Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom where you live forever and ever.
> *Amen.*
> The peace of the Lord be with you always.
> *And also with you.*
> Let us offer each other the sign of peace.

Everyone at least shook hands. The many who knew one another well enough kissed. Father Brown broke a wafer, and held it up before the congregation:

> Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:
> *have mercy on us.*
> Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world;
> *have mercy on us.*
> Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:
> *grant us peace.*
> This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Happy are those who are called to his supper.
> *Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed.*

Fr. Brown, Fr. Conan, and Charlie began distributing communion, placing a wafer on each communicant's tongue, with the words: "The Body of Christ." As the communicants filed up, the singer sang the "Panis Angelicus."

After communion, Fr. Brown put more incense in the thurible and descended once again to the casket, accompanied this time by the acolytes with candles and cross, and by Charlie who carried the container of blessed water. He swung the thurible three times over the casket and said:

> Our brother has fallen asleep in the peace of Christ. In the faith and hope of eternal life, let us commend him to the most loving mercy of our Father.

He took the holy water from Charlie, handed him the thurible, sprinkled the casket one final time, and concluded the Mass with the prayer:

> Most merciful Father, into your hands we commend the soul of our brother, for we are sustained by the sure hope that he will rise again on the last day with all those who have died in Christ. We give you thanks for all the good things you granted him during this mortal life, as signs for us of your goodness, and of the community of saints in Christ. Lord, in your great pity accept our prayer that the gates of paradise may be opened to your

servant. And in our turn, may we be comforted by the words of faith until we hasten to meet Christ, when we shall all be forever with the Lord. Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord.

And let perpetual light shine upon him.
May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God rest in peace.

Amen.

* * *

Molly Murphy did not join the cortege to the cemetery, Instead, with her daughter and one of Peg's friends, she drove to Mom's house with the various casseroles and salads that she and Mom's other friends had brought to church. When the family and their guests, a group of about thirty-five, arrived at the house, the food was ready. Charlie, asked to say "Grace," said:

Bless this food
And those who serve us
And from indigestion
O Lord, preserve us.

The grandchildren screamed with laughter. Charlie was great with kids.

The men, against custom, congregated in the kitchen, pouring drinks from the liquor bottles that had been set out on the sink hub. Tim talked about his work to an interested audience of older men. Peg talked to mothers with small children about her daughter Suzy who, when told that "Boppa" was in heaven, asked, "How'd he get there, float?" Everyone was hungry, everyone ate, and yet the last guest was gone within ninety minutes.

Peg went home. Tim and Hilda retired to one bedroom, and I to another, leaving Mom alone for almost two hours while we slept. When we awoke, Pat was gone, and Mom was asleep on a couch in the living room, a woolen afghan tucked up under her chin.

Tim started a fire in the fireplace. Hilda, who had quietly assumed most of the housekeeping during the days of the wake, made tea. I joined them in the kitchen, and we talked about California. Tim said that he was going to give Dad's rosary to Peg's little boy. It had been in Dad's hands in the casket, but Tim had taken it out before the casket was closed.

The next morning, Thanksgiving Day, we rose to find a note from Mom on the kitchen table. She had gone out to early Mass, having wakened at exactly 3:45 A.M.

EPICYCLES

Myths, Stories, Parables

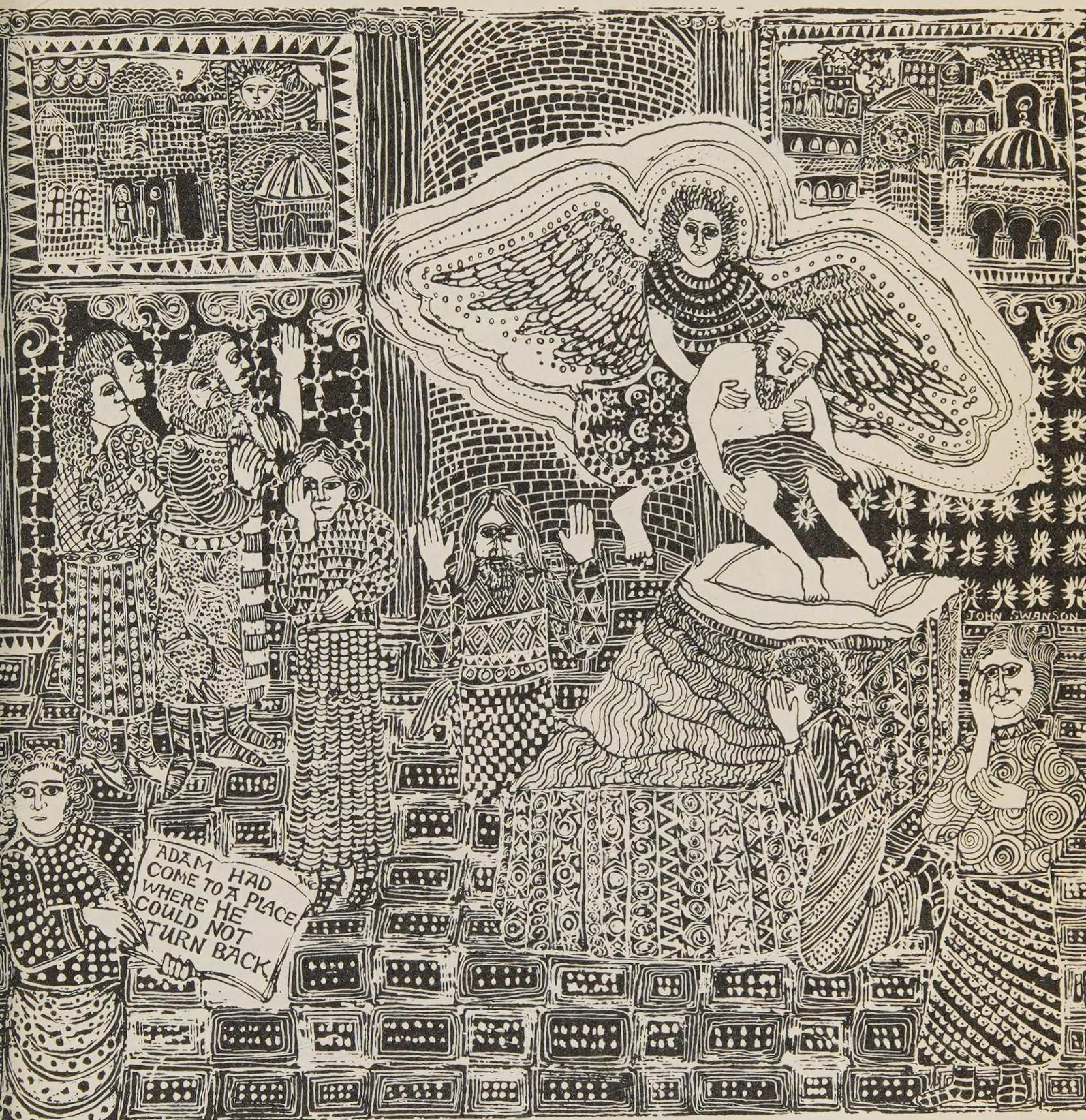
Epicycle I

The Death of Adam

Adam lay in his tent, surrounded by his many sons and daughters. He had lived to be nine hundred and thirty when the sickness had seized him, and now even the days that had been numbered were drawing to an end. His first wife, Lilith, had left him long ago, and Eve, whom God had created for him from his own rib, had been dead for more than two centuries. In their last years Adam's memory of their life inside the Garden had become blurred, and when he had finally forgotten the lost splendour Eve had died of grief, and of the burden of bearing a memory that was too great for a single survivor. Now Adam alone was left. And strange to say, among the children of his children, there were those who had come to doubt the story of his origin, who could not bring themselves to believe that one father and mother had given birth to so many. But his sons and daughters had always shielded him from these sceptics, and among them the years he had toiled outside the gate that the angel still guarded were burned into their memory, as was the story of the death of Abel, his second son, and the punishment of Cain, his first. And now only Cain and Abel, among his many children, were missing. Instead it was Seth, himself an old man, who bent over his bed and spoke in his ear. But Adam had come to a place where he could not turn back. The words of his oldest living son were lost to him. Neither did he notice the presence of the angel that had entered the room. His eyes had turned inward. At the last moment a luminous light passed through them and a bright glow surrounded his face. And at that very moment even those who had been uncertain that he was, in fact, the first father, felt the past become a blank wall behind them, and knew that the first era was finally past.

Howard Schwartz

From *Midrashim: Collected Jewish Parables* (London: The Menard Press, 1976; distributed in the U.S. and Canada by Serendipity Books, 1790 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley, California, 94709). Copyright 1976 by Howard Schwartz and John Swanson. Reprinted by permission.



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Epicycle II

Osiris

Listen, and I will tell thee, then. Follow a little behind me and mark where my finger traces the shapes upon the wall, for when in years to come there is no one to put the words into thine ears, the walls will tell thee all that thou wishest to know. Come! Let me lift thee up and show thee the place where the tale begins, here near the corner, where the Eye of Osiris looks upon thee. Look thou well upon that Eye that looks at thee and sees thee better ever than thou canst see it, and remember this tale in years to come whenever that Eye and thine shall meet.

Osiris, who became Lord of the Dead and guide to the soul in afterlife, was born of the Lady Nut, who rules the heavens, and Keb, who rules the earth, to be king over Egypt and her people. He was the first-born, and his brother was Set, his sisters Isis and Nephthys. Like a father he was to his subjects, and like a wise parent he weaned them from their childish ways until they grew to the stature of men.

Nothing of what thine eye can now behold was in existence then: for men did not know the hewing and moving of stone or the baking of bricks as they who built these walls have learned, but all lived crudely in such shelters each one could think to raise above his head: skins of beasts, straw and sticks and the like, or else they sought shelter under the stones and in the mountain caves, poor defenses against the floods and rains. Likewise they knew not how to make the beasts work for them, nor indeed had they any use for beasts except as food. Crude and barbarous were the ways of men in the days when Osiris was born of Nut!

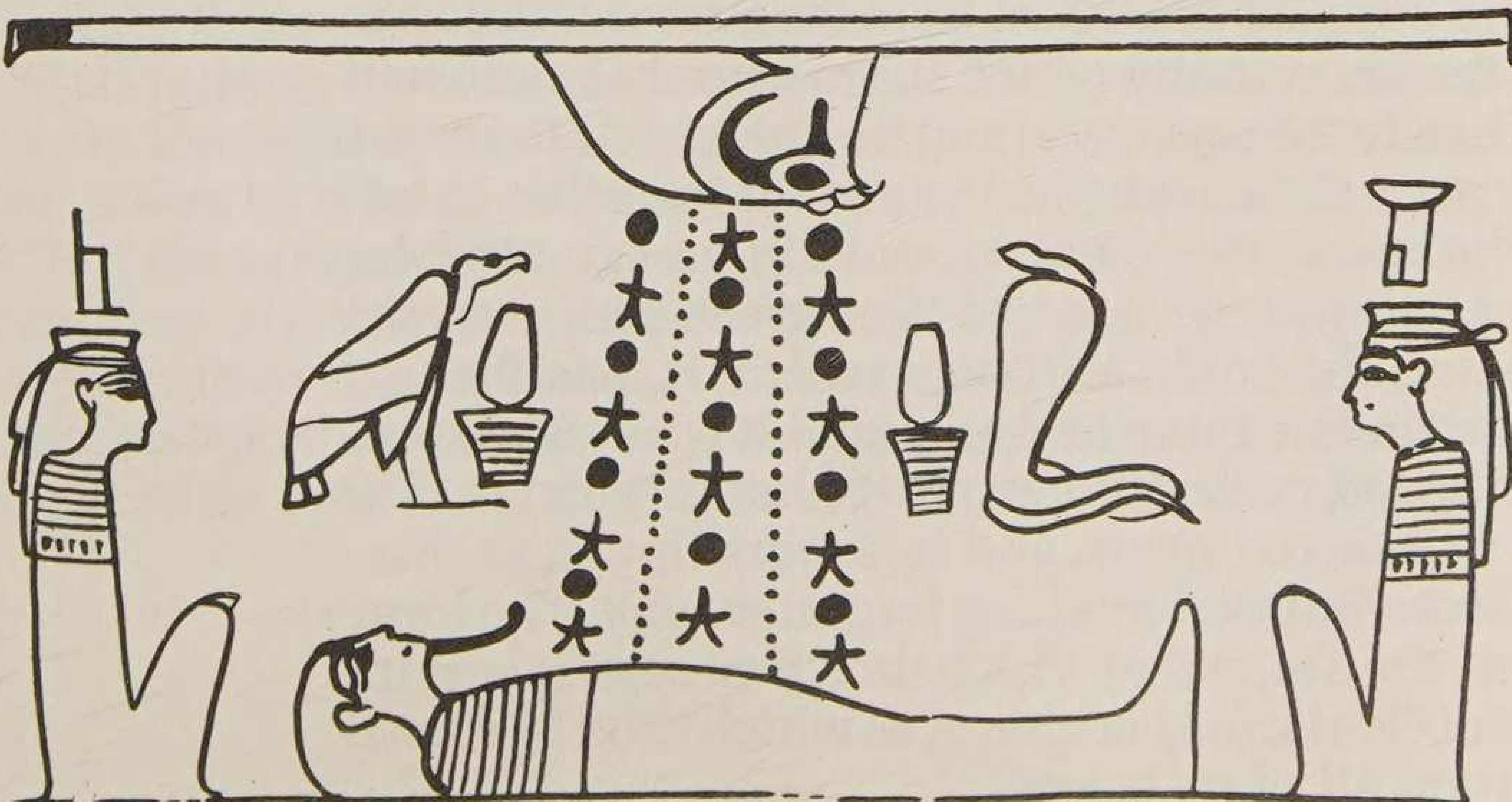
Then all was changed. Slowly, as an infant is weaned from the breast, men were weaned from their haphazard lives. Osiris the king taught them the tilling of the fields: how to sow and how to reap, how to grind the grain and how to store it. He taught them the making of bread and beer, and the other crafts as well: how to weave and how to build and how to make the thousand things that thou takest for granted. Granted they were, for Osiris gave these things into the hands of men. Then he taught men to keep order among themselves, gave them laws for their self-governing, and taught them the proper worship of the gods.

Now when all these things were in the hands of the people of Egypt, Osiris left this land for a while to go among the other peoples of the world, to teach them what his own people had

learned. The other nations he taught by means of hymns and songs which he sang to them, accompanying his voice on the various musical instruments, drum and flute and lyre, which were also in his gift to men. Thus were all the peoples of the earth given the wisdom of Osiris, and his Eye beheld all that was in the earth among men.

When Osiris left Egypt, because of the jealousy of his brother Set he put in charge his sister Isis. For Set was not born to rule, and yet he wished to do so. Therefore he went about among the people of Egypt and whispered into their hearts the changes which he wished to make in the ways men worked and lived. All this Isis beheld, and her vigilance was strong to see and to correct the changes that Set was wont to introduce. With prudence and great wisdom did Isis rule in her brother's absence, and the order which he had established was not allowed to become corrupt.

Seeing that he could make no headway in his attempt to change the order of things, Set resolved instead to be rid of his brother altogether and to seize the kingdom and take possession of Isis, his brother's sister and wife, whom he loved with a passion equalled only by his jealousy of Osiris. Therefore, when Osiris returned from his travels among the other peoples of the world, Set plotted against him. With a tongue of honey he persuaded seventy-two of his brother's subjects, together with the queen of Ethiopia, to join in conspiracy against Osiris. He made a wooden chest, most beautifully carved and wrought, to the exact measure and stature of Osiris, of whose like there was none among men. With gold and lapis lazuli he enriched the covers of the chest, and he had it brought into the banquet-hall of the palace where Osiris was to feast. When his brother came home to his palace, Set commanded that a feast be put before him, and invited the seventy-two conspirators as well. Much was made of the beautiful box, and, speaking as if in jest, Set declared that he would give it to the one who could lie down in it in comfort, being neither too tall nor too short, too broad nor too narrow. Thereupon, one after the other of the seventy-two lay down in the chest, but of course not one of them but was too tall or too short, too broad or too narrow to fit exactly into the box. Finally, the great king Osiris himself expressed a desire to enter the competition also. But when he lay down in the box, the seventy-two rushed forward and fastened down the lid, driving in the nails that stood awaiting the hammer, and then pouring molten lead over the joints of the chest to make it air-tight. Thus did Osiris die.



Acting as one, under the command of Set, the conspirators then dragged the coffin to the Nile and cast it into the waters. Being air-tight, the coffin floated, and the waters of the great river carried it far to the north, past the Delta and into the northern sea. The day of the murder of Osiris by his brother Set was the seventeenth day of the month sacred to Hathor, in the twenty-eighth year of the reign of the king.

Word of the fate of her brother and husband came to Isis, where she dwelt in the city of Coptos. Long and loud were her laments—it is said they were heard from Saïs to Abydos, from the upper to the lower Nile—and she cut off her hair, put on the apparel of mourning and went in search of her husband's body. Throughout the length of the land she sought, asking all she met, until at last, by the Tanitic mouth of the great river some children told her that they had seen the box float past the river's delta and into the northern sea.

Now the chest had indeed floated out into the sea, and had come to rest on the coast of Syria, at Byblos. As soon as it had landed, a great Erica tree sprang up around it and enclosed the chest within its massive trunk. The tree grew to an enormous size. One day the king of Byblos came down to the shore of the sea and there he beheld the wonderful tree and marvelled at its size. He ordered it cut down, and commissioned his finest craftsmen to fashion into a pillar for his own palace the very portion of the trunk which contained the chest, the coffin of Osiris.

News of this came to Isis, as she searched. She set out at once for Byblos, and, upon arriving, sought out the queen's handmaidens where they bathed by the palace fountain. To no one did she speak but them: thou canst see her here conversing. Sweet was the fragrance of her body, which she imparted to them so that their hair and bodies emanated the odor of Isis when they returned to their queen. Perceiving this wonderful scent, the queen sent for Isis to be the nurse to the youngest of the king's sons. Thus at last did Isis find the body of her husband.

But what was she to do? The coffin was trapped in the pillar-tree. By night she gave the king's son her finger to suck, and plunged him into the fire to burn away his mortal parts, while she herself, in the form of a swallow, fluttered mournfully around the pillar, chirping and singing to her dead husband.

It chanced one night that the queen came to see her child, who lay in the fire, the last of his mortality being consumed by flames. She screamed and plucked the infant from the fire: and thus he was deprived of the immortality which should surely have been his that night. Then there was nought to do but for Isis to reveal herself and to explain her quest. She begged for the pillar to be opened and for the chest to be removed, and this was granted, for her ministrations to the king's son had been great. Thus was the pillar cut down and the coffin laid bare within it. Isis then wrapped the coffin in fine linen and anointed it with the fairest spices of the earth, and carried it away with her into Egypt. The pillar was reset in a sacred place, and it is worshipped to this day, though the worshippers have long forgotten why. The form of this same pillar, the Tet, is that which thou hast seen raised in the great festival of Osiris: they are his eyes which thou hast seen looking down upon all of us below.

Isis brought the coffin back to Egypt in secret, and by night she would open the chest and lay her body upon that of her husband, warming his corpse with the heat of her heart, and washing it with her tears.

Now see! Here by the column thou canst discern the form of a pig, wandering about by the light of the moon. That is Set, who became perplexed when Isis suddenly returned to Egypt. It happened that one night Isis was late in coming to her husband, and on just that night, it would seem by chance, Set went out to wander in the desert, and so came upon the body of Osiris where he lay, his heart warmed by Isis' pulse. Knowing well whose body this was, and fearing lest his brother come again to life, he broke the body into fourteen pieces and scattered them throughout the country, believing that at last he had foiled all attempts to resuscitate the king.

But Isis—it is her form thou seest here, as it were harvesting—travelled throughout the land, patiently and with love, gathering in the members of her husband's body. Thou seest her here in a boat of reeds, seeking the pieces of his body that Set had scattered around the Delta, one by one gathering them and burying them, and in each place erecting a shrine sacred to the worship of Osiris. Some say that she built false shrines also hoping thereby to distract her brother Set and make him believe he could never find the true shrines and thereby desecrate them with further iniquities.

What follows hereafter also concerns Osiris, who was raised to life in the Other World to become lord, judge and guide of the dead. It was he who encouraged his son Horus to do battle with Set. But the vanquishing of Set and the glorification of Horus is for another tale: thou canst see now that the Eye of Osiris appears less often than that of Horus, for the rest of the tale is his.

Remember what thou hast learnt here: remember well. For the Eye of Osiris sees more than thou canst see, even of thyself.

Epicycle III

Tales of a Demon is adapted from the *Vetalapanchavimshati*, or *Twenty-five Tales of a Vetala*, a cycle of stories embedded in the eleventh-century Indian epic known as *The Ocean of Stories*, by Somadeva. The "Tales of a Demon," twenty-four in number, are all riddle stories which were used for religious instruction by the Buddhists and others; their antiquity antedates the *Ocean of Stories* by several centuries. Subsequent issues of *Parabola* will each carry a Tale together with King Trivikramasena's answer to the previous riddle. Readers are invited to try their wits at an answer and to send in proposed solutions.

Tales of a Demon

In the last tale told by the Vetala sitting upon the shoulders of King Triple-Victory, the young Brahman wastrel called Moon-lord, having gambled himself to destitution, found shelter from the wrath of his debtors in an abandoned shrine. There he met an ascetic, whose magical powers brought the young man the delight of beautiful maidens in an enchanted palace. Moon-lord, becoming desirous of such powers for himself, entered into discipleship with the ascetic, who gave him precise instructions for the acquisition of such magical powers as he wished, warning him that the slightest mistake would cost them *both* the knowledge. He was to endure the illusory life with which the ascetic's protective genie would tempt him, all the while reciting certain incantations, and then at the height of the illusion, enter the funeral pyre which he would see before him. The temptations of that imaginary existence, with all its worldly pleasures, were indeed powerful; but after reflecting briefly on the choice before him, Moon-lord did indeed enter the fire, but found it as cool as snow. Upon hearing of this, the ascetic became deeply troubled and tried to summon the magical powers for himself, only to find that they had been lost forever.

Why should this be, asked the Vetala, when all the incantations were performed as required?

With a profound inward sigh, King Triple-Victory, bent on performing his promised task for the mendicant Kshantisila, replied, "My demonic friend, I know you are determined to waste my time with such frivolities; nevertheless, inasmuch as this supposed riddle may be so simply answered, I will speak. No one may obtain success, however correctly he performs rites and ceremonies, unless his will is firm, his courage spotless, his mind unwavering. Your spiritless young Brahman, however, even when roused by his master, hesitated, and failed to follow his teacher's instructions immediately. Thus, quite rightly, that magical power was lost, not only to the unworthy disciple, but to the imprudent master as well."

The noble King Triple-Victory having spoken, the troublesome Vetala immediately vanished from his shoulder, and had again to be fetched from the branches of

the simsapa-tree. Hefted yet once more onto the shoulders of the king, the Vetala waited scarcely a moment before speaking: "My lord, my lord! What meaning has this indomitable persistence of yours? Leave off that beggar's troublesome business and go about your own! Still, if you must go on, let me at least make the going light by reciting to you the following curious tale."

THE BOY WHO LAUGHED

You have, no doubt, heard of the wonderful city of Chitrakuta, beautiful to behold and so orderly that it is said to reflect here below the very laws governing the universe. In that city there lived a king, as noble as the city itself, whose name was Chandravaloka, in appearance indeed as radiant as the moon. Wise he was, but sad at heart, for he had found no wife worthy of him.

It was the practice of King Chandravaloka to soothe his loneliness in the hunt, slaughtering wild swine and scattering the lions with his arrows. One day he went deeper into the woods than usual in pursuit of game, leaving his attendants far behind. A hundred miles deep into the woods he went, and when he stopped, the king found himself in an alien place with no knowledge of his whereabouts.

As he wandered about in the woods, wondering which way to turn to find his way out, he came upon a great lake. There he stopped to rest and refresh himself, tethering his horse by the bank and settling himself in the shade of the trees. Then it was that his eye beheld a fair maiden, a hermit's daughter by her dress, under an ashoka tree with another girl. No ornaments had she but flowers, and her dress was made of bark, but as the king looked, his heart became entangled in the thick masses of her beautiful black hair, and he himself fell under the onslaught of the arrows of love. "Who is this delightful being? Could this be Gauri, leading an ascetic's life in order to win back her husband Shiva? Or is she indeed the moon, come down incarnate on the earth? I will go to her and find out."

As he drew near, the hermit-maiden thought to herself, "Who is this who has found his way into the woods? Surely he is a Siddha, for in truth his beauty is enough to brighten all the world." In modesty, she looked away, and the garland of flowers she was weaving fell from her hands, her legs seemed to want all power of movement.

At last, approaching near, King Chandravaloka spoke to her. "Fairest maiden! A long journey I have come, all but aimless, and yet I have found you. I ask nothing more but to look upon you. Is it the manner of hermits to turn away?"

Then the maiden's companion, a clever girl, spoke and bade the king sit with them, and she treated him as an honored guest. The king therefore directed all his conversation to her, though his eyes drank in only the loveliness of the hermit-maid.

"Tell me, most worthy one, whose family does your charming friend adorn? What are the nectar-distilling syllables of her name? And why, at such a tender age, does she torture a body as delicate as a petal with the hermit's practices?"

To this the clever friend replied, "Your Majesty, she is the daughter of the Rishi Kanva, and her name is Radiant-lotus. It is with her father's permission that she has come from the hermitage to bathe. It is not far from here."

King Chandravaloka was delighted at this news, and rose immediately. He mounted his horse and rode directly to the hermitage, to the holy Kanva, to ask for the maiden in marriage. Pulling a modest robe over his kingly attire, he entered the hermitage and saw before him many hermits, clothed in garments of bark as if they were trees, and in their midst the radiant Kanva, as the moon among the branches. The king fell at his feet and bowed low.

Then Kanva, bestowing upon the king a blessing, spoke to him, saying, "My son Chandravaloka, listen to me and I will tell you something to your advantage. Do you not know the snare of hunting? Do you not know that the hunter and the hunted are both deceived by the passion of the hunt? Why do you uselessly kill wild beasts? Warriors such as yourself were made to protect the timid. Therefore strive only to protect your righteous subjects from evil. If you must hunt, hunt only for the bliss of your own kingship, and pursue that by whatever means are at your disposal; but leave off this sport of Death, for it profits you nothing."

Ah, how sensible are the wise! Bowing low again before Kanva, the king declared, "Holy sir, I receive your instructions into my very heart. From this day henceforth I hunt no more. Let the beasts of this and all other woods fear no more my arrows." And the hermit, touched by the king's sincerity, blessed him and thanked him for his protection of the beasts, and promised him any boon whatsoever he would desire. Then that quick-witted king said, "Holy sir, if you are well-disposed towards me, give me only your daughter, Radiant-lotus, to be my bride; for she alone have I found worthy to be my queen."

And so it was that King Chandravaloka and the fair hermit-maiden Radiant-lotus were married with the blessing of Kanva. After receiving directions from the hermits, the king mounted his horse, with his bride sitting beside him, and began the long journey back to the city of Chitrakuta.

They journeyed the day long until at last the sun, weary of his work, sank behind the western hills to rest. As twilight came upon the land, and fawn-eyed night appeared, clad in the garments of darkness, the king beheld a great fig tree by the shore of a pond. There he dismounted with his beloved, and there beneath the branches of the tree they spent the night.

In the morning, after performing his prayers and ablutions, the king prepared to set forth with his wife, just at the time when

the moon, as if in fear, slipped down into the west and the red sun raised his angry scimitar. At that moment there appeared before the king a Brahman Rakshasa, a demon with hair as brilliant as lightning, in all appearance like a thundercloud. A wreath of entrails he wore about his mighty neck, and in his hand he held a human skull from which he sipped blood. With fire vomiting from his mouth, the demon laughed horribly and threatened the king with these words:

"Villain! Thou has desecrated the tree sacred to my awesome being! Know now that I am the demon Fire-mouth, and that this fig-tree which thou hast presumed to occupy is my dwelling-place. O King! This is the marriage-boon I bring thee: I will tear out thy heart from thy breast and devour it, drinking thy blood from thy carcass until my thirst and vengeance has been slaked."

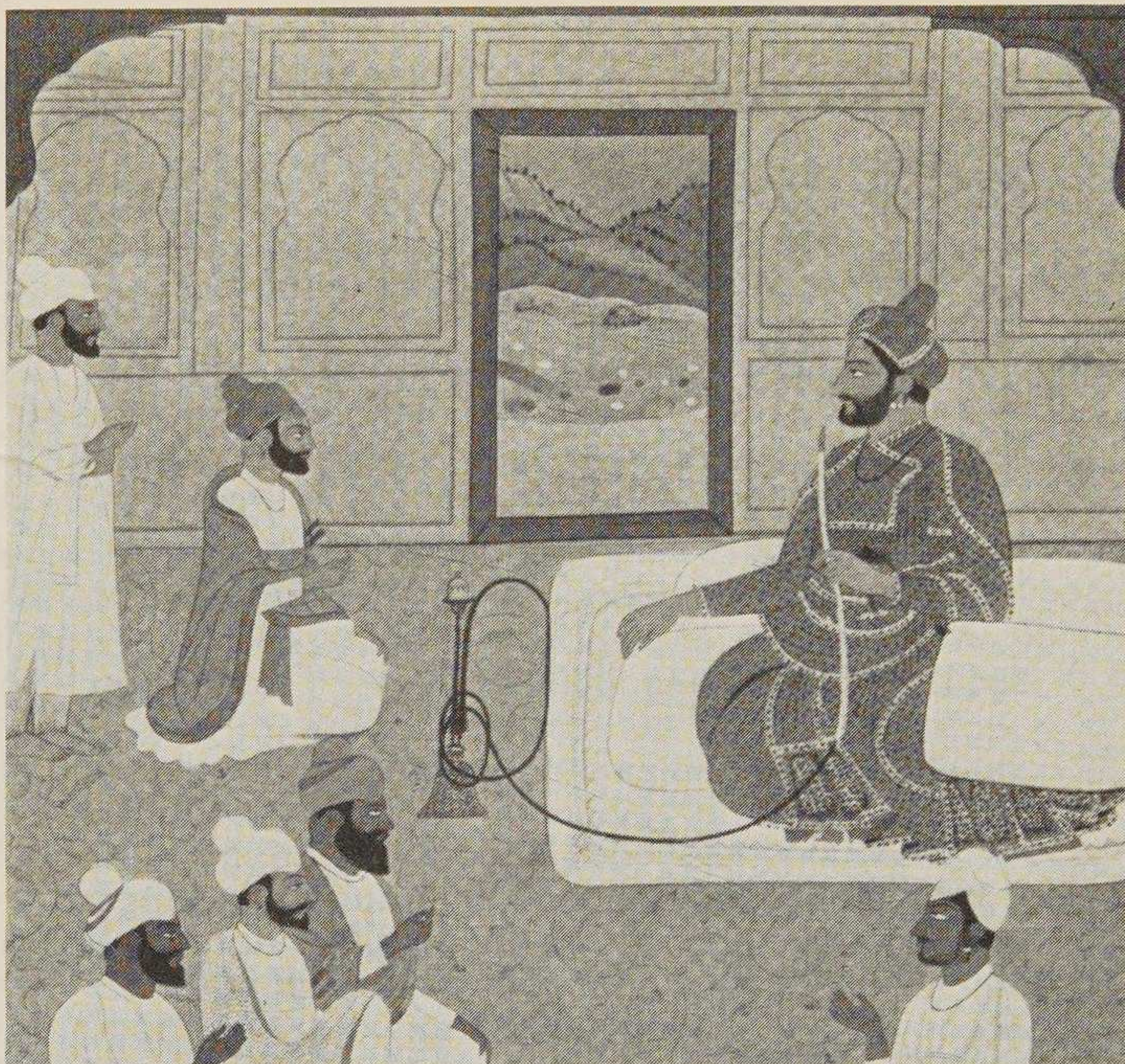
Then King Chandravaloka, trembling with fear, cowered before the dreadful monster, and in his terror made this vow:

"Dread being! Forgive the sin which I have unknowingly committed: I am a lowly guest, come to your hermitage and seeking your protection. I will give you what you desire, if you will but spare me for the sake of my wife. I will bring a human victim here, whose flesh will surely satisfy your appetite and appease your wrath."

Then the demon forgot his anger, in the anticipation of a more delightful feast than the king, and said, "So be it! But hear me! On the seventh day from this will you bring your victim, and this is my desire: he must be a seven-year old boy, Brahman by birth, who out of the nobility of his heart willingly offers himself up for your sake. Bring him here, and slay him yourself with a single stroke of the sword, as his parents hold him firmly to the ground by hand and foot. If this my desire is not fulfilled exactly, be assured that I will come to you and destroy not only you, but your family and all your people as well." And the king, in his terror, consented to all that the demon demanded.

Then King Chandravaloka mounted his horse and rode away to his own kingdom. There he was received with great joy, for his wife was found to be truly worthy of him. A great feast was held in her honor, but none of this would assuage the despair and agony of the king. "Alas," he said to himself, "how am I ever to fulfill the demon's desires? Surely in a week's time he will come to destroy me and my people."

On the following day, King Chandravaloka called his counsellors to him and told them of his plight. And one of them, the wisest, told the king, "Do not despair, your Majesty. I will find such a victim for this sacrifice. The world is a strange place, and I



am sure that such a one may be found."

Then the minister caused a statue to be made of gold, in the shape and size of a boy, garlanded with fine jewels. Then he sent the statue out into all the streets of the city, with constant beating of drums and a proclamation describing the king's desire for a seven-year-old Brahman boy to offer himself as a sacrifice with the permission and assistance of his own parents. As a reward, the statue was to be given to the boy's parents, together with a hundred villages.

The world is a strange place. For there was indeed just such a Brahman boy, only seven years of age, and wonderfully made: he seemed indeed to be an incarnation of all the merits of the king's own subjects, acquired by them in his wise rule. Hearing the proclamation, the boy went directly to his parents and declared his desire to be the victim.

"Have you gone mad?" his parents exclaimed. "How could you possibly imagine that we would consent to such a thing for the sake of gold? And what child in his right mind would sacrifice his tender body even for the sake of the king?"

"I am not at all mad," replied the boy. "And as for my body, consider this: sooner or later it will perish at any rate. And if it perishes without merit—which the wise declare is the only substance which has permanence—of what use will it have been? What greater merit can there be than the salvation of all creatures? Surely I and all the other beings of this city shall be destroyed by the demon if I do not offer myself. What better fruit can my body reap than the merit of this act?" Then, receiving his parents' consent, the boy informed the king's minister of his willingness, and received in turn the golden statue and the hundred villages, which he gave to his parents.

On the seventh day, therefore, the king went forth from the

city, together with the Brahman boy and his counsellors, and went to the fig-tree where he had first encountered the demon. All the appropriate preparations were made: a circle was drawn around the tree and oblations were made before the fire. And then the demon Fire-mouth appeared, even more horrible than before: with blazing eyes, his lips slavering with blood and froth, he came in a cloud of flame, reciting the Vedas. Then he stood before the king and his retinue, licking his lips as he gazed on the Brahman boy.

"Holy and adorable one!" said the king. "Behold, I have fulfilled my promise. Here I am, on the seventh day from our first meeting, and I have brought with me a victim precisely in accordance with your desires. Here is the boy, and here are his parents, who will hold his hands and feet firmly to the ground. And I too am ready with my sword. May the sacrifice be pleasing to you, and remit the debt I owe you by my unwitting sin." And as he spoke, the king drew his sword and advanced upon the child.

Then the boy, seeing the threat of death before him, uttered to himself one last prayer: "Let whatever merit I may acquire by this sacrifice not gain for me heaven or any other salvation that cannot benefit others. Instead, let me be born again on the wheel of rebirth so that again and again this body may be offered for the benefit of others."

Then the boy was placed in front of the demon, who gazed hungrily at him, licking his lips. His mother took hold of his hands, his father held his feet, and the king lifted his sword, prepared to slay him with a single blow. Then, to the amazement of all, the child laughed so loudly that all there—the demon included—immediately abandoned all that they were about, and putting their palms together in the attitude of prayer, gazed astonished at the child's face.

"Now tell me, most clever King," said the Vetala, "for this indeed is a puzzle to me to which I am most curious to have the answer: what was the reason that this child laughed, even in the face of so awful a moment as his own death? And please, remember that if you know the answer and refuse to say, your head will burst into a hundred pieces."

THE DIAMOND VEHICLE: 2 Conversations on Tibetan Buddhism and the West

Although holocaust may be too large a word to describe what happened in Tibet in 1959, the near-extinction of both a people and a religious tradition is exactly what took place. Then, there were internment camps, a great many dead (80,000 killed outright), thousands more sent into exile, and, to complete the act, an ultimate symbolic defilement. The monastery of Drepung, the seat of the Dalai Lama and the central locus of the Tibetan Buddhist faith, was converted by the Chinese into a municipal city hall—a change roughly equivalent to turning St. Peter's Basilica in Rome into a train station. It was from this destruction that Gomang Khen Rinpoche and Nechung Rinpoche fled, along with 100,000 other Tibetans, lamas and other believers.

Following this termination of Buddhism in Tibet, the Tibetans charged with the preservation of the tradition realized that to survive they would need the world's help. India offered them refuge and a place to pitch their tents, but little more—certainly no help in rebuilding the structures destroyed by the Chinese. Questions about transplanting a religious tradition from one culture (for example, Tibetan) to another (in this case Indian) are usually of an intellectual nature—scholars and interpreters arguing about the inevitable new forms likely to emerge, and whether the original purity of the tradition can be preserved. For Buddhists who once lived in Tibet, there is no choice and little argument. The structures must be erected in India much as they were in Tibet, because India was quite simply the only feasible place for them to go. The Rinpoches are currently in the United States to find help in the rebuilding of their monasteries and temples.

Gomang Khen Rinpoche was born in Kham, Tibet and at the age of 13 became a monk at the Pashod Monastery, which was known for its excellent training in philoso-

phic principles. After a lifetime of study in the five-fold Tibetan division of knowledge—Logic, Transcendental Wisdom, Middle-Way Philosophy, Metaphysics, and Ethics—the Rinpoche received the highest honor awarded in his college of monks. Following the period of hardship after the Chinese invasion, Gomang Khen Rinpoche was appointed by the Dalai Lama as abbot of Gomang College, responsible for the training of future Buddhist monks. Now 62, he is considered a Master of Tantric Studies, but the path for him was neither short nor easy: there were 41 years of study and 10 years of exile for him before he assumed the mantle of Abbot.

Nechung Rinpoche had a different path, as he is considered the incarnate Grand Lama of the monastery which was the seat of the State Oracle of Tibet. He is accomplished in ritual arts, psychic sciences, and traditional Buddhist literature, and in addition has received the most esoteric teachings of Tibetan Buddhist faith, the "hidden treasure texts" of Vajrayana, the receipt of which marks his full ordination in the tradition. Then too, he is one of the very few lamas who will perform the ritual of Consciousness Transference, used in assisting a dying person through the first stages of the Bardo.

The two Rinpoches are travelling now through the U.S., a country which has not proved to be exactly hospitable to them. Totally unfamiliar with the rigorous path of traditional Tibetan Buddhism, many Americans seem to prefer their spiritual teachings short and sweet, the Rinpoches find. Whereas it took each of these men a half-century to reach proficiency in their disciplines, many here expect to be guided "straight to the top" in a matter of weeks—or preferably at once. The great gap between this instant approach—and the teachers or gurus who espouse it—and the more sustained effort of the will which the Rinpoches exemplify has made their sojourn here somewhat perplexing to them. Their task of familiarizing Americans with Vajrayana Buddhism has not been easy, and few funds have been raised here for the construction of the new monastery.

Readers who would like to know how they might help should contact The Drepung Fund, 145 East 52 Street, New York, N.Y. 10022.

Parabola: Tibetan Buddhist teachings speak of death as a passage, a journey. But what is the essence—the word "soul" is perhaps inadequate—which makes this passage? How might we define it?

Rinpoche: That is a difficult question, partly because it is not easy to define the Buddhist concept of "I" completely, using English terminology. But the force which goes into and through the passage of death is the discriminating force of the substance we call *mind*. This is the force which *perceives*, the force which discriminates between what is good and bad, between happiness and suffering.

But the basic definition in Tibetan Buddhism for "mind" revolves around an understanding of what we call "clear nature," and there is an analogy I can give which might help you understand this.

The clear nature is like a clear sheet of glass, without any color. So then, the glass may be put on top of another substance and whatever the color of that substance may be, the clear nature will pick it up. If it's a blue substance then looking through the clear

glass you will see blue. So the clear nature is the force which perceives the different aspects of objects, it understands everything and makes discriminations. This is what we define as the mind.

Parabola: Does this clear nature have a particular kind of energy which is organized in a certain way, which is common to every being, or does each clear nature have an individual characterization? Do you have one that is different from mine, or are all our clear natures the same?

Rinpoche: In one sense the clear natures of all of us here are the same, but what is different and distinct about them is the potential force that each of them possesses. The potential forces are, in Buddhist terms, the karma, the accumulation of action. Action is committed and then leaves an impression on this clear nature, as a perception. And this is the force which gives us a form into the next existence, the future.

Parabola: Could you say that the clear force, like the DNA molecule, has a code, has a plan already in it which can be transmitted? Or would you say that it is neutral?

Rinpoche: The basic nature is neutral, but then it picks up potential!

Parabola: To cast the question in a different light, I wonder if you could say that there is a primordial sort of beginning, a clear state which takes on these perceptions, these karmic impressions? If this were so, could you then say that the process of enlightenment is a return to an original state or is it an advance to a state that couldn't exist if you had not gone through this development?

Rinpoche: In your question there is a slight misunderstanding about what is meant by the clear nature. There is no "beginning" which can be likened to a clear aspect of mind. I am not saying that the mind can be all pure, only that there is a part of it which can perceive everything clearly, in a clear nature. So in this lifetime we did not start out with a pure mind and then lose it. In Buddhist concept there is no beginning, everything is *beginningless*. And through this beginningless current we believe that we have had innumerable previous lives, and that the stream of mind now is the same thing which was many, many years before. And since this stream has had so many of the different forces of life go through it, it has picked up a great many delusions. Then the goal of enlightenment is this: we try to get rid of all the bad impressions in the karma we have picked up along the passage of the many deaths we have experienced.

Parabola: But if there were good impressions, one would try very hard to retain them?

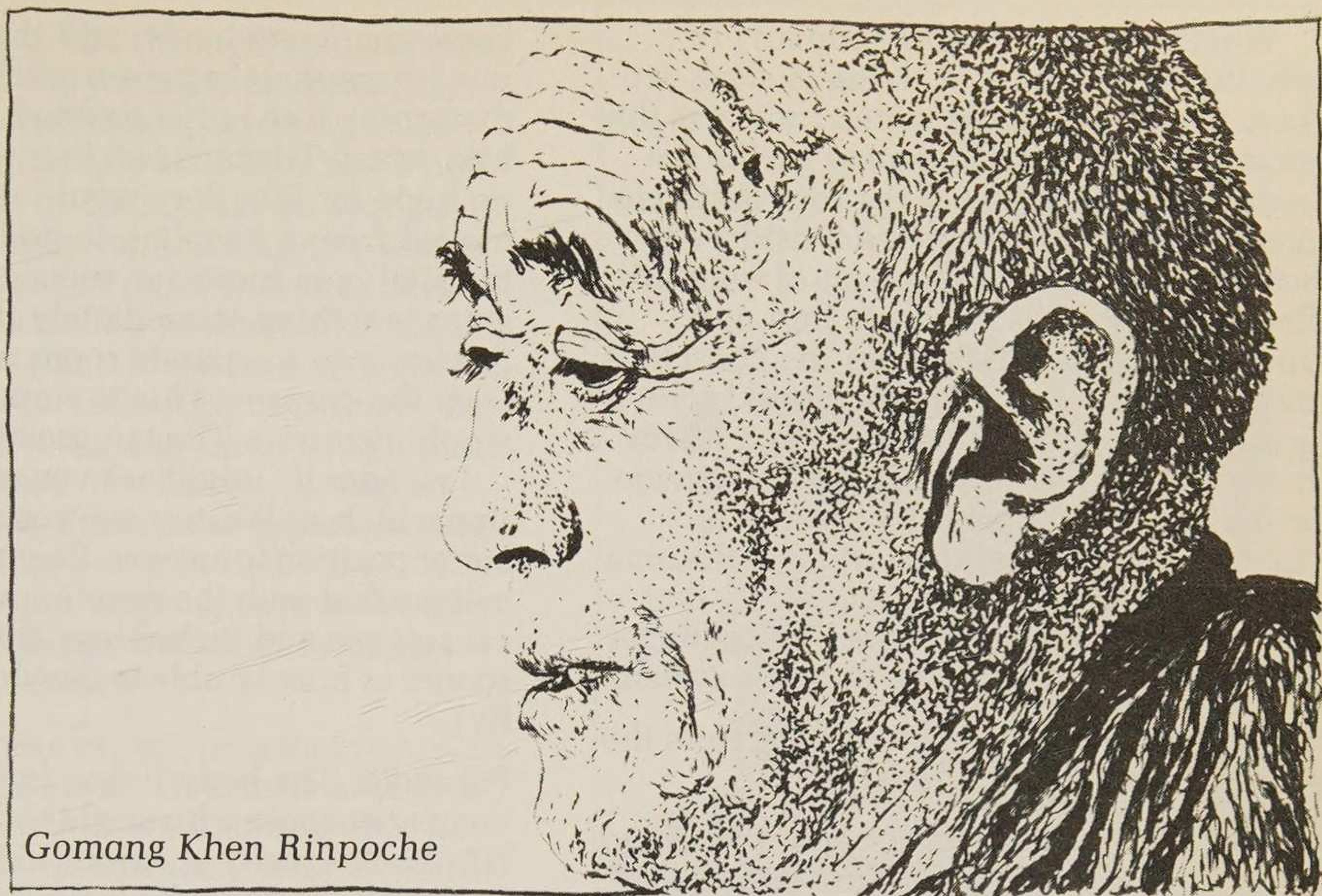
Rinpoche: Yes, you try to retain good impressions. When these good impressions are activated they get rid of the bad impressions, the bad karma: delusions.

Parabola: If the process reaches a climax at the time of death, in leaving one lifetime behind, how does a lama help at this time, in the moments of death?

Rinpoche: Whether or not a dying person has a peaceful death or not in general depends on his own karma. But if there is a karmic relationship between the lama and the dying person, and if the lama has received the oral transmission, the teachings of the lineage—the meditation on the transference of consciousness—then the lama will go and see this dying person. As soon as the person has externally stopped breathing, the lama will perform the meditation, to send the stream of mind which we spoke of earlier to a more favorable circumstance, an existence in one of the Buddha-fields, or else back to a human rebirth.

Parabola: If the clear mind is able to receive an impression and hold it, is this moment of death a particularly important impression?

Rinpoche: Yes, this moment of death has a great influence on the taking of rebirth in the future. It is not only the moment of death, it is the moment before the next life. So that if a dying person is able to have the guidance of a lama, all his previous virtues will be more powerful because they will be


Gomang Khen Rinpoche

strengthened in this moment. Therefore he will take a better rebirth.

Parabola: If the lama can help, what can hinder a person at the moment of death?

Rinpoche: The person's own delusions are the forces which act as interruptions in this passage.

Parabola: Is it possible to say that one can determine purposefully, by an act of the will, the nature of one's passage into death or one's future incarnation? In Buddhist concepts how much of a role does the will play in determining the passage and rebirth?

Rinpoche: There are many people who can purposefully determine incarnations, but these are the meditators, the people who practice very deeply and intensely. They achieve a certain level of attainment and with it the power to determine their death and the rebirth they will take. In the traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, this is thought of as a selfless purpose, because the aim of what is called "purposeful incarnation" is to better spread the dharma, to eliminate the suffering of other sentient beings.

Parabola: In the light of Tibetan Buddhist teachings, what is the importance of repentance at the moment of death? Does the Christian model of repentance—the thief who was crucified along with Jesus, forgiven by Him because he repented—have any resemblance to the Buddhist notion of forgiveness at the moment of death?

Rinpoche: The force of repentance is important throughout life, not only at the moment of death. In the practise of Tibetan Buddhism, repentance certainly makes nonvirtuous actions very much lighter, but it does not abolish them totally. This I would say is the principal difference: for repentance to be complete, it must be wedded to daily practises, with the three other components of the daily practise of Buddhism. Repentance by itself does not destroy all the roots of bad actions. It seems that a practising Christian can say to someone "I'm remorseful," and repent. And then somebody else has the power to say "That's all right, it has been forgiven."

Parabola: To return once again to questions relating to the nature of death and dying, I wonder if you could venture a definition of the precise moment of death. This is a question which has become quite snarled in the United States at the moment, with the civil authorities, the courts, medical doctors and spiritual leaders all venturing conflicting opinions.

Rinpoche: I have heard this question asked quite frequently while I have been in this country. Here it seems, in most cases, that when someone dies in hospital, as soon as he stops breathing and the heart no longer registers a beat the person is considered dead. This is not how it is in Tibetan Buddhism.

Whether a person dies suddenly or whether the process of dying is slow, we have a different signal which indicates the moment when consciousness leaves the body. The dissolving of the four basic elements must occur before we consider a person to be "dead." The elements of water, air, fire and earth must dissolve into one another, and only then does the conscious mind stream leave the body. Speaking in a general way, when the mind-stream leaves the body there are physical signs. A person will bleed from one of the nostrils or there will be a white liquid which will come from the person's sexual organs. At that time only do we say that there is no longer any mind or energy in the person's system.

Parabola: How long might that be from the time the person stops breathing?

Rinpoche: Anywhere from a few minutes to 7 days. With many lamas who have attained a high level of spiritual mastery, there has been a period where they rested in what we call "death meditation." There was recently a lama in India, who, after he had stopped breathing, held his posture in the meditation position for over a month. When the consciousness left his body, his head was seen to drop and blood came from his nostril and only at that time did we consider him to be dead. His body had remained fresh until then too, and only afterward had it begun to decay.

Parabola: It's fairly common practise that as soon as death seems to have occurred, people want to move the body away to start processing it for burial. Is that harmful to the person who has so recently died—to be moved away so quickly?

Rinpoche: It is considered a highly non-virtuous action in the practise of Tibetan Buddhism to disturb the dying person like this—it gives him a great deal of fright and frustration. All of his senses have stopped functioning. If a person wants to communicate something, but has no power to do so, it causes a great deal of disturbance. Therefore it is considered extremely harmful and non-virtuous.

Parabola: Is it harmful for doctors to try and maintain life by sustaining people on respirators and artificial heart-support machinery?

Rinpoche: I feel this is harmful. When it comes to the point where a person stops breathing, completely, and there is not much hope that the person will live, then it's disturbing him in his passage, not helping him. Many Tibetans feel that when there is no hope for life, they would rather be removed from a hospital, to go home. In a hospital, you know, as soon as the person stops breathing immediately the body is thrown into a separate room where they keep the corpses. This is something that would disturb a Tibetan greatly.

I wonder if I might ask you another question which, as Westerners, you might be in a better position to answer. Do you personally believe that with the development of medical science and technology that they will sooner or later be able to develop immortality?

Parabola: The body living forever? Well, there are people who might think that way, but it's not really a serious aim or a goal. Scientists do study the ways in which cells degenerate, and they do recycle organs, but really so far only to learn more about how the human body functions. Immortality is not the goal.

Rinpoche: If doctors someday hope they can achieve this sort of immortal life, what do your Christian theologians say?

Parabola: Most Christian theologians would say that it is an aberration, that it should not be done. You attain perfection only with resurrection after death. And the attempt to prolong life indefinitely shows, in a way, that you value the material world in a disproportionate fashion.

But along similar lines, could you say that if a person has had vital organs transplanted from the body of another person, a new heart, a new lung, new eyes, would that have any influence on reincarnation?

Rinpoche: No, a heart transplant, a lung transplant have no effect, no impact on the mind. When the person dies, the whole body is abandoned and the mind travels independent of the form, the body. And it has to reincarnate by itself. Right now, I eat my food using a set of false teeth, but it does not change my thinking at all.

Parabola: There's an American medical doctor named Elisabeth Kübler-Ross who's done a great deal of work with people who are dying or about to die. Dr. Ross has also done research among patients who were considered dead, clinically,and were

brought back to life through medical technology. Some very similar experiences emerged in what these people reported. Many of these people said they had a definite sensation of consciousness leaving their bodies; they reported having seen a very bright kind of light; that they saw a hand being extended to them and that the hand belonged to a loved one, or someone who had a great influence over them; that they experienced going up to a high place and being aware of what was going on below, on earth. Since these experiences occurred after these people had "died," I wonder how you might interpret them? How might Tibetan Buddhist teachings shed light on them?

Rinpoche: These experiences that you relate do not surprise me. In Tibet there are a great many people who have returned after having been in an intermediary state of rebirth, or *Bardo*. They've returned into their own bodies and have reported similar experiences: consciousness has left the form, they have seen their relatives in their consciousness and tried to communicate with them and the relatives do not respond and the people experiencing this are frustrated, and they go through the preliminary stages of the *Bardo* and then return to their own forms. We have had very similar stories related in Tibet to what your medical doctors report in their research.

But sometimes when a person dies, as I said before, the element of air dissolves. With so many of the arteries collapsing in the channels where air is supposed to flow, sometimes the person gets extremely vivid experiences of travelling to another place, of intensely experiencing a part of their karma. And when life is restored back into the body again, they tell of these things. But this is only caused by the element of air leaving. It's an illusion, not a real experience of the *Bardo*, the death passage. The air has simply travelled in the wrong channel. Chemical things then happen in the body, and the whole experience is rather on the level of a dream.

Parabola: Many people in the West who practise or follow the Tibetan form of Buddhism say that its traditional forms are threatened now that Tibet has been invaded by anti-religious red Chinese forces and proper monasteries have not been built elsewhere. Is this impression wrong? Is there a threat to the preservation and survival of Tibetan Buddhism?

Nechung Rinpoche

Rinpoche: Your impression is correct—the situation is difficult as well as desperate. The Tibetan tradition is one of the authentic forms of Buddhism in the world today, and this tradition has been preserved in a highly concentrated way in Tibet until the Communists invaded in 1959. Now of course there is no hope for Buddhism to ever return to Tibet. So the handful of people, practitioners and people trained in the teachings, the oral traditions, and the techniques of Tibetan Buddhism are trying to do their best under very difficult conditions now in India. In fact, the difficulty for a tradition to come from a center where it has developed over a period of a thousand years into a new and in many ways a hostile environment, should be self-evident to any intelligent person.

Parabola: What does Tibetan Buddhism have to offer the world now? Are there prophecies or oracles in the tradition concerning dangers we all face at the present moment?

Rinpoche: Materialism has taken over most of the surface of the world today, and most peoples have lost that kind of precise bal-

ance between spiritualism and materialism which sustains beneficial living. This much should again be obvious to any intelligent person; what Tibetan Buddhism can offer, especially to the West, is a definite means of achieving an equilibrium, by preserving and practising the traditions. And the means of achieving this goal is adaptable and flexible—the forms of Tibetan Buddhism can adapt themselves wherever they take root.

Happiness is the goal of Tibetan Buddhism, and that is what we all would like —animals and insects included! Whoever has any life is included in the benefits that a knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism can bring, it is by no means limited to Tibetans, or Indians, or anyone else for that matter.

Parabola: We'd like to understand what happened in Tibet in 1959. We know that there was some historical reason for the conflict which erupted then with the Chinese. But is there some way to understand the rupture in terms of karmic law? It might sound strange, but can a karmic cause be said to have originated in Tibet itself, through some sort of wrong action or thought?

Rinpoche: There is no denial that the conflict was the result of a karmic consequence. But the circumstances in which these karmic results were brought to Tibet were unjustified. The atrocity, the total destruction of the faith and of the people who held it is not the way it should have happened.

Parabola: Are you saying that there was indeed a need for reform?

Rinpoche: There was need for reform and need for change. But the way they did it . . . to take away the total freedom of the people . . .

Parabola: But the change should have come through a restoration of the Tibetan traditions?

Rinpoche: Yes, we should have been allowed to do it for ourselves.

Parabola: Just this past month (September 1976) the *New York Times* published a series of articles which talked about Tibet today. The series also spoke of pre-1959 Tibet, describing it as a feudal state where thousands of peasants struggled under the worst sort of conditions in order to support a handful of monks who might then live in luxury. Now, we are aware that this is a very biased view of the situation that existed then, a very materialistic point of view. But how did the peasants see themselves then—would the poorest of laborers have thought of himself as being oppressed?

Rinpoche: No, and I am glad that you are aware of the bias in articles like the one contained in the *New York Times* series. This point of view is highly influenced by Communist hands. While it is true that the peasants in pre-1959 Tibet had to work extremely hard to support the monastery, this work was done on purely volunteer basis. The peasants pursued this labor because they felt that it was an honor to do it. It was a form of practise for them, an accumulation of merit to be able to serve the monastic community. So people did have to work hard, but they did not mind doing it. They also had their freedom.

Now, of course, there is no such thing as freedom in Tibet. Some of the peasants who remained behind, who are still in Tibet, complain bitterly about the Communist rule, and say that, if anything, the Communists have worsened their situation. So even from the materialist point of view, things are worse now in Tibet than they were.

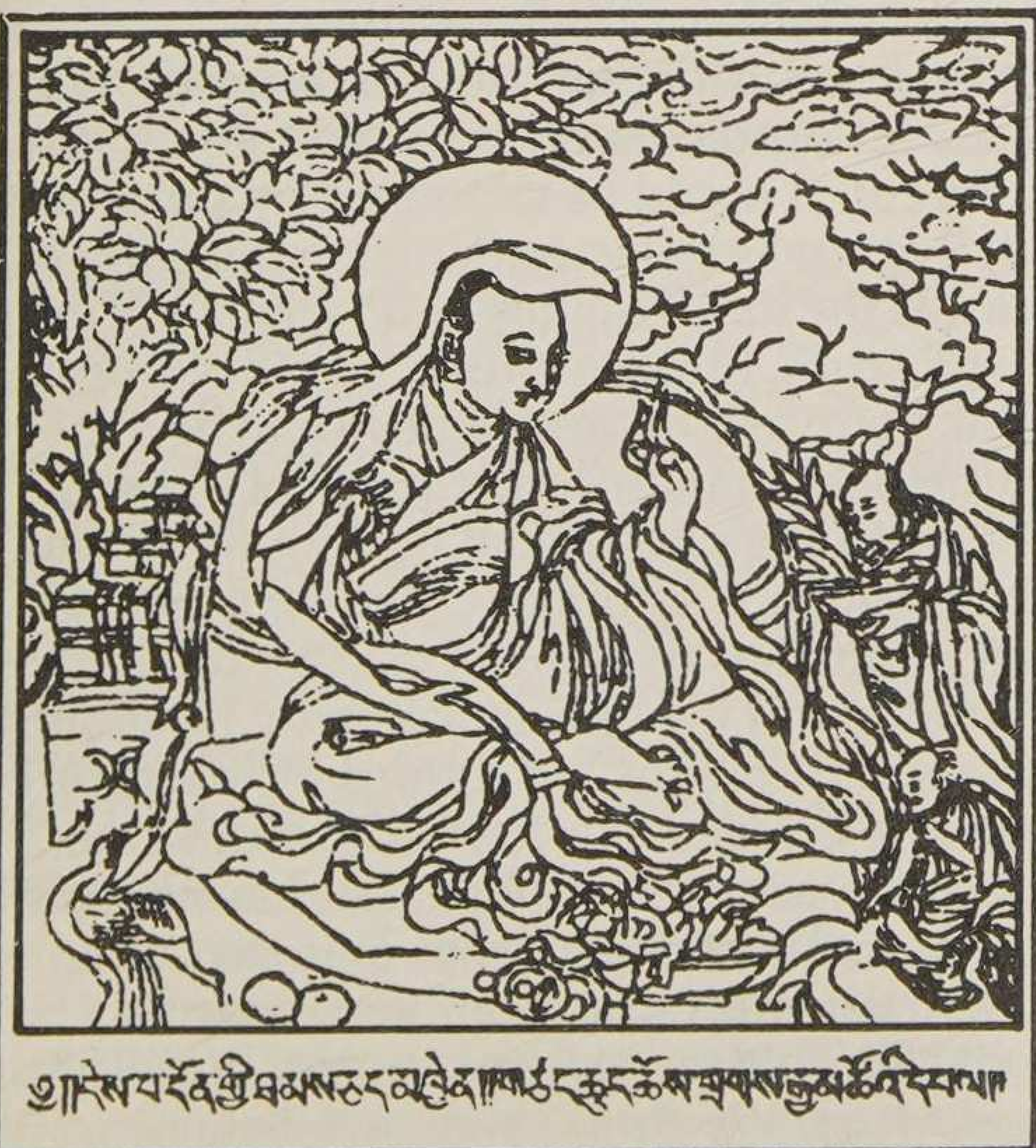
I know the reality and the conditions of Tibet, then and now. I remained there for 3 years after the Communists invaded and tried to work under their rule. I was put into a Chinese Communist prison camp for another 3 years. You must be reminded that all the claims they make for Tibet today are mere propaganda. The Tibetan people, after the Chinese invasion, simply lost their identity.

Robert Alexander Thurman, born in New York City and educated at Harvard, has long been immersed in the study and practice of Tibetan (Vajrayāna) Buddhism. As a senior in college he took a year's leave of absence to go to India, where he first encountered Vajrayāna in the flesh. Returning to America from this initial contact, he then spent six years of study at a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in New Jersey. Having gained a footing and eager to go further, he returned to India and was formally ordained as a Buddhist monk by the Dalai Lama.

The young monk did not take full vows, however, preferring to return once again to America and pick up his academic studies where he had left them years before, as a senior at Harvard. A Ph.D in Buddhist studies and Sanskrit were attained, along with other degrees. Thurman now teaches at Amherst College.

This remarkable combination of initiation and academic study has made Thurman unique as a teacher and interpreter of Vajrayāna. Able to conceptualize freely and adventurously, he seems to weigh each of his theoretical flights with the hard knowledge that only the true practitioner may gain.

Thurman is personally committed to the idea of developing an alternative approach to the teaching of Tibetan and other forms of Buddhism, a middle road between the academic and religious ways of knowing. At The American Institute of Buddhist Studies, Thurman and others are preparing just such a program, hoping to transfer it to the setting of a larger Universtity structure.



Parabola: What do you think, Mr. Thurman, about the Tibetan attitude towards death having some effect on our Western attitude? Do you think there's any hope for us in the West of changing our way of looking at death as being the last enemy, the final disaster?

Thurman: I certainly hope so. I can't give a valid sociological opinion but I can say that my own confrontation with Tibetan Buddhism certainly changed my attitude toward death. In the ideology of scientific materialism, the notion that there is no mind apart from the brain, or no psyche apart from the body, or that the psyche is an evolute of matter, naturally makes death the most terrifying thing of all. If all we are is a body, when the body stops, we're finished. Curiously enough, this "modern" notion of ours is also a very ancient notion as well. There were a group of philosophers in ancient India who held these views in opposi-

tion to the Buddha. Buddhism countered that view successfully then, and I think it will counter it wherever it finds it now.

Parabola: Could you perhaps help us by clarifying what the lamas told us in answer to our question about what leaves the body at death and what is reborn in another body? And what is the essence that escapes death and rebirth?

Thurman: Basically Buddhists speak of the mind, or what could be called the continuum of the consciousness, and in the simplest terms it is this which discards the physical body and takes on another physical embodiment in the next life after a transitional period. Buddhism teaches that the human being is composed of what are called the five aggregates. These aggregates may be called the aggregate of matter, the aggregate of sensations, the aggregate of ideation, the aggregate of volitions, and the aggregate of consciousness. You notice that the four aggregates from sensations to consciousness are non-physical and only the aggregate of matter is physical. The Buddhist teachings say that those four are not discontinued at death, but simply separate from one particular form of the material aggregate and become ensconced in a new material aggregate after a period varying from some weeks to some moments.

Parabola: Would the non-physical aggregates correspond to our Christian notion of soul?

Thurman: Yes, certainly it does correspond to the Christian notion of soul. A difference however, is that the Tibetan or the Buddhist notion of mind is a notion of a non-physical process that constantly changes. Just like water flowing in a channel, the mind is described as a process that has a definite continuity, but as in the example of water, you can't say that the same water is in one or another part of the channel. So the mind is perceived as an impermanent changing process, and not as a fixed entity that travels through a medium. The Western notion of soul, then—along with the Hindu notion of *atman* or self which the Buddha took issue with in India when he brought the doctrine of non-self—is tied to the concept of a fixed entity. This concept Buddhism does not share. Let's say that Buddhism is critical of the notion of fixed self. Therefore, they don't entertain the notion of an immortal soul in the same way a Christian would.

Parabola: I think it's right here that we run into the biggest difficulty for Westerners. How, for instance, can someone speaking for Buddhism say that this is a process that travels on, as you say—or as it has been described, as one billiard ball hitting another or one candle flame lighting another—and yet be able to turn to a person dying and say, "You are going to," etc.?

Thurman: I mentioned that the Buddhists had a similar difficulty talking to their contemporaries. They had to defend themselves against arguments like: if there is no fixed soul, no basic register, how can you say that karma has any coherence? How can you say there is any continuity? There are volumes and volumes of philosophical literature on the subject. One of the most effective metaphors that I've found is that of fire. A fire burns across a field. Is the fire that reaches one end of the field the same fire that was at the other end?

If you answered that it was the same, that answer could be criticized, pointing out that its fuel was different, that its location was different. And conversely, if you said it was different, it could be criticized by pointing out that it was the same fire from the point of view of the forest rangers who were fighting it and so on. Either attitude, in other words, if taken up as a dogmatic position, becomes vulnerable from the other point of view. So it is with the question of continuity versus fixed entity. It's neither the same nor different, if one has to come up with a dogmatic formula. But if a person asks why he should be responsible for his actions or to a future life if it is just a continuum and not "me," the response to that objection has always been, traditionally, "what is it that you think is continuing from yesterday to today?" This is, perhaps, unintelligible to us at first. We think, well, we have a solid

body; but if we think in biological terms of the cellular changes that are involved, the atoms that constantly change, we are really quite hard pressed to say that this body is the same one it was an hour ago or a week ago. Because of the relative stability of the material aggregate we can feel that we have a certain continuum. Our real wonderment about how the future life continuum can take place, the Buddhists tell us, is based on an overly comfortable notion of our present continuity.

Parabola: There is another question which interests us very much. What part does spiritual love have in Buddhism? Compassion, the Bodhisattva ideal of compassion is known, but this seems to be more the part of love that goes out to other people. What part does the love for the inner life have, which seems to me the essential religious feeling? How does love for one's inner self, love for one's soul—which is what I think Christians probably mean when they talk about love of God—how does that come into Buddhism?

Thurman: I would like just to say a quick thing about how Buddhism distinguishes between love and compassion. Love takes other sentient beings and oneself as its object and wishes for them and for oneself to be happy, truly happy in a real and permanent sense. Compassion has the opposite mode of wishing them not to suffer. It's a kind of wish to take upon oneself whatever suffering others have and alleviate it so that they may be freed of suffering and the cause of suffering. The other is trying to take in and take away suffering. In relation to love of God, if you define that in a more, say, Johannine manner, where you also say that God is love, then what you mean is a mode of existence as pure love.

Parabola: How can the Tibetan teachings, or the ideas behind them, instruct us in the West about how to be in the face of death —either our own or that of others? The *Tibetan Book of the Dead* makes it rather clear what our concrete responsibilities are, but goodness knows they are very far from the way we generally behave and even think it right to behave. This is something we would like to have you comment on.

Thurman: Let me say first that we tend to think of these ideas ethnically as Tibetan, and I think that will get us into intellectual problems when we approach the subject. We have to realize that Tibet is primarily the cradle of an ancient culture from India that was lost to the rest of the world during the second millenium through the effects of materialism, the Islamic conquests all over Asia, the Christian conquests, and finally the French and British conquests. It's been a rather dark era from the spiritual point of view. But Tibet was a place where this culture was preserved, hidden away from the ravages of invasions, library burnings and so on, that took place in India and in other places. So what we can get of value from Tibet has to do with recovering something of our own heritage from the first days of the great civilizations both in the Mediterranean and Asia. That having been said, I can comfortably use the word Tibetan. From the Tibetan Buddhist teachings, what we can obtain of value about death has to do with a better analysis of the way in which our present ideologies form our attitudes towards death. Of course, the most significant one I'm referring to here is materialism—the one that makes death into such a tremendous problem for us. The Tibetan teachings can help us to analyze what it is in our make-up that causes us to have this false attitude and how we can rise above it. They have a deep understanding of the interconnection between ideology and attitude which we could well make use of. That's the first thing. There are a number of other matters that the lamas have pointed to quite adequately: for example, that we should learn to be more calm around the dead person, not to consider the death a tragedy. Our main responsibility is not to create anxiety in the consciousness of the dead person—who is said to be still in the area. Of course, they stress that the person's previous knowledge and self-control is of main importance; we can only really be a subsidiary help, and the dying person's own mental state is most significant. The root of

our ability to behave in the way that is recommended, however, comes from our attitudes. Naturally one will be calm, even cheerful if one doesn't consider that the person has had the worst possible thing happen to him that ever could happen, but rather that some natural part of the process has occurred and that it might be a very good transition. Certainly we should try to think about it that way. If our attitude is not based on the erroneous notion of the pre-eminence of matter, then automatically we will take the proper behavioral paths, as will the dying person, for that matter. So, the main contribution of this culture is not in some gimmick or some rite or some procedure that we can enact. It has to do with the kind of critical analysis and reflection on our own ideological make-up that will enable us to see fundamental errors in our attitudes.

Parabola: Speaking materially for the moment, in the West we think a person is dead when the heart stops beating or the breathing has stopped, whereas we learn from the Rinpoches that Tibetan Buddhists have a completely different notion of the moment of death. They say it is when blood flows from a nostril or when a fluid comes from the sexual organs, and this can happen as long as weeks after the body has stopped breathing, the heart has stopped beating.

Thurman: It can be. The rule of thumb is that an extremely good person or an extremely bad person—like a demon—departs immediately with cessation of breath. They're gone into some new experiential realm. The normal, middle range of people, neither that good nor that bad, tend to hang around a while, because they're attached to the area psychically. They think they are still there, but they can't communicate with other people, and they experience great frustration and distress. They don't understand what is happening to them. This is very vividly described in the *Book of the Dead.*

Parabola: Are you familiar with the Kübler-Ross and Moody research on life after death?

Thurman: Yes, a little bit.

Parabola: The Rinpoches seemed to indicate that the experience of the individuals described by Kübler-Ross was an experience of dream consciousness, not an experience of death. Though they had stopped

breathing and their hearts had stopped, they were not dead, but only dreaming when they reported an archetypal . . . .

Thurman: Let me make one important point clear. There is no experience of death in Tibetan Buddhism. It is technically not possible. In Tibetan language or Sanskrit, life and death are not contrasted as a pair of opposites. Birth and death are a pair of opposites linguistically. In Buddhist cultures, Chinese, Sanskrit, Tibetan, birth and death are the opposition. Birth and death *together* make *life*, for which there are words like vitality, life-force. But what we mean when we talk about life—the joy of life—we mean what they would call the birth-and-death cycle. Therefore, death is simply an arbitrary line drawn by us. In the life process of a plant, for instance, when is this a seed, when is this a sprout? It's a flowing process that has no dividing line in its own nature. The line is our own construct. So that even when you are dying, any experience that you have, if it's previous to a certain moment of being identified with the functioning of your physical senses, then you could say that this is in the continuum of your former material aggregate. If the four aggregates that I mentioned—feeling, ideation, will, and consciousness—if they no longer have the avenues of the senses of that previous body, they still experience. But they are not experiencing death, they are experiencing the *Bardo* in the Tibetan way of seeing, which is a kind of dream experience. So to say that those people cited by Kübler-Ross who died and were resuscitated had experienced *death* is a linguistic

impossibility for the *Rinpoches*. You don't talk about experiencing death, you talk about experiencing the death /birth transitional state which is a dream-like state.

Parabola: Thank you. I think that really clarifies it. When a person is dying, is there a certain effort they must make? In the *Tibetan Book of the Dead,* the dying person is being adjured all the time to look at one light as opposed to another, and so on. How is that effort understood, that effort to die well?

Thurman: A point that is stressed very strongly in the *Book of the Dead* is the importance of a person having made efforts during his lifetime so that at the time of death he already has a certain skill in controlling himself. What is needed at that moment is self-control to the highest degree. The great danger in the *Bardo* state, of course, is not the *Bardo* state itself, but the danger of getting dragged into the wrong type of next life. That's the tremendous danger. What people in those cultures fear, therefore, and I would even say people in the West also fear, is not death. Nobody fears death, I take it; they fear what possibly might happen subsequently. We certainly could say unequivocally that in the Buddhist cultures it is hell, or the *Preta Loka* or the animal realm, or even an inferior form of human existence that is really the cause of terror to the person who faces death. It's not the death process itself. The point is that they need to have a strong self-control so that their desire will not allow them to be attracted to one of these inferior states of existence, so that their fear or terror or hatred will not cause them to take refuge somewhere without examining where they're going and then end up in the womb of a pig, let's say. Or perhaps in the hell realm. So the effort has to do with self-control and seeing through the surface appearance of things, not being attracted somewhere undesirable. Now, as they say in the *Book of the Dead,* this is something one can do much better beforehand. Death becomes, then, a most powerful motive for self-cultivation in the Buddhist tradition because once you're at the crisis point—it's like being in a dream—once you're dreaming, and things are so fluid and changeable, and you're so unstable—it's very hard to begin at that time to make an effort at something. If you've already developed a way of not identifying with your emotions, not identifying with your hatred, not identifying with your attachments, then you can go through the kind of psychic upheaval that occurs in the *Bardo* remaining calm and concentrating on a positive result for yourself and for others. The worst thing is to go out in a state of wrath or terror and that should be avoided at all costs. There are Buddhist laymen's prayers not to die violently, to die peacefully when they are composed and concentrated. However, even if such a misfortune should take place, if they have either (1) attained a stage of a certain type of mastery where they haven't gotten angry dying in a violent situation or (2) they have a certain cultivation of religious concentration such as devotionalism, that kind of death will not be so disastrous. If one has a deep faith in any symbol, such as the Buddha or Bodhisattva or a deity of some kind, then that concentration is something that is always going on in your mind. You may have heard of Tibetans that go around mumbling *om mani padme hum*. They have a visualization that there is a wheel turning in their heart which is a wheel of these syllables and that this wheel is turning in a constant prayer of compassion that all sentient beings, including themselves, don't go to hell or other bad places. If they have this kind of practice going on, this would save them in a somewhat artificial way. It's not like real mastery, but it's the kind of prop that will genuinely help them. It's like a homing beacon for the mind towards something positive and a way to avoid being dragged into the terrors of all the dream-like experiences. So there are two possibilities, self-mastery or some sort of symbolic focus

for one's concentration that can save one from the disaster of a violent death. And first of all, of course, one will pray not to die violently.

Parabola: Well, the Christians also.

Thurman: Of course, these things are very similar.

Parabola: One would then avoid battles?

Thurman: Absolutely. There is no rationalization in Buddhism. I don't mean that there haven't been wars in Buddhist cultures, although a good thing about Buddhism is that there has never been, for instance, a holy war in its name. There is philosophically no way in which fighting is justified in Buddhism.

Parabola: This is an instance, then, of death instructing life. To avoid a violent death, one would necessarily be a pacifist or pacific in one's thought and actions.

Thurman: Yes, but that's a complicated question. In the former-life stories of the Buddha of which there is a vast literature—moral tales couched in terms of the former lives of the Buddha before he became a Buddha—he actually does kill during those lives when it's a question of saving more lives. If he knows, for example, that someone is going to kill 500 people, he then actually will kill that one person. He tries not to, but if he has to he will to save the 500. But he does it with a mind of compassion for the 500 people and even a mind of compassion for the person who is killed. If a tiger leaps on the Buddha, he knows the pain will be there and then it's gone and he hasn't gotten into a violent conflict with the tiger. He prays that in the future he may feed the tiger with the doctrine, with enlightenment, now that he feeds it with his body, and boom, next life. He has a confidence that because of that detachment the next life will be better for him, you see. And this sounds strange to us unless we can really realize that to those who see the karmic nexus of former and future life it is not just an abstract theory. To them, it's just like you and me seeing this floor and feeling we could walk across it anytime. Just as we have no doubt the floor is there, they have no doubt former and future life is there, and therefore they can actually act with the confidence that they can put their foot down and it will be there. It's a kind of pragmatic thing, and not an abstruse thing they arrive at.

Parabola: We are speaking about being reborn in a better or worse way. What, then, is the relation between different forms of life? Are there lower and higher forms? Is it bad karma to be reborn as an animal?

Thurman: Yes, in Buddhist thinking, it is.

Parabola: In the stories of the Buddha's past lives, wasn't he sometimes reincarnated as an animal?

Thurman: Yes, but in his case it was a voluntary act, and that makes a critical difference. According to the Buddhist notion, there are what are called the six realms. The lowest and worst is hell, and there are many different forms of hell. It's like Dante, very elaborate: the sixteen hot hells, the sixteen cold hells, and others. There are long descriptions that are absolutely gruesome. Anyone with any sensitivity and imagination, even a convinced materialist, will genuinely feel terror reading those descriptions. The hell realms are where one is dragged if one is embroiled in anger and hatred. Total embroilment in desire or greed leads to the *Preta Loka*, one step up, which parallels the Christian notion of limbo. Sometimes this realm is translated as the realm of the "hungry ghosts" or disembodied spirits. The life there is a kind of Tantalus existence of thirst, hunger, insatiability and so on. One is attracted to the animal realm through embroilment in stupidity and ignorance. These three together constitute the three root poisons, or afflictions—desire or greed, hatred and ignorance. Then comes the human realm, with the realms of the Titans and finally the innumerable heavenly realms above. Curiously enough, however, the human realm is considered to be the best level of all. The Titans have too much power

and too much easy pleasure to think about developing themselves. They have very light bodies, some of them pure mental bodies, and they experience very few difficulties. But then, one day, their existence comes to an end, and they're in the *Bardo* again with no idea of where they are going to go. They have never developed any self control.

Parabola: Are they like the angels?

Thurman: Some of them are like angels, but there are many types—some are formless, energy-filled beings, others complete beings who live in a very blissful place. They tend to take things for granted, however, and when they die they suffer a great deal. So the human realm is the best, the Buddhists say, because it provides the right mixture of pleasure and pain to cause one to be able to develop freedom of will—to be close enough to the fear, terror and problems of existence to have a motivation to do that. They have a concept of the human body being a precious jewel, and it's something they take very seriously.

Parabola: How can one person affect or help another person's karma?

Thurman: He can help by giving you an example of the spiritual life, for instance; or by giving good advice, explaining what is right and what is wrong. But what really helps others is that which is based on compassion; in other words, your sensitivity to the feelings and needs of others to whatever degree. Obviously empathy to the highest degree is a staggering concept: to really take on the feelings of others. Supposedly that is exactly what a Buddha or someone who perfects great compassion does—he actually feels other sentient beings' feelings so he knows exactly where it hurts and what to do about it. It's hard for us ordinary people to know whether or not we're helping; the thing that we have to rely on and try to cultivate is our empathetic sensitivity to others' needs and then our help will be better and better. Does that help?

Parabola: Yes, very much. Can you also tell us what is meant by afflictions in connection with karma?

Thurman: You remember we spoke about the three root poisons, or afflictions: ignorance, or non-knowledge, really, which is the most important one, hatred and greed. Hatred and greed are really two reflexes of the same thing—both are based on the root poison of ignorance. That which creates the world is the interplay of one's continuing ignorance, hatred and greed with the karma one has accumulated in the past, in the events that happened to one. So, if karma is the external element, afflictions are the internal elements. Karma means causality, and includes all circumstances. The word comes from the root *ker*, meaning to do, or to work, or to make. So karma means doing or working or making, nothing more mysterious than that. Ignorance is considered the root of it, but not the kind of ignorance as being ignorant of what's inside that file, a failure to know some discrete piece of information. The kind of ignorance that is spoken of as being the root of karma is actually knowledge—the false notion that I hold of myself, the idea that I really am what I

think I am, that I am really this self against the world, that there is a subject-object duality. When this is held as a dogmatic ideology then all is ignorance and the cause of all the trouble. If you don't identify with yourself, you see, you can't desire to be a millionaire and go off on the greed path; you can't desire revenge and go off on a hatred path. You cannot feel that someone has wronged you if you don't identify first of all with "I"—with what we call "I," the pronoun, I and mine with notions of self and property. That is the fundamental ignorance, the ignorance inherent in the notion of self. Therefore they say that if you can get rid of ignorance through a cultivated critical awareness of these conditions and these notions that drive us, then you attain enlightenment. That's what it means to become enlightened: to become free of the whole causal network.

Parabola: Something that strikes people here in the West about Tibetan Buddhism is that there seem to be so many different sects and our impression is that they aren't always on the best of terms with one another. One tends to wonder what is wrong.

Thurman: The reasons for that lie in a long story of Central Asian history and have to do with the collapse of the royal dynasty in Tibet towards the end of the first millenium. At that time political power became vested in the different religious factions and created a perfect example of the mixture of church and state from that time on. Long before the present theocracy of the Dalai Lama, different groups began to vie for political power. The Buddhist institutions, therefore, became a forum for people whose interest was not religious, with predictable results. But in spite of this, they did manage to preserve the great treasures of the teaching from India, and that is something I think not just the modern Western world, but the modern Asian world also, will in the next 50 years greatly appreciate. There are psychological techniques and scientific and artistic principles which I feel will be found to be of great value. In spite of factions and feuds, they have preserved something very significant. But sectarianism is a very unfortunate thing, it was in Tibet . . .

Parabola: And it continues now in America!

Thurman: Well, yes unfortunately, because of a certain interest in it for Americans with their fascination for the exotic. Look at Hilton's *Lost Horizons*, also Rampa's *Third Eye*, all these quaint ideas that everything about Tibet is holy. And there are some uneducated Tibetans who have this notion of themselves as the chosen people of the holy land. There is nothing in Buddhism to justify this. They might claim something unique in being the custodians of a precious cultural and philosophical heritage of mankind. Those who really understand are like the Dalai Lama himself, who doesn't climb into the cultural thing, at least not in my personal discussions with him. He even has said to me that he is very grateful for the political disaster that befell him, personally grateful, in that he now has more time to study, and the misery of it had made him more aware of the message in his own teaching.

Parabola: We've heard it said that some of the *tulkus* who are coming to the United States and offering Americans access to these teachings are changing the forms somewhat in order to make them more accessible. Is this a corrupting influence or is it helpful or necessary?

Thurman: Well, obviously it is inevitable at this point because of everything that has taken place. My main point here would be that we have seen an enormous number of cultural fads come in and out of the U.S. First we had swamis, then we had roshis and now we have lamas. Some of these people rely mainly on personal charisma, and many young Americans, because of a sense of alienation and many other things, tend to turn toward that sort of thing and get swept up in it. On the other hand, we have the Western educational establishment which is coming to realize that it is very important for our cultural and educational maturation to gain a better sense of Asia, to understand their culture from the inside. For that we

need more linguistic training, more profound philosophical and cross-cultural work. We need real knowledge. If we put more energy into using these genuine people from these genuine traditions to teach our young people within the framework of our own liberal arts institutions where they won't get alienated from their own culture while learning about these other cultures, then we will have gained something of lasting value. It is a way between remaining closed off to it on the one hand, or on the other hand having all our young seekers running around chasing gurus. Our young people don't need encouragement to study these things, they need protection from exploitation by elements of authoritarian personalities. At the moment you can hardly find a course on Buddhist philosophy in a Western college except in specialist graduate programs. If the universities had a more open approach the young people could satisfy their personal quest while developing themselves as professionals, citizens, integrating their personal knowledge with their cultural setting so that they wouldn't go for the ethnic bag that they tend to get caught in when they go for a particular guru.

Parabola: Mr. Thurman, don't *you* teach an undergraduate course in Tibetan Buddhism?

Thurman: Right, and I am also part of a group of teachers around the country who have started the American Institute of Buddhist Studies which is working to reach the student population we can't reach in our religion and psychology departments. Our ideal is that every lawyer and doctor should be just as familiar with the real culture of China, the Buddhist thought of China and the Taoist thought of China, as they are with Plato and with France in the 18th century.

Then we would have Americans who understood the world, and not just the world of European domination. What Tibetan Buddhism in particular can offer us is not magic and mystery—everybody has magic and mystery—it is their age-old academic tradition, which is quite profound. What would we give if a duplicate of the library at Alexandria was discovered buried under the sands somewhere, say some oil driller discovered it? Everybody would go nuts over the ancient Hellenic world's treasures. This is what we have found: it's not Alexandria but the library at Nalanda—the great library of Nalanda. This ancient treasure does exist in the Tibetan Buddhist teachings and it can be recovered by translation and study. It represents a very great treasure to us.

IMMORTALITY: More Than Intimations?

John Loudon

Discussion of death is supposed to have been taboo in modern American society. Now it threatens to become a light industry. The number of college courses on death and dying has more than tripled in the last few years. There are lectures, seminars, workshops, summer schools, symposia, newsletters. The cases of Karen Ann Quinlan and Gary Gilmore captivate the media, and presumably the public. Books exploring every facet of life's end tumble forth from the publishers at a furious rate, and death now ranks with sex, cooking and movie stars as a staple of popular magazine fare. Suddenly death is chic, dying fashionable—or at least talk of it.

One irony in all this is that not a few of the new death experts begin their books or articles by saying that they are daring to speak of something that Americans, with their cult of youth and premium on material well-being, try their best not to talk or think about. Well, either these writings have been long in gestation, consist of dated reprints, or their authors have been living as hermits. The Barnes and Noble bookstore here in New York has a special 30-title section on death and dying, freshly provisioned weekly with the latest thanatological musings. (Nonetheless, I still feel ill at ease standing in front of it—do passersby think I have morbid sensibilities, or some terminal disease?) Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, whose fine book *On Death and Dying*—an analysis of the stages one may go through in achieving a mature relationship to the fact of death—made way for a spate of lesser imitations, has become a much-travelled celebrity and almost ubiquitous presence: her blurbs and forewords seem to endorse half the books in the field; she appears regularly on talk shows, panel discussions, etc.; and she keeps up a

staggering lecture schedule, along with her wide-ranging research on and treatment of dying patients. Death-watchers now have their own serious but readable *Journal of Thanatology*, edited by Austin Kutscher, a medical expert in problems of bereavement, suicide, terminal illness, etc. Recent select bibliographies on death and dying—e.g., in *Humanitas* (X:1, February 1974) and the latest *Hastings Center Bibliography of Society, Ethics and the Life Sciences* (1976-77)—have catalogued the outpouring of books and articles.

Suffice it to say that there is now a great deal of talk about death. The seeming wall of silence has been breached at many points and fallen all at once, and the problem may be that all the chatter about death drowns out any serious confrontation with its real mystery. What was once wrapped in silence seems covered with talk. And whether the talk has made a real difference in people's lives—and deaths—is open to question. At least there is the chance that it will lead some to the more profound literature, both traditional and contemporary, on the meaning of death and to real confrontation with the challenge of mortality.

Until recently the discussion of death and dying has been devoted pretty much to four general areas: medical and pastoral care; moral-legal debate; sociocultural analyses and comparative studies; speculative inquiry. First, and perhaps foremost, there have been the books, articles, symposia, etc. on the care of the dying—how to deal with terminal illness, how to prepare oneself for death, how to cope with the loss of a loved one, and so on. Then, there are all the moral and legal discussions of the "right to life" and the "right to die"—the validity of abortion, euthanasia, "dying with dignity," suicide, the death penalty. Taking a wider, descriptive approach are the surveys and anthologies of various attitudes towards death, different death customs and beliefs (from Jewish perspectives on death to death in modern literature and death in Eastern thought). And most significantly, there have been an increasing number of serious, probing theological, philosophical, and psychiatric studies that explore the mystery and power of death—what it actually means to die, how the fact of mortality shapes human living, how one might live with mature awareness of death's inevitability. In this category might be everything from Robert Lifton's study of the survivors of Hiroshima and Ernest Becker's *The Denial of Death* to renewed interest in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

Now a new facet of death's secrets has captured attention: the question of life after death. This new focus is a logical extension of the preoccupation with dying, especially in response to the many experts who have been emphasizing that we must become reconciled to the fact that our life is bound to come to a complete and final end. There is no question that immortality is suddenly a hot subject. Grocery store magazine racks trumpet the news: "Life After Death—10 Amazing Reports" (*The Star*) and "Life After Death...the testimony mounts" (*Reader's Digest*). And just this January three new books have been rushed into print on the subject: Archie Matson's *Afterlife: Reports from the Threshold of Death* (Harper & Row, paper $2.95), an updated paperback edition of Alan Harrington's *The Immortalist* (Celestial Arts, $5.95), and the serious theological study by Rev. E.J. Fortman, S.J., *Everlasting Life After Death* (Alba House, $6.95). Matson's book is a collection of descriptions of afterlife experiences taken from people who have almost died; Harrington rejects the inevitability of death and advocates the materialistic pursuit of immortality via cryonics, scientific research into the causes of aging, etc.; and Fr. Fortman affirms the traditional Catholic doctrine of life after death in the light of modern biblical, theological, historical, and scientific thinking.

But the two principal knights-errant questing after immortality's confirmation are Dr. Raymond A. Moody, Jr. and, once again, Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, both medical doctors specializing in psychiatry. Their independent research apparently dovetails rather neatly, and Dr. Kubler-Ross supplies a commendatory foreword to Moody's book, *Life After Life* (Bantam, $1.95). She says that research such as Moody presents "will confirm what we have been taught for two thousand years—that there is life after

death," and indicates that his work is corroborated by her own research and that of "other very serious-minded scientists, scholars and members of the clergy." What Kubler-Ross and these others have discovered is that patients who have been declared clinically dead and then come back to life, have, in her words,

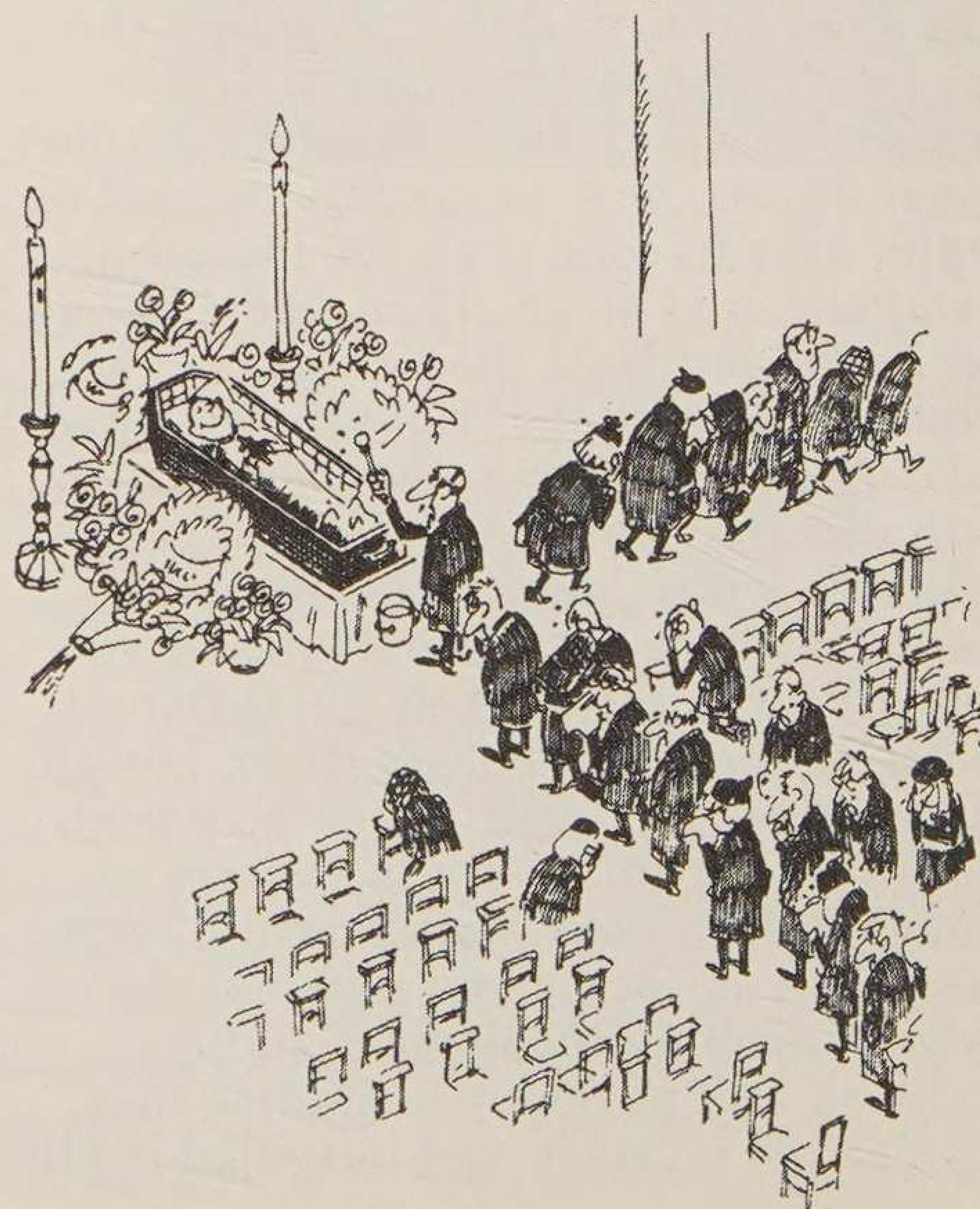
> *experienced a floating out of their physical bodies, associated with a great sense of peace and wholeness. Most were aware of another person who helped them in their transition to another plane of existence. Most were greeted by loved ones who had died before them, or by a religious figure who was significant in their life and who coincided, naturally, with their own religious beliefs.*

Kubler-Ross is now in the process of writing up her findings, although she has talked freely about them in interviews and lectures of late. Thus attention currently focuses on Moody's book, which has sold a million and a half copies—most in the last few months.

Dr. Moody's book is based on 150 cases of "near-death experiences," and especially on 50 in-depth interviews with persons who have had such experiences. Most of the data seems to have come from people who freely volunteered the information, once they found out that Dr. Moody was investigating such experiences. Three basic types of evidence are used: the personal testimony of people who have been declared clinically dead and returned to life; the reports of people who have had close brushes with death; descriptions which dying people have given to others. Moody relies chiefly on the first two types, though he says the third type corroborates the other two. He finds a remarkable similarity among the reported experiences, and his book is primarily a summary, analysis, and defense of this testimony. He has the advantage of being both a philosopher (Ph.D. in logic and ethics) and a physician, so that he is adept at building an argument, hedging it with appropriate disclaimers, and at sorting out relevant medical questions.

The heart of the book is Chapter 2, "The Experience of Dying," in which he offers a kind of model experience and then proceeds to elaborate its fifteen constituent elements. This "theoretically 'ideal' or 'complete' experience" may be summarily paraphrased as follows: A dying man hears himself pronounced dead. He hears a disconcerting ringing or buzzing noise and feels himself moving fast through a dark tunnel. He then finds himself outside the body but in its vicinity; he can see his body from a distance, as a spectator. On becoming accustomed to his odd state, he notices that he has a kind of spiritual body. Others come to meet and help him, including the spirits of deceased relatives and friends. He encounters a warm, loving spirit—"a being of light"—who non-judgmentally gets him to evaluate his life via an instantaneous replay of his life's major events. Eventually, he approaches the barrier or border that apparently separates earthly and afterlife existence, but finds that he must go back to earth. He does so reluctantly, since the experience of afterlife has been so overwhelmingly positive—full of joy, peace, warmth.

None of the actual experiences exactly parallels this model, but Moody insists that it represents the recurrent aspects of the various experiences quite substantially. Besides the overall feeling of bliss and tranquility, the most remarkable element is said to be the encounter with the being of light. And though the life-review is reported to be more educational than judgmental, the

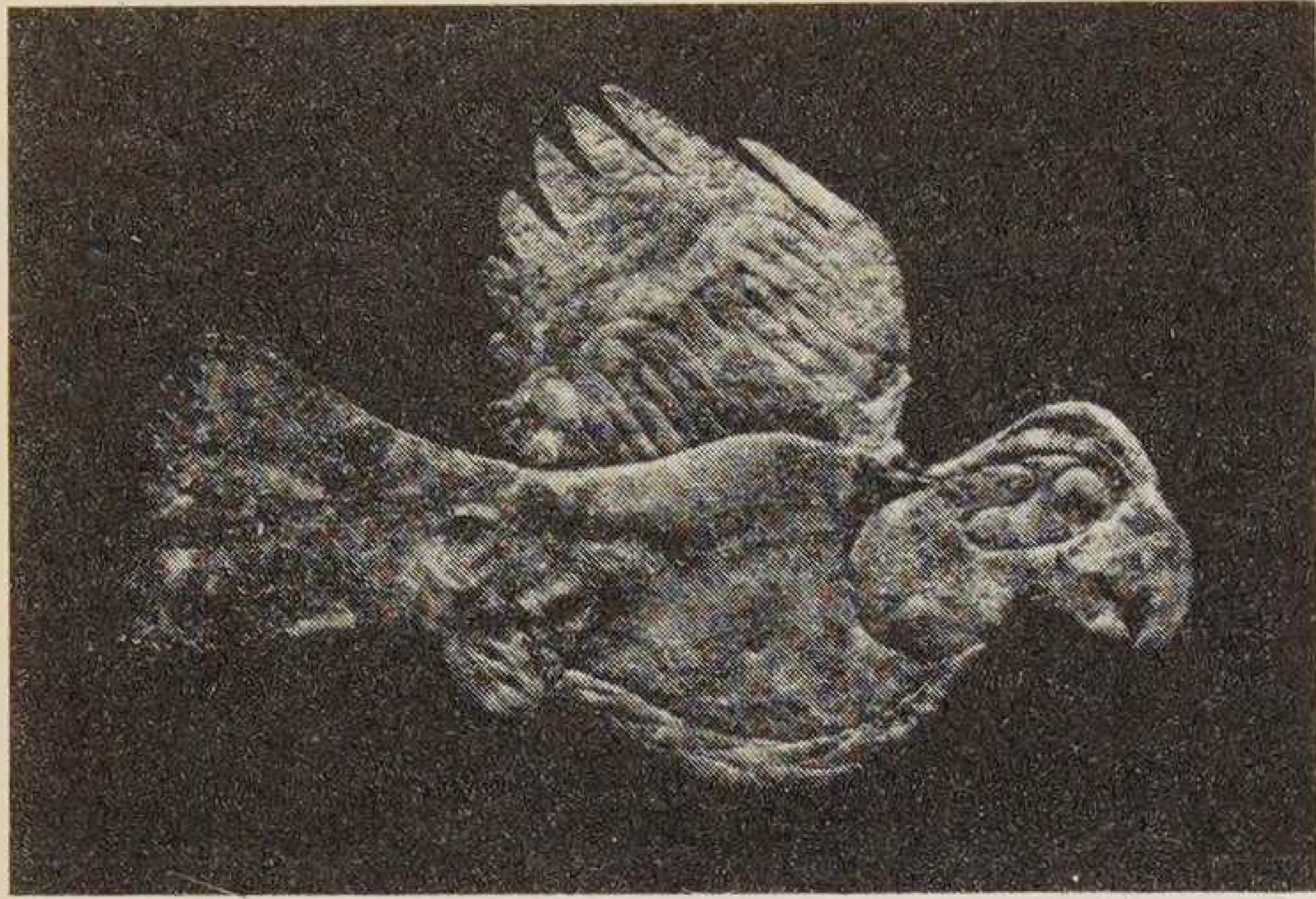


being does communicate—more by direct thought than by a series of words—that the most valuable aspects of human living are love of others and the acquisition of knowledge.

It should be made clear immediately that the evidence that Moody presents does not at all add up to an empirical proof that there is "life after life," and he explicitly says as much. What he does argue is that the continuation of consciousness after death seems to him the best available hypothesis to account for the testimony. The most compelling aspects of the evidence are: 1) the fact that so many people with various religious, social, and educational backgrounds report strictly comparable experiences in independent testimony; 2) the "dead" informants were able to describe events in the operating room, even in the thoughts of grieving relatives, which they could only have known about if they were somehow consciously present after being declared dead. Moreover, he is able to discount alternative theories—e.g., that the experiences are induced by hospital drugs, or by a neurological reaction, or by various psychological factors—with some dispatch. But basically he is saying that there is a serious phenomenon here that deserves sympathetic attention.

Still, his presentation hardly qualifies as a scientific study. For one thing, the details Moody gives regarding his informants are limited to what serves his case, and the data is summarized to fit into a thesis rather than presented fully. As well, all of the evidence consists not of directly verifiable data but of personal reports of experiences. It is what people say they experienced, and there are all the complicating variables of how well such a unique experience can be expressed in ordinary language, of the backgrounds and psyches of the informants, and of the researcher's eagerness to hear what is being told. Thus the enterprise is more in the realm of casual social science than the field of hard physical science. The gathering, control, and reporting of the evidence is too haphazard to warrant careful scientific scrutiny, But just because Moody's work is not science does not mean that it does not merit serious consideration. He has gathered information from people who are uniquely qualified to inform us about what happens when we die.

Moody, then, does not prove the existence of life after death, but he does put us in touch with people who have tasted death and given similar accounts of the kind of passage it is. Now it is true that there are people who report experiencing all sorts of things: sighting UFOs, appearances of the Blessed Virgin, being many persons at once. But, though Moody doesn't tell us enough about his informants, it appears that their reports are not fully explicable in terms of modern culture, a specific religious tradition, or abnormal psychology. Rather they confirm, in their own way, what religious traditions have taught not just for 2000 years, but since the dawn of man. Moody is aware of this and he has a sketchy section in his book in which he points out the parallels to these reports in the teachings of the *New Testament*, Plato, the *Tibetan Book*, and Swedenborg's writings. But he admits that he is no expert in world religious traditions, and he leaves the way open to much more extensive and sophisticated comparisons and contrasts between the reported experiences and religious teachings. Fortunately, in addition to the religious texts themselves, there have recently appeared two excellent resources in this area: John Hick offers in his dry-as-dust but painstaking and encyclopedic *Death and Eternal Life* (Harper & Row, $15.00) a good summary analysis of Eastern and Western religious views of life after death and works out his own rather ingenious compromise between reincarnation and individual immortality. And the late Arnold Toynbee's *Life After Death* (McGraw-Hill, $9.95) is a wide-ranging collection of the views of notable social



and physical scientists, philosophers, psychics, etc., on the possibility of spiritual existence beyond the grave, including selections by Arthur Koestler, Geoffrey Parrinder, and Toynbee himself.

But what is most interesting about Moody's findings is what he leaves unexplored—their implications for living. And not simply the fact that we can expect to survive death, but rather what these reports suggest about the nature of man. First of all, it seems that the supposedly outmoded view of man as composed of body and soul, flesh and spirit, might be more true than recent thinkers have tended to indicate. The dying apparently experience the release of their spiritual self, the seat of consciousness, through the top of the head, and this self seems to possess all the capacities of perception and understanding it had when embodied, except that these are enhanced. Second, and correlatively, the talk in the many religious traditions of an astral body or glorified body is borne out in these accounts, which speak of a "spiritual body" that is egg-shaped, even something like a cloud (cf. Hopi beliefs!). And there is an equivalent to the last judgment or final assessment that various traditions teach. It is noteworthy though that the encounter with the being of light is much less evaluative and discriminatory than the Christian tradition, for instance, would suggest. But more on that later.

Now if these findings tell us something about the way we are constituted, and thereby support the teaching of much religious tradition, they have important implications for how we are to live, for what we should deem important. Most obviously, if it is our mind or spirit or consciousness that survives death, then its development is what matters most in life—just as the being of light intimates: our relations with others and our growth in knowledge matter most. More specifically, if after death the body and the spirit, the empirical and spiritual dimensions of ourselves, are related as observed and observer, then this capacity for self-observation, for objective self-awareness, is something we need to attend to and nurture. Moreover, since this experience of transcending the body and earthly concerns is said to be most positive, involving bliss and tranquility, the spiritual traditions that advocate self-transcendence—in love, in prayer, in meditation—as the path to fulfillment seem to be on the right track. Coming to full life through the experience of dying gains confirmation not just as an apt image of spiritual growth but as the actual pattern of our nature. Also, the reports about being for once completely relaxed and at peace suggest that the states of attentive tranquility achieved in various "yogas" mean that through them we reach a level of being in which our true self is at home, at one. Something like this line of thought is pursued, for instance, in Peter Koestenbaum's recent book, *Is There An Answer to Death?* (Prentice-Hall, $9.95; paper $3.75), in the last section of which he suggests that through various meditative exercises we can get in touch with the transcendent dimension of ourselves which survives death and can come to know "the eternity of consciousness." Such thinking is even more richly pursued in John S. Dunne's 1973 book *Time and Myth* (now available as a Univ. of Notre Dame Press paperback). Dunne argues that

what survives death is not the things of life—the things, as Ecclesiastes says, for which there is each a season—but the relationship one develops to the things of life: that is, the transcendent dimension of one's self that is present in all of one's experiences.

But one's spirit, this spirit that endures, seems in actual experience to wax or wane, grow hardy or shrivel up. It may be that we possess, or are, a spirit that survives death to the extent that we develop one. The less spirit there is in us the less there is to survive the passing of the temporal things of life. We reap in death what we have sowed in life. And if what ultimately matters in the conduct of life is the spirit that we are building, the self we are becoming, then living is literally a preparation for dying.

This idea raises a major question about these reports of afterlife experiences, viz. their egalitarian nature. There seems almost no distinction—at least Moody makes none—between surviving spirits; no matter how one lived, the experience of dying seemed to be the same. The uniform nature of the experience seems very much at odds with the teaching of the great religious traditions —whether one thinks of the Christian doctrine of the last judgment and mythology of heaven, hell and purgatory; or the Hindu conception of appropriate rebirth; or the stages in the Tibetan *Bardo*. Perhaps the discrepancy between the reports and the teachings is due to the fact that Moody has only the experiences of people who came back to life, who did not fully die, to go by. They can supply only descriptions of death's antechamber. And there is the interesting fact, reported by Moody, that suicides did not have the positive experiences that others did—for them dying was a wholly negative experience with the clear message that the passage to tranquility could not be thus forced.

So it seems clear that Richard Bach, of *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* fame, is wrong when he declares (on the back cover of *Life After Life*) that Moody's research "dissolves ancient fear and mystery." Of course, the book may contribute to making belief in immortality into a thoughtless, comforting fad—a vague, pervasive hope of living happily ever after. There is a danger that death will be somehow trivialized into a kind of painless transition for all to an eternal holiday in the sun. But if read from a more thoughtful, indeed religious, perspective, Moody's book might make the challenge of death more pointed and its mystery richer. If it seems certain that the human spirit survives, then the challenge of life is not so much to live it to the full ("for tomorrow we die" once and for all) but to develop one's spirit fully, since it is what survives in the afterlife. And the mystery of death is enhanced, because the afterlife advances from a vague, fuzzy possibility into a real future with real unknowns: who is the being of light, how is my life judged when there is no return to earth, what lies beyond the barrier? Belief in afterlife makes death a critical passage: all of life becomes a preparation for it, and thus charged with the dramatic elements of fear and wonder.

REVIEWS

THE MYTH OF FREEDOM

By Chögyam Trungpa. Edited by John Baker and Marvin Casper. Illustrated by Glen Eddy. The Clear Light Series. Berkeley: Shambhala, 1976. Pp. 166. Paper $3.95.

By Charles S. Prebish

I once heard one of Chögyam Trungpa's long-standing disciples say that you could reduce all of his teachings since coming to America into about a half–hour lecture, aptly titled "The Battle of the Ego." It was not clear whose ego was battling: Trungpa's, the listener's, or both of theirs. *The Myth of Freedom* offers little to contradict such an opinion. But before examining the particulars of Trungpa's "new" work, something should be said about the author and his mission, lest the book's importance and context be peremptorily underestimated.

Chögyam Trungpa was born in February, 1939, in the small village of Geje in northeastern Tibet. The prior year, the supreme abbot of Surmang monasteries had died, and the search had begun for his incarnation, to be enthroned as the eleventh Trungpa Tulku (i.e., the abbot). To aid in the search, support was sought from Gyalwa Karmapa, head of the *Karma bKa-rgyud* sect of Tibetan Buddhism, and eventually he is said to have had a vision which ultimately led to Chögyam Trungpa. Through his teens, the young abbot was immersed in the study and practice of Vajrayāna Buddhism and the fulfillment of his ecclesiastical obligations.

By early 1959, with the Communists most eager to capture high-ranking ecclesiastical officials, Trungpa had to go into hiding, waging a touch-and-go battle with discovery by the Chinese. He soon fled with a small party, outfitted with little but courage and determination, to India. The details of this escape are stirringly related in *Born in Tibet*, and its adventure is heightened by the fact that the stakes involved not simply the lives of a few refugees, but the survival of the cultural and religious heritage of an entire country. On his arrival in India in early 1960, he was not only a newly ordained monk (having taken his vows at age twenty) but he represented, along with the other incarnate lamas, an unbroken lineage of uniform religious teaching that extended back over nine centuries.

Since the Holocaust, the religious life of the Tibetans has largely been confined to the communities in exile in India. During his stay in India, Trungpa continued his study and practice, and he was tutored in English by a marvelous Englishwoman who had recently been ordained in the *Karma bKa-rgyud* sect. When a scholarship afforded Trungpa an opportunity to study at Oxford, he went there and pursued studies in art, psychology, and comparative religion. In 1967 he took over Johnstone House Contemplative Community in Scotland and founded Samye-Ling, thus launching his career of bringing Buddha's Dharma to the West. Then in 1969 he was injured in an automobile accident which led to a lingering paralysis on the left side of his body. It was this accident, and his keen insight into Western culture, that led him to take off his monk's robes and return to lay life. He hoped that by stripping himself of the "exotic" trappings of Oriental tradition he could deliver his message in a way better suited to Western culture. After marrying in 1970, he moved to Tail of the Tiger Meditation Center, a retreat in Barnet, Vermont, founded by several of his former students at Samye-Ling.

In his five short years in America, Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, has assembled perhaps the most impressive spiritual organization of any Buddhist in the West. Robert Greenfield, in *The Spiritual Supermarket*, reports an apt remark of one of Trungpa's students: "He was trained to be a king and he lost his kingdom. Now he's building another." Trungpa has built his new empire on pure energy, as he ceaselessly boards planes to fly off to yet more seminars and guest lectures.

Since the 1966 publication of *Born in Tibet*, Trungpa has become one of the most prolific exponents of Buddhism in the West. *Meditation in Action*, derived from taped talks at Samye-Ling, was completed while he was recovering from his auto accident. It has proved a most valuable book for students of Buddhist meditation in that it addresses significant questions about the application of meditation to situations of daily life. The one exception to the general practice of distilling his books from seminar and lecture tapes is *Mudra*, published in 1972, a slender volume of songs and poems composed since his exile from Tibet. Perhaps the most forceful of his books is *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* (1973). It is the author's attempt to delineate "the numerous sidetracks which lead to a distorted, ego-centered version of spirituality," which he calls "spiritual materialism." He also has frequently contributed to his own magazine *Garuda* and to *Maitreya* and collaborated on projects with other scholars (e.g., with Herbert Guenther on *The Dawn of Tantra* and with Francesca Fremantle on a new translation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*).

Although he is an acknowledged meditation master in both the *Karma bKa-rgyud-pa* and *rNyin-ma-pa* traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, few of Trungpa's students have understood clearly the scholastic aspects of his training. Like all young lamas, he was thoroughly schooled in all aspects of the Buddhist tradition: Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna. But rather than working toward the balance of study and practice sanctioned by Buddhism in general and their teacher in particular, his students are often victims of a serious misunderstanding that results in a transparent anti-intellectualism. In *Cutting Through* Trungpa quotes a saying from the Tibetan Buddhist canon: "Knowledge must be burned, hammered and beaten like pure gold. Then one can wear it as an ornament." Apparently the furnace has just begun to heat up. The most prevalent of these misconceptions among his students concerns their understanding of the historical, philosophical, and sociological roles of Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna Buddhism. For the Vajrayānist, these prior forms of Buddhism represent an indispensable preparation for the practice of Tantra. But many of Trungpa's students diverge from his teachings and concentrate only on the psychological aspects of these pre-Vajrayānist traditions, assuming that since they are but preliminaries to Tantric practice they must be inherently inferior on all levels. Only when Trungpa's students begin to find the proper balance between practice and study and build up a community of practitioners who are at home with their new religious commitment, their role in society, and themselves, will we be able to say that his teachings have been actualized. When asked about the current status of his enterprise, Trungpa compares it to making a home: first the foundation is laid, then the house is built, and finally the roof is put over it, rendering it secure. He is currently involved in building the house and considers it unimportant if he isn't around for the final dedication. And when asked about the misconceptions of his students, as well as about their individual setbacks, he answers Tantric-style: "Well, I think some of them are working through it."

The contradictions that circumscribe Trungpa's life pervade virtually all aspects of his routine (or lack of it) and duties. Both guru, in the Buddhist sense of spiritual friend, and transmitter of the teachings, he is impossible to predict, likely to be inconsistent, vigilant about dispelling student expectations, and as playful as one would expect a teacher hailed as a fully realized Tantric *siddha* ("perfected one") to be. Since he represents for many the embodiment of Buddha's Dharma (and for some of them, the only contact with Buddha's teachings that they have had), he is treated with awed reverence. Trungpa picks away at the obsequiousness of overly deferential students with a biting sense of humor, and with students who take his instructions too literally, he relies on the *reductio ad absurdum* dialectics of the famous Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna in order to dismantle their narrow understanding.

While his many varied students represent a living testimonial to the efficacy of his teaching in America, they also show how easily traditional teachings, as well as the image of the teacher, can be distorted. During 1974, when I began to notice that many of his students tried to copy his speech patterns, drinking habits, and even his sexual proclivities (which result in a boundless flow of rumors and gossip), I mentioned these problems to him, and met with his usual response: "Well, I think some of them are working through it." Nevertheless, he then referred to the old axiom: a guru is like a fire; if you remain too distant, there is not enough heat, while if you get too close, you get burned. During a class on the Mahāyāna doctrine of emptiness, in mid-summer 1975, one of Trungpa's students remarked to me that we do not exist, that all of experience is a big illusion. Further, he maintained that it is impossible to influence our karma, and that suffering is characteristic of everything, even nirvāna. Now all of these notions contradict Buddhist orthodoxy, and when questioned as to the source of these absurd doctrines, he reported with pride that he had heard them directly from Trungpa himself. To my dismay, I discovered that many of Trungpa's students held these same views, all giving the teacher as the source. I questioned Trungpa on these points, and with a large grin, he informed me that of course he had said nothing of the kind. Rather, he commented that anyone who read Buddhist texts would know these statements were erroneous. All of this highlighted one of the basic problems inherent in an expanding organization. Until there are a sufficient number of advanced and mature students to transmit accurately the pronouncements of the teacher, there will remain a dense haze of uncertainty over the real message. Unfortunately, the haze is not dispelled by his new book.

The Preface to *The Myth of Freedom* tells us that "*The Myth of Freedom* can be viewed as a companion volume to *Cutting Through* or as an independent introduction to the Buddhist psychology and meditative practice of Tibet." Like *Cutting Through* it progresses from a general statement of the problem, through the supposedly progressive layers of the solution—first Hīnayāna, second Mahāyāna, and finally Vajrayāna. It covers many of the same topics: e.g., the five *skandhas* and the six realms, the guru, the way of the Bodhisattva, and Tantra.

However, it seems to me that there are significant problems with this volume which render it powerless. The first of these is a severe logical contradiction which occurs in the section entitled "Cosmic Joke". Trungpa states, "In the beginning there is open space, zero, self-contained, without relationship." Although it is somewhat unorthodox Buddhism, and anti-scripture, to speak of a "beginning," the real contradiction follows in the next sentence: "But in order to confirm zeroness, we must create one to prove that zero exists." Where did the "we" come from? The first passage establishes that all that exists is open space with no relationship, thus rendering the second passage self-contradictory. It is this sort of sloppy but arousing logic that Trungpa uses throughout in order to seduce his audience with a pitchman's flair. In simple terms, we seem advised not to worry that some of his statements are inaccurate or contradictory, but to be impressed with their psychological profundity. But Buddhist psychology, no matter how impressive or arousing, that is built on a shoddy metaphysical foundation, eventually crumbles and falls.

While trying to impress upon his students the efficacy of Buddhism's second noble truth, that the cause of suffering is rooted in craving, Trungpa often resorts to a method of overstatement that borders on Buddhist heresy. For example, in speaking of meditation he notes, "Nothing happens: it is absolutely boring. One often asks the question, 'Who is kidding whom? Am I on to something or not?' You are not on to something." While I would admit that meditation practice can be boring, and usually is (if it is effective as a soteriological device), to disavow something happening seems to invalidate the experience of Siddhārtha Gautama, the historical Buddha,

under the Bodhi Tree. The "something happening" in Buddhism is the religious experience that represents the very core and basis of its teaching. As Trungpa goes on and on about nothing happening, one gets the impression that we are listening to an ethnic est.

It is most curious too that, in dealing with the Bodhisattva Path, Trungpa says that it developed in Tibet, China, Japan, and Mongolia; but nowhere does he mention India, the homeland of the concept. Further, he then goes on to describe the ten *bhūmis* or "stages" and the ten *pāramitās* or "perfections" that comprise the path. In so doing, he says, "The joyous generosity of the first *bhūmi* is accompanied by *prajñā*, transcendental knowledge." I regret that I find no correlative reference to *prajñā* occuring in the first bhūmi. The standard texts on the subject, e.g., the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra* and the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (among others), place this event in the sixth *bhūmi*. And on the same page, Trungpa offers the following etymology of *pāramitā*: "*para* means 'other,' *mita* means 'shore.' " This is sheer and utter nonsense. Actually, *pāram* means other (side or shore), and it is a Sanskrit participle meaning *gone*. There is no Sanskrit word *mita* meaning shore. Unfortunately, errors like these are typical whenever the author employs languages he does not know. In the Bodhisattva path, there are two places of critical import, excluding, of course, the beginning. These are stages five through seven and stage ten. In stages five through seven, the Bodhisattva emerges from *samādhi* (5), attains *prajñā* (6), and cultivates *upāya* (7), all necessary perfections on the path to complete perfect enlightenment (i.e., Buddhahood). These, for some inexplicable reason, Trungpa lumps into two and one-half pages, after spending ten pages on the first four stages. Again, he says little about stage ten, the point at which perfect enlightenment is attained. More than ten percent of the book is devoted to gurus and related topics, offering material that Trungpa has thoroughly reported elsewhere.

One could go on in similar fashion, pointing out errors and inconsistencies. However, it seems more advisable to suggest here that Trungpa, Rinpoche should begin once again to offer his readership some of the wealth of information that is uniquely his. He has helped many American Buddhists learn to be American (and not Tibetan or Chinese or Japanese), has guided many on-

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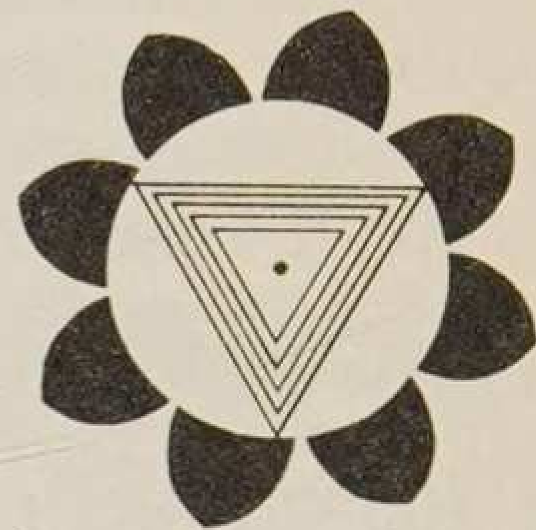

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Charles Prebish teaches history of religions at The Pennsylvania State University and is a specialist in Southeast Asian Buddhism.

A Sense of the Cosmos

By Jacob Needleman. New York: Doubleday, 1975. Pp. 178. $6.95; New York: Dutton, 1977. $3.50 (tent.)

By R. Ravindra

It is a pleasure to review a good book. And this is a good one. It is not so much a book of facts or arguments as it is one of insights.

The intent of the book is revealed by its subtitle: the encounter of modern science and ancient truth. What sort of cosmos is it that modern science has discovered or can discover? How does the scientific cosmos relate—in intention, purpose and consequence—with the ancient cosmos? In order to answer this question, Needleman devotes separate chapters to the branches of cosmology, medicine, biology, physics and psychotherapy, in each case focusing on the underlying presupposition or tendency of the field of investigation. And in each case showing that, contrasted with ancient truth, modern science has unwittingly fallen for partial truths and the satisfaction of lower and egoistic tendencies of man. From the point of view of one cherishing an expanded and a clearer vision, the scientific enterprise has become soporific.

Modern man thus finds himself in a crisis—a crisis of knowledge. Behind him is the dream of science: of the conquest of nature, of unbounded technological manipulation, and the limitless gratification of desires. What is ahead of him? What other dream will lull him back to sleep? Will it be the exploration of the inner space, undertaken with the scientific attitude of control and manipulation even though scented with the perfumes of oriental mysticism? Perhaps. But the nature of the next dream is not really what occupies Needleman. He is here interested in the moment of the crisis, the moment between dreams on a cultural scale, the moment of awakening —unaccustomed and unpleasant, yet full of possibilities. It is this opportunity of real seeing, afforded by the crisis, that engages the author.

What is the nature of a moment of wakefulness? What sort of attention is involved? And how does one fall asleep again? On the rare occasions when such questions are raised, the discussion centers on individuals—struggling to awaken, experiencing moments of expanded consciousness, and returning to the usual state of clouded and sleepy vision. What Needleman has done, with an extraordinary skill, is to raise these questions on a cultural scale. He has attempted to see modern science as an aspect of ourselves.

Science has been beyond question the most important cultural force in the Western world since the major scientific revolution of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Particularly in the last hundred years, the technological triumphs of science have overwhelmed all other modes of thought and knowledge. This domination of a specific metaphysical bias has been so successful that even normally thoughtful and sensitive people seem often surprised at the suggestion that modern Western science is one of many ways of approaching reality. One forgets that science makes numerous assumptions, arising out of its historical and philosophical context, which blind it to other, perhaps wiser, relationships with nature. Other modes of inquiry with different underlying purposes and intentions can exist and have existed in the past; these lead to different truths or to different emotional attitudes to the same truth.

Some of these ancient truths are brought

by Needleman into confrontation with the findings of modern science. All of these truths are grounded on an understanding, quite different from that of modern science, of the basic purpose of a human being and the essential function of human knowledge. The author weaves a tapestry of these truths in an engaging style along with his discussion of various facets of science. These truths, according to ancient traditions, can really be seen in their fullness only by an individual who is willing to submit himself to the necessary discipline of a path (as distinguished from religion). The book is informed throughout by one such truth, namely, that the same fundamental laws apply to the nature outside us as well as to the nature inside. In other words, history, psychology and physics refer to the particular workings of the same general laws. Thus, the history of science becomes an avenue of self-knowledge. The manner by which scientific intentions have changed, for example, from a wish for understanding to a wish for explanation, is precisely the way in which our own internal impulses change. Science is viewed as a human activity reflecting our own inner nature.

One rather surprising error in the book is the author's identification of the Hindu god Vishnu rather than Shiva with the law of death and destruction (p. 126). Some of his remarks or implications about the beginnings of modern science appear to me to be historically questionable. His gathering of ancient truth from diverse cultures and periods weakens his thesis. Although my own bias is perhaps the same as the author's, it may be questioned whether the ancient world had a self-consistent, monolithic wisdom spanning different civilizations. Also, while placing modern science in contrast to ancient truth, one can exaggerate too much the modernity of science. After all, in much of its underlying structure science is a continuation and an expression of much older tendencies in Western thought. Regarding the prevalent assumption, well remarked upon by Needleman, that man can understand the universe without simultaneously understanding himself, it is not clear that this attitude is peculiar to science or to modern times. It seems to be a fairly straightforward corollary of presuppositions already present in the two major streams of Western intellectuality. There is the inalienable distinction made by the Greeks between the subject and the object, and the sharp Judaeo-Christian discontinuity between God and man. Clearly, there have been exceptions—who have often been considered heretics. In general, for many centuries before the beginnings of modern science, Western man has considered himself wholly different from nature as well as from God. He has approached God and nature by means other than self-study.

These remarks notwithstanding, this is a significant book. Written with intelligence, sensitivity and enormous respect for science, it is an entirely unusual work. Needleman's way of looking at science stimulates serious philosophical reflection. Every page is thought-provoking and insightful; so many incisive questions are raised that the reader will be ill-advised to rush through the book. It should be read slowly and carefully. The author's style invites conversation with him as with a wise friend about an important matter: what is your, my, and our sense of the cosmos?

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The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata

By Alf Hiltebeitel. Symbol, Myth, and Ritual Series. Edited by Victor Turner. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1976. Pp. 368. $19.50.

The Legend of Krishna

By Nigel Frith. New York: Schocken Books. Pp. 238. $7.95.

By Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty

A good myth—and the Krishna myth is one—serves as a prism through which we all bend our own views of the world. Alf Hiltebeitel is a scholar; Nigel Frith is a poet. Each sees his own Krishna, and we see ours doubly refracted in each book, four-fold in them both. If one follows the lead of Claude

Lévi-Strauss, all interpretations of the myth become epi-variants and part of the protean mass of the myth itself. Each new interpretation makes the myth stronger, as beams support a cathedral roof; the only clear mistake one can make, the only way to weaken the myth, is to deny an interpretation or to superimpose one's own myth upon someone else's, blurring the image. To say that Krishna is *only* a god or *only* a hero; to say that because Krishna has a specific form in the oldest text he always has that form—this is to reduce the myth. Neither Hiltebeitel nor Frith errs in this regard. And although their approaches are so different that the casual reader might not realize that they are talking about the same figure, their works do not clash with each other or with the texts on which they draw.

Nigel Frith's work falls in the honorable (though scholar-mocked) camp of the amateur Indologist; this places him in very good company indeed—with Thomas Mann (*The Transposed Heads*), Aubrey Menen (*The Ramayana*), William Buck (*The Mahābhārata* and *The Ramayana*), David Stacton (*Kaliyuga: A Quarrel with the Gods*), Herman Hesse (*Siddhartha*), and other novelists who have been inspired by Indian themes. Nigel Frith's work is highly personal but firmly rooted in the Indian tradition, in the tales of Krishna attacked by Kamsa, Krishna and the serpent Kaliya, but above all, Krishna and Radha. Weaving into these stories other Indian myths of Indra and the serpent Vritra, of Yama the god of death and Agni the god of fire, and binding them all with many imaginative and erotic passages of his own devising, he presents his very own Krishna. All interpretations of the myth may have validity, but they are not all equally interesting or beautiful; this one is both.

Alf Hiltebeitel's work is a detailed (though highly readable) study of the oldest text in which the Krishna myth appears, the ancient Indian epic. Professor Hiltebeitel is a student of Georges Dumézil, and one great strength of this book is the skill with which the author places the Krishna epic in the context of other Indo-European epics. But Hiltebeitel is also an admirer of Madeleine Biardeau, a scholar in the structuralist tradition, who is a critic of the Critical Edition which Dumézil endorses. This conflict hangs upon the essential point of reductionism in myth. Although the structuralists try to catch all known variants in their net—not just those rejected by the Critical Edition, but others of even later recensions (Lévi-Strauss himself would doubtless include Nigel Frith, as he includes Freud's variant of the Oedipus myth)—they can be prone to a kind of reductionism of their own, in stressing one set of meanings common to all variants while ignoring other variant meanings. The reductionism of the Critical Edition is purely historical, for the editors have selected what appears to be the oldest layer of the major epic, called it "The *Mahābhārata*," and relegated all other variants to appendices, which have not been included in J. A. B. van Buitenen's translation of the epic.

As an historian of religion, Professor Hiltebeitel is naturally interested in the chronology of the myths of Krishna:

> *. . . it strains matters to regard all the varients as synchronically equal in value. Some features must be older than others, and although indisputable rules for determining textual priorities will probably never be established, historical development, through such processes as alteration, interpolation, and perhaps sometimes abridgment, must not be ignored (p. 15).*

Moreover, as an Indo-European, he funnels the Epic into an even wider context with nevertheless narrowing implications; that is, he seeks not only what is common to all Indian variants (the Critical Edition) but what, out of this corpus, is common to all Indo-European epics (Scandinavian, Greek, etc.), an even more select body of *Indian* material than that found in the Critical Edition. The ultimate step in this direction is that of the Jungians and Freudians, who distill an even richer brew out of the Indo-European corpus by extracting from it only those themes that are found in other cultures as well, the so-called archetypes or universals. This is a step that Hiltebeitel is not altogether willing to take, though he draws upon much non-Indo-European material and cites with approval Victor Turner's hypothesis that red, white, and black are grouped with a universality based upon

> *their ability to "epitomize the main kinds of universal human organic experience": white associated with milk, semen, life; red with blood and thus with both childbirth (life) and bloodshed (death); black*

with cessation of consciousness ("black out"), death, and sometimes (although rarely explicitly) feces and urine (p. 72).

He also remarks upon the Oedipus, Electra, and Iphiclus complexes, so named because of the ability of epics to serve as "primary vehicles for the expression of psychological values."

Professor Hiltebeitel refuses to be drawn into the Epic battle between structuralists and Ur-text-seekers. He remarks,

The apparent irreconcilability of the two approaches is only superficial, for both (Dumézil and Biardeau) draw on sources which can often be elucidated by a common frame of reference—the practical and conceptual milieu of the Brāhmanas (p. 15).

With the tact and deference befitting a young scholar—and with the confidence and style that one usually finds only in a seasoned academic warrior—Professor Hiltebeitel manages to walk the razor's edge between the two camps, taking a lead gratefully from each when the lead is good, challenging or correcting a hypothesis when he finds good grounds to do so, and without clapping his hands in Oedipal triumph when he points out a flaw in the master. Where Biardeau tends to be vague, he is specific; where Dumézil is Procrustean, he reshapes the theoretical bed on which the data is to lie.

The book abounds in theories which appear far-fetched at first but are invariably substantiated—that there are three Krishnas, one red, one white, one black; that both Krishna and Shiva, though ostensibly absent from or passive at the disrobing of Draupadī and the disastrous dice game, are in fact essential elements of these episodes; and many more. Several chapters deal at length, and in great detail, with the death of the hero, the destruction of the world, and other aspects of the tragedy at the heart of the Epic; these are analyzed in the light of many complementary theories gleaned from an impressive array of scholarly works cited in the copious footnotes. But this is no patchwork of other peoples' theories; it is an integrated view of Krishna as personal in its own way as is Nigel Frith's. As Hiltebeitel remarks,

I think the spirit of the text requires that one be open to its many frames of reference, its many different levels of meaning, and the many influences that would seem to have shaped it. No "theory" will ever do justice to the Mahābhārata *that does not take its multivalence into account (pp. 18–19).*

The many levels of the Epic are brought together and refracted through the author's own prismatic view of the Epic and the myth.

Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty teaches Indian religion and comparative religion at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. Her publications include Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva *(Oxford University Press, 1973),* Hindu Myths *(Penguin Classics, 1975), and* The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology *(University of California, 1976).*

Raid on the Articulate: Comic Eschatology in Jesus and Borges

By John Dominic Crossan. New York: Harper and Row, 1976. Pp. xvi + 207. $10.95.

By William A. Beardslee

John Dominic Crossan juxtaposes Jesus and Borges as storytellers. Stimulated in part by Borges' observation (about Kafka) that great artists create their precursors, Crossan shows how Jesus is an important precursor of the oblique and comic art of Borges. This means that what Borges does with narrative helps us see things in Jesus' storytelling that we otherwise would have overlooked. The thesis is the more challenging because Borges himself shies away from biblical themes for the most part.

Crossan's central thesis is that the reality which we perceive is totally shaped by language, and language is a form, indeed the most basic form, of play. We need constantly to be shown that the patterns of

meaning which partially satisfy us are at best only relative and playful attempts to speak of that ultimate which is permanently inaccessible to us, but which, when the established form is broken, may hint itself to us as the imminent revelation which never quite occurs. Comedy, in particular comic eschatology (comedy as confronting and ending an established form), is the conscience of language—it is the constant reminder that language is play, and an attack upon those who think that the ultimate can be seized in language.

In showing how Borges makes his critique of our established securities, Crossan is able to rely on an able group of critics. His main point of controversy is with John Updike, who speaks of Borges' "unconsoling theology." Crossan sides rather with Ben Belitt who speaks of the "epistemology of loss" in Borges' parables, but he finds this revelation of our ignorance to be at bottom comic rather than an occasion for despair. For him there is a comic release in the absurd and insoluble riddles of human existence, precisely at the point of the often-indicated verge of epiphany in Borges' writing.

In the case of Jesus, Crossan has to campaign more sharply against the received interpretation, to show that Jesus (the Jesus implied by the structure of his language) was like Borges a comic "parabler" whose parodies of case law, paradoxical aphorisms, and parables were all aimed at the upsetting of established securities, and were not in any sense moral teachings. Crossan defines parable as "paradoxes formed into story by effecting single or double reversals of the audience's most profound expectations." What distinguishes his working-out of this definition in relation to Jesus' parables is his view that the parables not only do not communicate a moral stance, but that they also do not communicate anything "about" God; the point of Jesus' words is that the ultimate escapes language just as it does in many of the stories of Borges.

This is an important book with a strong thesis that is well presented. Crossan's procedure of appropriating the relevant historical scholarship and then moving away from it toward literary analysis, as well as his provocative interpretations of Jesus and Borges, are on the frontier of New Testament hermeneutics and of the reading of the language of religion generally. Though he concentrates on the imaginative dimension of culture, and tends to bracket the reflective dimension, as rigid rationalism, with the secure worlds which myths create and sustain and which need to be challenged and destroyed by comic eschatology, the book does serve as a potent reminder of how deeply interwoven the imaginative and the reflective sides of our culture are. The fact is that the view of language as play, wholly structuring our perceptions, which is so fashionable today, is not dictated by the literary form of the parable itself, but derives from the critical philosophies of Hume and Kant. Crossan is certainly right about the direct thrust of many of the words of Jesus as well as of Borges. But Jesus was innocent of the modern skepticism about what we can know. He needn't be seen as a kind of nihilistic mystic, ever pointing beyond to an ineffable mystery that can neither be known nor said. His words can be heard in a different, more realistic context. If, for instance, we follow such thinkers as Whitehead and Ricoeur, who in different ways have challenged the modern skepticism about what language refers to, we may be able to listen to the breakup of our expectations in the words of Jesus without finding that that is all he is about. We might, then, retain Crossan's insight into how stories organize time into linear segments without ceasing to find meaning in the flow of time which connects the segments. We could retain Crossan's picture of the layers of persona, of acted self, which an artist creates through his work, without denying the person who interacts with the persona. And we could listen for "directions," for vectors of meaning, in our encounter with the ultimate, as well as for the rejections of our idolatries.

William A. Beardslee teaches religion at Emory University, where he is a specialist in New Testament interpretation.

The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps

By Terence Des Pres. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976. Pp. 218. $10.00.

By Robert E. Meagher

Survival denotes, for most of us, a minimal space, a niche dug into the abyss of death by the nails of those who will not acquiesce in the inevitable. Nothing would seem to be further removed from heroism than an unqualified commitment to survive. Most often heroism has a pact with death; for the hero presumes to have and to act on a purpose for dying or for killing, or for both. Traditional heroism has everything to do with martyrdom and murder. And death for the traditional hero is a masked figure willing to struggle, face to face, one to one, for trophy or dust. Mass death is, however, simply unacceptable; and in an age of mass death, we require a new image of the hero, not so much for the sake of an appropriate literature but for the sake of a decent life. This endeavor to hold up before us a heroic ideal, an ethic, a taper for the darkness of our times seems to describe the central purpose of *The Survivor*. In Camus' terms, the survivor is neither a victim nor an executioner; and in the avoidance of those intimately linked complicities with death may reside the most fitting image of heroism under the reign of modern technological and totalitarian terror.

Because the reality of mass murder is so overwhelming and the reality of survival so marginal, this may at first seem to be a book of death, unmediated and unredeemed. The darkness of mass slaughter is so dark and the light of the will to survive is so dim that to unaccustomed eyes the darkness of this book is at first total. There is no life, it seems, in the death camps, only death. For the reader, as for the prisoners of whom the reader reads, there is a stage of initial collapse, a stage of radical disorientation, disintegration, and despair. As one confronted with the challenge of survival, the reader is required to discern, to accept and to appreciate the way of life, the tough, com-

ALONE OF ALL HER SEX

THE MYTH AND THE CULT OF THE VIRGIN MARY

by MARINA WARNER

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says Margaret Mead

"It will prove both astonishing and enlightening . . . It can delight the mind and eye of any reader alert to the vicissitudes of cultural change. One is led on from page to page, greedy for more . . . Her style is so packed with scholarship, imagery, vivid selection, and wry contrastive comment."
—from Margaret Mead's review in *Harper's*

"It abounds in perceptive insights. . . It explores the cult in all its ramifications, peeling aside each successive accretion of doctrine and devotion in order to examine its moral, social, and emotional implications."
—Keith Thomas, *New York Review of Books*

"A rare jewel in the realm of historical scholarship . . . With both clarity and excitement, Marina Warner shows how the Virgin's image altered in the Church doctrine and iconography. . . Devoting the different sections of her book to the various roles Mary has played as virgin, queen, mother, bride, and intercessor, she gives a full tour of the art, literature, and historical moments that created these images of Mary."
—Mary Ann Maggiore, *Philadelphia Inquirer*

The New York Times says: "Few readers will come away from it without a vastly enriched perspective on European history and how important religious ideas and artistic expressions were interrelated within it." —Christopher Lehmann-Haupt

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promised, hopeless pattern of "pulling through," which seems at first to be a mere twitch, a flutter on the rotting faceless mask of mass death. And, what is more —unbelievably more—the reader is required to regard this life in death, this all but dead clinging to non-life as impressively human, and finally as heroic. Or so this challenge appears to the reader in the stage of initial collapse.

The face which emerges from the brutality and defilement of this book is unmistakably the face of life, a communal human biography of those who found the thread of life stitched into the apparently absolute, seamless reign of death and who pulled that thread loose, defiantly. The task of the camp survivor was to assert life in the face of death, with all of the futility, compromise, and contradiction inherent in such an assertion. And the task of the reader is to somehow detect and follow the story of life in the vast shadow of what appears to be the story of dark death, fractured or staggered into its several constituent moments—social, psychic, moral, physical. Even the path of resistance may be mostly obscured and otherwise traced as a path of egoism, regression, and demoralization. The reader, the world to which the survivors survived to tell their tale, requires guidance here. The reader's journey begins in what must be the center of hell from which there is an ascent. We know that now. The first survivors of our own modern hell were required to act, to assert their path step by step. For now, in this limited realm of imaginative sympathy, the reader is required only to understand. The descent and ascent before the reader is no *comedia;* for it is utterly empty of the divine. The descent reaches into darker spaces than Dante's "high fantasy"; this dark wood is lightless and loveless and infinite. To see the ascent at all and to find it beautiful one requires the service of a poet. And Des Pres is a true companion here in this hell and in the arduous ascent which leads to a miracle less lustrous than Dante's "Love that moves the sun and the stars." This is tragedy and not comedy; for it is a godless wonder which faces us in this book, the wonder of survival. "It was all miraculous, or no, it was not. God kept away from the concentration camps, and what was done, miraculous as it might seem, was done by human mind and will—by men and women doing what they could to make life possible."

In simplest terms, the death camps were a place where human beings utterly denied the humanity of other human beings. But they were also a moment when that denial was utterly denied. This is resistance stripped bare: to deny the denial of one's humanity. The dialogue here is fundamental and familiar. And we must recognize two things about it: (1) that it contains an affirmation (in the grammar of resistance two negatives make a positive), the first words of a humanity laid bare in its struggle to maintain itself; (2) that this implicit affirmation represents a quite severely limited disclosure and assertion of one's humanity. Only when one responds to the celebration of one's humanity rather than to its denial can human community and human language come to fullness. Yet it is denial and not celebration which is familiar to us. And this book instructs us well concerning resistance—that it is possible, communal, and that its language is archaic, quasi-religious. Survival, the community of resistance, and the language of ultimate concern are mere vestiges in what we come to see as our own extremity; but they are necessary and beautiful and almost enough.

Finally, it is the simplest and finest praise due Des Pres to have spoken here of his book's vision and not of its considerable craft; for craft must serve vision, and in this book it does.

Robert Meagher teaches humanities and religion at Hampshire College (Amherst, Mass.) and is the author of Cave Notes: First Reflections on Sense and Spirit.

Krishnamurti's Notebook

By J. Krishnamurti. New York: Harper & Row, 1976. Pp. 252. $10.00.

By Anne Fremantle

In June 1961, when he was sixty-six years old, Krishnamurti began keeping a daily record of "his perceptions and states of consciousness." He kept this record for seven months, during which he was travelling a great deal. He began writing, in pencil, in New York, and continued in California, London, Gstaad, Paris, Rome, Florence,

Bombay, Madras, Benares, and Delhi. The account begins and ends abruptly, and Mary Lutyens, in her brief foreword, declares that Krishnamurti "cannot say what prompted him to begin it." He had never kept such a record before, nor has he since.

The very first entry, June 18th, describes how "it was there: suddenly it was there." And the recurrent experience is of this "it," which Krishnamurti accepts as a benediction, as bliss, but does not, indeed he says cannot, induce. It simply comes upon him—when he is cleaning his teeth, when he is getting into bed, when he is sitting on a crowded plane, almost as often as when he is meditating before dawn, walking in woods, or watching a stream or a sunset. The experience is, he notes from first page to last, actually not experienced: "it was simply there" he writes on June 20th, and a week later he calls it a "presence" that "was waiting patiently, benignly, with great tenderness." It is present even when he wakes up groaning and shouting from intense pain in his head: " . . . there was, this morning, that peculiar sacredness, filling the room. It had a great penetrating power, entering into every corner of one's being, filling, cleansing, making everything of itself." Sometimes the benediction comes "like a knife-thrust" just as "one was going to have breakfast." On August 10th "it" is there again and, he reports, "this has been going on for four solid months, whatever the environment, whatever the condition of the body." Yet it is always strange: it comes when it wills, yet "is never the same." On September 13th: "the otherness has been present wherever one has been, whatever the daily activity . . . There is a sense of watching from infinite depth." Before dawn on the 16th, "time stood still, and life without a shadow went on . . . Time as measure, and time as thought and feeling had stopped. There was no time." And the next day was "a day of the otherness." On October 18th, on a flight to Bombay, he writes that in the middle of the night " . . . time had stopped. There was only an awakened attention, with a centre that was attentive," and later he tries to analyze the complete stillness of the brain which is a prerequisite for the "emptiness which is not a state of vacuum, a blankness; it is energy without a centre, without a border . . . It is never the same, always new, always unexpected; the odd thing about it is that thought cannot go back over it . . . Memory has no part in it, for every time it happens it is so totally new and unexpected, that it does not leave any memory behind it." He repeats this denial of memory on December 29th in Benares: "it was not an experience . . . it was simply an event . . . Time and memory could not hold it . . . it was a flash in which all time and eternity were consumed, without leaving any ashes, memory."

Krishnamurti was born in South India in May, 1895, the eighth child in a Brahman family. His mother died when he was six. In 1904, when he was playing with his brother, one of the chiefs of the Theosophical Society saw them and showed them to Annie Besant, the Society's founder. She paid for their education, and in 1910 Krishnamurti came to London. He wrote his first book at fifteen; his second at sixteen; and in 1919 he studied at the Sorbonne. Then he went back to India. There, in 1922, he had a spiritual experience which changed his life. This was followed by "years of acute and almost continuous pain in his head and spine." And it is to this pain, which he calls "the process," that he constantly refers in his notebook when speaking of the benediction and presence of the sacred.

Like Gaul, the book is composed of three parts: descriptions of "that benediction" which could sometimes be physically felt, "like a wave flowing into the room"; next, comments on what the Victorians called "life and hopes," which, though often perceptive and acute, tend to become didactic, and sometimes even governessy; and thirdly, descriptions of nature, trees, rivers, stars, etc.—some fresh and lively, many banal.

W. H. Auden divided mystics into four categories: those who receive visions through Dame Kind; through Eros; through Agape; through God. All four are "noughted," as he puts it, adopting Julian of

Norwich's word for the supersession of the ego during the experience. Krishnamurti would seem to be one who receives through Dame Kind: as with Wordsworth and Hopkins, mountains, rivers, seas, trees, flowers are often proximate to the arrival of the "sacred benediction." Often too, his phrases echo those of others: "All opposites must cease" (Nicholas of Cusa); "Virtue is only order in a disordered world" (Augustine: "virtue is the ordering of love"); "The cup is not only the shape, the color, the design, but also that emptiness inside the cup" (*Tao Te Ching*: "thirty spokes has a wheel, but the space between the spokes makes the wheel.").

He is honestly and humbly aware of "how little one changes" and of "how little we know about ourselves." Going to the moon is far more exciting than going into ourselves, he warns. (Us? himself?). And he deplores the desire for *any* form of power, even over oneself, even self-knowing: the hermit and the party boss are equally burning with desire. "One must be wholly indifferent," he says, echoing De Caussade, and recommends "self-critical humor"—which he sometimes fails to show, especially when he spews platitudes, such as : "Love, death, creation are inseparable"; "Power breeds authority, and with it conflict, confusion and sorrow" (both perfectly true, but trite).

Yet it is, finally, the contrast between the nature notes, the sometimes sententious commentaries on living (which have the air of notes for lectures), and the irruption of stammerings occasioned by the presence of "that sacredness," which gives this notebook such validity and vitality, and gives it too a place among the great spiritual biographies. The light and power that the notebook has clearly are not self-created but a benediction for which we as well can be grateful.

Anne Fremantle, author of The Protestant Mystics, *writes regularly about the Christian and other mystical traditions.*

The Nobility of Failure: Tragic Heroes in the History of Japan

By Ivan Morris. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1975. Pp. 500. $17.95; New York: NAL/Meridian, 1976. Paper $4.95.

By Frederick Franck

While reading this splendid book for review, I learned that Professor Morris had died of a heart attack at the age of fifty. The notice in *Amnesty Action* also indicated that he had been the founder of the American section of Amnesty International.

This offered a clue to the deep humanity and compassion that pervade this account of representative Japanese heroes and their often gruesome life stories. It should be required reading for anyone who has any ambition to penetrate into the recesses of the spirit of Japan. I find its insights indispensable to understanding Japanese literature, even the modern works of people like Yukio Mishima. It contributes as well to one's comprehension of Japanese film and theatre, especially Noh drama. For it is a veritable initiation into the psyche of Japan at precisely the point where it differs radically from ours.

Morris' focus is on defeated heroes. He traces the destinies of tragic figures who became national folk-heroes, usually rising meteorically to prominence during periods of upheaval through their exceptional courage and verve, who ultimately were overcome by their enemies and ended in utter defeat. But this failure, ignominious in itself, assured their place in history and legend as an inspiration to generations of poets. The conquerors are forgotten, but the noble vanquished are exalted in memory.

These Japanese heroes embody the antithesis of the ethos of power and success which in our tradition confers hero-status almost exclusively on winners—on a Marlborough, a George Washington, and even a Henry Ford. But in the rigidly conformist structure of Japanese society, whose mem-

bers are cowed by both authority and precedent, the heroes are not the ones who prevail so as to become the establishment, but these non-conformist, uncalculating, but sincere and incorruptible souls who succumbed in their forlorn struggle to the overwhelming odds favoring *Realpolitik*, ruthlessness, and raw power. Posthumously these melancholy losers and loners won the battle for the Japanese heart: they have been celebrated in song, cherished as loved ones, and even enshrined as gods through the centuries.

The stories stretch from Prince Yamato Takeru, seemingly the Ur-hero of the pre-Buddhist period, to the Kamikaze pilots of World War II. Passing in ghostly review are: the melancholy young prince Arima no Miko, who was executed in 658 by the sensual prince Naka as a kind of Hamlet in reverse; the Heian-period poet and scholar Sugawara no Michizane, who challenged the Fujiwara hegemony and died in exile, but was later enshrined as a Shinto deity; Minamoto no Yoshitsune, the legendary victor of the battle of Dannoura (1185) who committed harakiri because of his brother's harassment and subsequently became the still popular protagonist in several Noh plays. Kusunoki Masachige, a loyalist of the Kamakura period, disembowelled himself in defeat, laughingly proclaiming: "I should like to be reborn seven times, so that I might destroy the enemies of the Court." And the memorial goes on: rebel-martyrs staging abortive coups that end in tragic slaughter, and successful insurrectionaries who wind up exiling themselves in protest and dying at the hands of leaders they put in power.

The long and revelatory chapter on the Kamikaze pilots is perhaps the book's most poignant contribution—certainly the chapter most likely to confront our own experience and assumptions. As portrayed by Allied propaganda, these suicide aviators were barbarous and bloodthirsty fanatics. But their farewell letters to parents and friends, copiously documented here, show that they were anything but filled with hatred against their enemies. Rather, in the critical days of 1944 when the depletion of the Japanese airforce made conventional aerial warfare no longer possible, these young men who steered "human torpedoes" and "flying coffins" to their targets and to certain death were acting in the great tradition of tragic heroism. And in that tradition nobility lay in the whole-hearted acceptance of defeat in a courageous act of self-immolation. Even when all hope of averting defeat had vanished, suicide tactics were being perfected so that, in the words of Vice Admiral Onishi (who was responsible for initiating the suicide strategy), "even if defeated the noble spirit of the Kamikaze attack corps will keep our homeland from ruin, without it ruin would certainly follow defeat." Sincerity of purpose takes precedence over pragmatic efficiency, and the spirit of one's efforts is what survives and protects one's heritage.

This learned, lively, elegant book immerses us in a central paradox of the Japanese spirit, teaching that only by meditating on the "koan" of noble failure, of glorious defeat, will we come to penetrate this alien world view, which is ultimately an alien and unknown dimension of ourselves.

Frederick Franck is a consulting editor of this magazine.

On the Way to Self-Knowledge

Edited by Jacob Needleman and Dennis Lewis. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976. Pp. ix + 241. $8.95; paper $3.95.

By Tom Moore

What is a psychologist to do when his "rivals," the spiritual masters, like Pied Pipers are leading his clients away to the mountains, when religious leaders are dabbling in therapy, and when he finds *himself* setting aside the technical journals in favor of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*? Where does therapy leave off and religion or spiritual discipline begin? Or, is that the right question?

Jacob Needleman, a man with demonstrated interest in the boundaries of experience, dared to ask these questions publicly, and he invited eight persons known to roam in these areas to answer them. The eight speakers representing various forms of psychology, therapy and spiritual paths, delivered their responses on the Pacific coast, appropriately, where the climate favors such probing. Their clarifications and conundrums have been made into a

book.

Most of the answers given indicate that it is time to go back to a quiet, sitting posture and stew over the koan for another few years. The trouble seems to be a desire not only to distinguish spirit from psyche but also to build a high fence between the two fields of practice. Many of the authors grant some common concerns for psychotherapy and spiritual discipline; for example, A. C. Robin Skynner mentions a person's clouded perception, inner division, the need for self-knowledge and the usefulness of a guide. But then he goes on to underscore the differences, most based upon the traditional notion of levels of being, some accessible only through spiritual discipline. A separate "dimension" for spirit is a theme common to many of the responses, and from this viewpoint psychotherapy is at best a preparation for spiritual discipline, at worst an obstacle.

Needleman states the problem both with directness—how is a person to know whether to seek out an analyst or a guru?—and with careful detail about the complexity of the issue. In addition, he has his own answer: psychotherapy is a means to an end, tradition a way of life. It is curious that Needleman, who quotes Robert Ornstein advocating a synthesis of tradition and psychology and an extension of the boundaries of science, would define therapy in the limited terms of adjustment and then point out how clearly this differs from spiritual discipline. Isn't it time to avoid the easy tack of reducing health and therapy to matters of adjustment in order to claim a special place for spirit?

Another curiosity: a word appears again and again throughout the essays—naive. Needleman talks about the "naive enthusiasm" of the spiritual revolution. Michel de Salzmann, in an exceptionally probing essay, suggests taking a naive posture when asking about the meaning of self, and later he again recommends a naive openness to existence rather than a search for explanations. Finally, James Hillman defends naive wishes and naive questions. "Whatever begins," he says, "is naive."

Hillman's formal response to Needleman's question is doubly naive. That is, he approaches the problem with a fresh viewpoint and with the talent and naiveté of an original thinker. Furthermore, the theme of his essay is the child-like character of spirit, what he calls *puer*.

Hillman calls for a marriage of spirit and psyche. "Come down from the mountain, monks," he challenges, and enter the realm of soul. In a brief, brilliant and important statement, Hillman warns against dangers of literalism in spiritual disciplines, and against the tendency to pack up and leave the valleys of soul, where feelings, pain, and relationship create quite a mess, for a flight to the peaks, to the pure regions of spirit. Hillman also refuses to draw a line of distinction between East and West, between spiritual masters and psychotherapists. Therapists, he says, engage in spiritual discipline when they focus upon growth, ego strength, spiritual illumination, and unity. On the other hand, spiritual masters engage psyche when they follow the inner female figure as a guide, allow fantasy to flourish, and attend to concrete, immediate events and situations.

What is behind the passionate statements to be found in this book? Why the dedicated concern of therapists to keep their spiritual concerns separate and intact? In some cases, at least according to many recent books on religion and psychology, it is a matter of metaphysical conviction—spirit is a channel to a supernatural reality. But even in less fundamentalist contexts the concern burns. Perhaps it all stems from an impatience with mediocrity. People want to fly. They are no longer satisfied with normalcy and adjustment. They want to reach high, and high is where spirit reigns. They don't want mere satisfaction and contentment, they want a sense of self, a sense of meaningfulness; they want a thriving connection between themselves and their universe, inner and outer. Spirit offers this outreach and is therefore important to keep in view.

But what profit is there in gaining the whole world of spirit while suffering the loss of soul? The way down is important, too. Just as adjusting and turning the psyche to normal frequencies can stifle the spirit, so too flying to the peaks of spirit can mean fleeing from the requirements of psyche. Maybe we have lost reverence for the gods of the underworld and honor only those high above.

Although this book has a spiritual bias, its authors are clearly still tethered to the tangles of soul. Perhaps their stumblings, contradictions, confusions, and dead-ends show that they are still in the dark labyrinth of psyche. The book offers some

promise of entangling the reader in this sticky web, the criss-crossing strands of spiritual and psychological issues. To that extent it is valuable, timely, and perhaps therapeutic.

Tom Moore is assistant professor of myth and psychology in the Department of Religion, Southern Methodist University.

Parallel Developments, A Comparative History of Ideas

By Hajime Nakamura, Edited by Ronald Burr. Tokyo and New York: Kodansha, 1975. Pp. xiii + 567. $28.00

By Edwin A. Burtt

Those who have known Professor Nakamura either through his writings or through participation in conferences with him will have high expectations of this book. They will not be disappointed. He sets a distinctive standard for detailed comparisons of Eastern and Western ideas in philosophy and theology. His mastery of the important currents of thought in all major areas of civilized culture and his familiarity with the languages used in those currents—Indian, Chinese, Japanese, and Western—are apparent on every page. He has given a great gift to the growing quest for international and intercultural understanding.

The author's way of organizing the enormous wealth of material brought together in his comparisons is both historical and topical. The all-inclusive historical division recognizes four main periods —primitive, ancient or classical, medieval, and modern. Within each of these periods he proceeds topically. He picks an important problem—such as the role in cosmology of creation myths and the relation between the Absolute and the individual self—and explains the way it has been dealt with at the period in question by thinkers in India, in China, in Japan, and in Europe, bringing out the instructive similarities and differences. Since he is a Buddhist and is more expert in Buddhism than other ways of thinking, he often takes that philosophical development as the foil against which to elucidate the problem under analysis as dealt with elsewhere. He never allows this emphasis to affect the sympathetic impartiality of his treatment.

Would that I could make this review one of praise without any qualification. Unfortunately, there are defects which mar an otherwise outstanding volume. I mention three defects in the hope that a subsequent edition will remedy them.

One defect is the lack of any index. This is especially unfortunate in a book dealing with so many important problems in such a variety of historical and cultural settings. Another defect is the large number of printer's errors. These are not frequent throughout the whole book, but in some of the middle chapters they are glaringly evident.

A third defect concerns a difficulty which an author faces constantly in a book of this kind. In comparing concepts expressed in Sanskrit, Pali, or Chinese, Professor Nakamura has to clarify their meaning to the Western reader unacquainted with them. Usually he does this sufficiently so that an intelligent reader can participate in the comparison. But sometimes he fails to provide that help, and the reader is left wandering. For example, when comparing the Chinese and Western attitudes toward natural law, he translates the Neo-Confucian concept *ch'i* (following Derk Bodde) by the English word "ether," with no explanatory comment. But the associations of "ether" in the history of Western science are such that this translation will be confusing unless some elucidation is provided. *Ch'i* is often translated by "breath," or "force," or "life-giving principle," or even by "matter." Would it not have been better to make *Parallel Developments* less encyclopedic and take the space needed to render each comparison fully intelligible?

It is hard to think of any problem seriously discussed in philosophy or theology that Professor Nakamura's systematic comparisons have left out. Of course some comparisons are brief; thus plenty of room is left for further investigations along the route he has opened up. We may hope that his work will stimulate and guide many such investigations. Some of them will follow his way of organizing the material brought together,

but some presumably will try a different way.

The overwhelming impression that this book will leave with the perceptive reader is an impression of the vast range of parallel developments in West and East, and of the profound and thoroughgoing unity of human nature, despite the radical differences of culture and historical setting. When thinkers delve into the mysteries of life and its encompassing cosmos, the quandaries they confront and the alternative solutions seriously considered are astonishingly similar everywhere. Very little of the similarity can be plausibly explained by intercultural influences except in the case of Buddhism's spread from India into China and Japan. Realization of this unity will be a growing force toward mutual understanding between nations and cultures. The author's monumental labor will, we may trust, be amply justified by the spreading influence of that realization.

Edwin A. Burtt, an expert in comparing the philosophies of East and West, has edited several collections of texts, including The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha.

Imperial Messages: One Hundred Modern Parables

Edited by Howard Schwartz. New York: Avon Books, 1976. Pp. xx + 348. Paper $2.50

By John Dominic Crossan

This superb collection of parables by seventy-two writers from over twenty countries places its "primary emphasis. . . on the writers of this century, including many contemporaries such as Jerzy Kosinski, Jakov Lind, W. S. Merwin and Italo Calvino," but it also includes "a sampling of parables from the 19th Century, by authors such as Fyodor Dostoevsky, Nikolai Gogol, Edgar Allan Poe and George MacDonald." There is even one by Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav from the 18th century. Howard Schwartz is himself a "parabler" (three collections published), and a poet (first book of poems, *Vessels*, promised for 1977), and a professor (University of Missouri in St. Louis). Apart from his excellent selection, he has added to the anthology an "Introduction," an "Afterword" on "Kafka and the Modern Parable", and brief summaries of the literary lives of his chosen authors.

I intend to focus primarily on the framing chapters within which Schwartz presents his magnificent anthology. Of the parables themselves I can only say to read them and then follow their implicit invitation into the sources whence they came. And not only into more obvious places like Kafka's *Parables and Paradoxes* or Borges' *Labyrinths*, but also into equally important ones such as Reinhard Lettau's *Obstacles* or Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. This last collection, published in Italian in 1972, is described by Schwartz as "the best single collection of parables to be published since Kafka's *Parables and Paradoxes*."

Schwartz argues, correctly in my view, that "due primarily to the rigid classification of literary genres, which for most readers limit the possibilities to the short story, the novel, lyric and epic poetry, and drama, the modern parable has so far failed to receive recognition as an independent literary form." The purpose of his anthology, he says, is to announce the resurrection of the parable as a literary genre.

Epitomizing Schwartz's two framing chapters, I would give his definition of parable as: an allegorical narrative of minimal length. These three components are of equal importance in delimiting the genre of parable, and a few comments are necessary on each—in reverse order. First, minimal length. "The basic challenge of the parable is to write a good story in as short a space as possible." Brevity is the soul of parable and why and how this is both possible and necessary will be seen below under the third point and in my own concluding metaparable or parable of parables (are all parables metaparables?). Second, narration. "The modern parable, more often than not, presents a recognizable narrative." It is the implacable discipline of narrative which distinguishes parables from dreams, on the one hand, and from prose poems, on the other.

Third, allegory. The Greek word parabolē (ballein = to set; para = beside) indicates etymologically "the key literary device of

both ancient and modern parable, that of allegory, (which) presumes a double meaning, that presented and that implied." Within this overall rubric of allegory, Schwartz distinguishes ancient from modern parable by noting that "far from being cut and dried allegories with obvious morals, these parables more closely resemble dreams" so that the difference "is between the explicit moral appended to the ancient parable and the implicit moral of the modern parable."

At this point one senses that much more thought will have to be given to allegory as the core element in parable, and the distinction between classical and contemporary parable will have to be determined more profoundly than by differentiating explicit from implicit morals. What follows intends only to open such a discussion.

Allegories can be interpreted psychologically, sociologically, historically, philosophically, theologically, etc. The structure of the allegorical narrative can be seen as isomorphic with structures as diverse as that of the human psyche, the way of all the world, or the divine plan for cosmic destiny. This multiplicity is possible, I would suggest, because allegory allegorizes allegory itself. Allegory is a narrative metaphor or metonym for the process of its own creation and interpretation. Ancient parables reflected homogeneity of meaning and univalence in interpretation (parable as puzzle). Modern ones reflect diversity of meaning and polyvalence in interpretation (parable as Rorschach). For example, Kafka's "An Imperial Message," which inaugurates this volume and furnishes its title, allegorizes both ancient and modern parables and also the shift from one to the other. The imperial message of the parable is the imperial message in the parable. And the personal dream in the parable is the personal dream of the parable. The vertiginous challenge of parable is precisely this economic allegorization of its own creation and its own interpretation. In other words:

Once upon a time there was a jester whose impudence had earned him the displeasure of his royal master. He was condemned to spend the rest of his life in a small room, six feet by six feet by six feet. The jester immediately invoked the condemned man's right to one last request. The king agreed, adding that the room's dimensions, its lack of windows, and its solid concrete manufacture, were not, of course, open to negotia-

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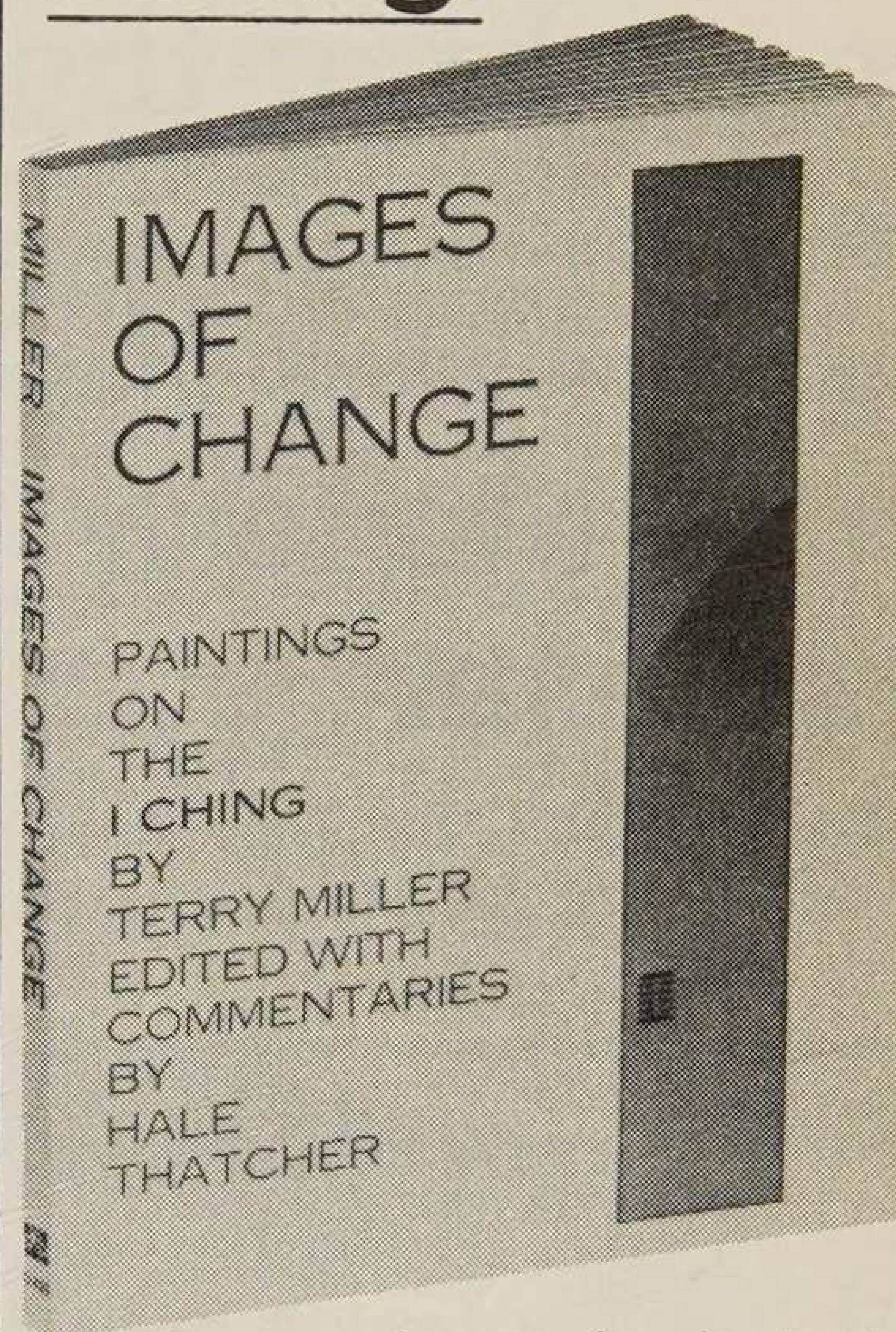

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tion. So the jester asked that the floor, ceiling, and four walls of his prison be faced completely with mirrors. And the jester lived happily ever after.

John Dominic Crossan is professor of religious studies at De Paul University. His books include In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus; The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story, *and (most recently)* Raid on the Articulate: Comic Eschatology in Jesus and Borges.

The Light at the Center: Context and Pretext of Modern Mysticism

By Agehananda Bharati. Santa Barbara: Ross-Erikson, 1976. Pp. 254. $11.95; paper $4.95.

By David Buchdahl

Bharati has written a book that should interest anyone with a serious concern for the contemporary religious situation. It is not a scholarly work, at least not in style. But beyond that specification, it remains difficult to classify. His publisher describes it as "an investigation of mysticism in the tradition of Butler, Underhill and Zaehner," even though Bharati offers only disdainful criticisms of these writers. The book is often annoying, sometimes simplistic; it even sounds silly at times—but of course, so does the language of mysticism, and Bharati knows this well.

Readers will soon discover that Bharati is *sui generis*: an Austrian-bred Hindu monk, ordained as a *sanyasi* in 1951, an initiate in the left-handed Tantric tradition, and a professional anthropologist and academic. His autobiography, *The Ochre Robe* was published in 1970, and he is the author of the widely respected *The Tantric Tradition*. He counts himself among people like Watts, Huxley, Koestler, Ramakrishna and, for that matter, Jesus and Buddha. A chronic name-dropper, he delights in referring to encounters and correspondence with everyone from Jack Kerouac to Karl Popper, Thomas Merton to Bertrand Russell. He describes his own mystical experiences, his moments of sexual bliss, and his tastes for fine music and refined thought. For the reader tolerant enough to wade through all this self-congratulation—impressed or otherwise—there is the reward of a good many challenging statements about the quality of mystical experience and of a variety of modern mysticisms.

For Bharati, the mystical experience is everywhere and always the same—the experience of *oneness*. Almost any sort of circumstance can precede it, but no one method can be guaranteed to bring it about. More importantly, Bharati argues, neither the "meaning" of the experience, its consequences, or the ontological status of the Reality it reveals are given by the experience itself. These come from the social and ideological context in which the experience takes place. Thus the various sociological and intellectual traditions of mysticism. Unfortunately, Bharati does not consider too carefully how much his own Tantric commitments condition this view; he prefers instead to refer to the sober analyses of W.T. Stace and Ninian Smart for corroboration. But for him, the ready agreement of the anthropologist /mystic and the philosophers proves the point. Hence, any claims that the "zero-experience," as he calls it, by itself yields goodness or practical wisdom or social improvement are false, and come from sources other than mystical experience. In fact, Bharati suggests that a zero-experience tends to change a person very little, except of course that one is transformed from one who seeks to one who has found. And what is it that mystics seek? The total, sensual bliss of *oneness*.

Bharati provides an interesting if sketchy "ethnography" of mysticism both here and in India, distinguishing mystics from mythologists, the genuine from the spurious, the religious from the secular. Here is where he presents the context of modern mysticism, though some readers may feel as I do that he misunderstands certain aspects of the contemporary spiritual scene. When he considers hippies, for example, he ignores their music and the most significant thing about them—their rapid disappearance. What characterizes the modern context most, says Bharati, is the eclecticism

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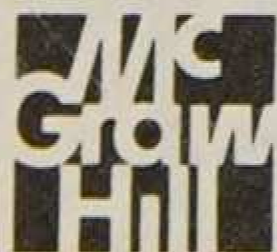

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espoused and practiced by so many. In opposition Bharati offers the scholar's traditional alternative: read the original texts in the original languages. Not that this will produce a zero-experience—it probably won't. But it will do away with some of the frauds, fads, and utopian fantasies that pass for mystical experience today. What Bharati wants is a rational, experimental approach to mysticism—free of false claims and expectations, on the one hand, and of authoritarian control, on the other—and his free-wheeling book is both an example of and an invitation to such an approach.

David Buchdahl teaches anthropology and American civilization at Brown University, and is currently studying Tibetan Buddhism and the transmission of its teachings to American soil.

Seeing With a Native Eye: Essays on Native American Religion

Edited by Walter Holden Capps. New York: Harper & Row, 1976. Paper $3.95.

By Christopher Vecsey

In this collection eight experts, including two American Indians, discuss the recent interest in American Indian religions. They trace its growth and suggest some lessons which the religions offer us.

Despite the contributors' expertise, the book is rather thin and uneven. Amid its pointed truths, it contains much that is pointless. Still, it holds enough of worth to recommend it.

The authors link the new interest in Native American religions to the recent disenchantment with Western values, institutions, and goals. For many whites, and especially among the young, the predominant Western orientation—with its technology, materialism, and environmental abuse—stands discredited. Thus, we turn toward native traditions—as to Zen, TM, and other exotic systems of thought—in order to find a way of escape from the perceptual straitjacket we're in.

At the same time, many American Indians are returning to what remains of their traditional religions, seeking to recover a richer heritage than current resources offer. They regard the new white interest in their traditions ambivalently: they enjoy the authoritative status it gives some of them, but they are wary of the motives of people who have robbed them of so much. As Hopi contributor Emory Sekaquaptewa notes, whites often appropriate foreign ideas in order to market them for popular consumption and thereby realize a profit. Editor Capps agrees: "Whereas the white man formerly took the Indian's land and goods, now we take their ideas—when it suits us or when we have need of them."

But Åke Hultkranz, the world's foremost authority on Indian traditions, points out that there are other ways of learning from American Indian religions, based on respectful participation and painstaking scholarship. He and Joseph Epes Brown favor an approach in which whites encounter Indians in personal dialogue, using

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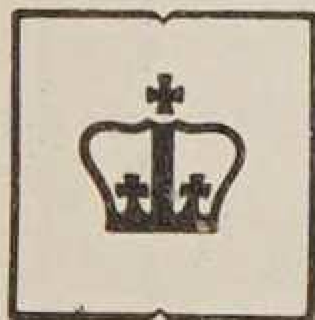

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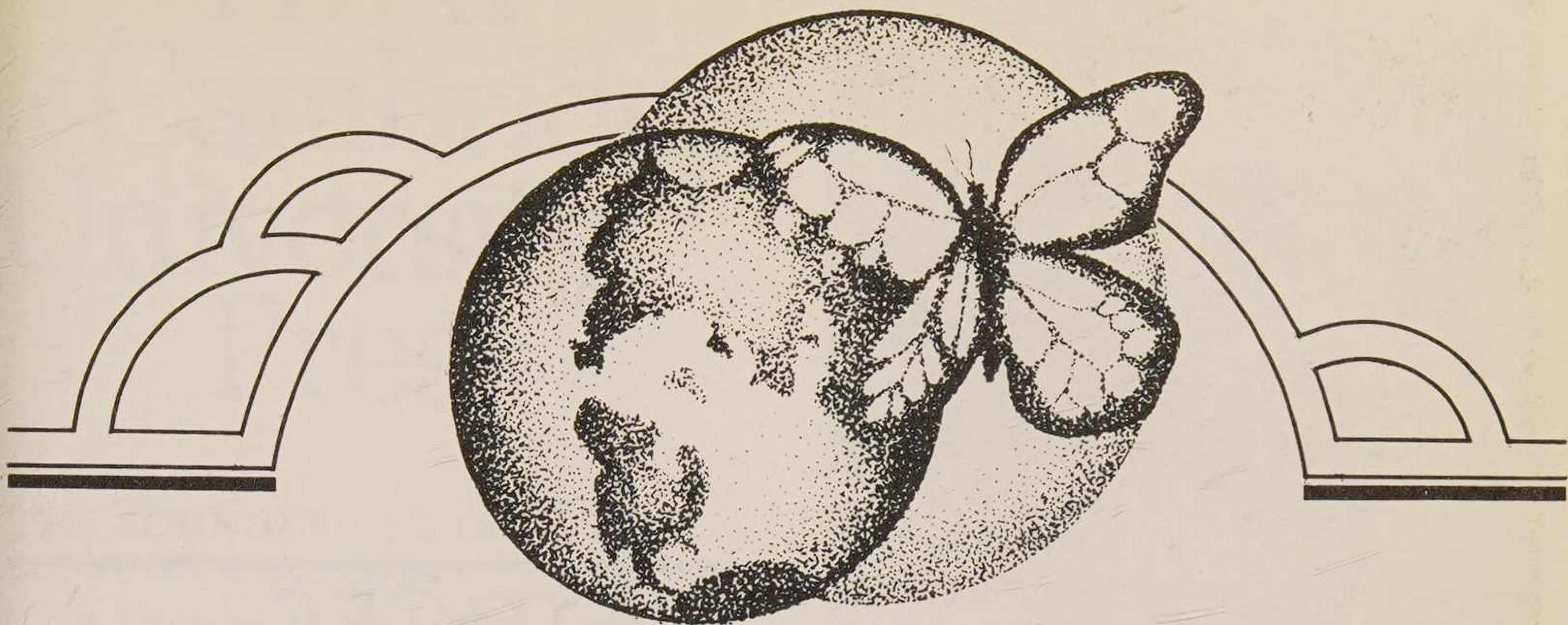
the tools of research and critical analysis to understand the religious dimensions we seek. To Brown, presently working on a biography of the late Oglala holy man Black Elk, ideas constitute one form of wealth that can be shared without diminishing the original holdings. Indeed, the dialogue between whites and Native Americans can lead to mutual enrichment.

There are difficulties, however, in attempting to learn from Indians, not the least of which is overcoming our perceptual biases and entering genuinely into the native view. Barre Toelken shows that we are programmed to perceive reality according to cultural patterns. If new information appears that substantially diverges from our preconceptions, we are likely to ignore it. He tells of whites attending a Yaqui dance who failed to notice non-dancing Yaqui participants who were vital to the ritual. The whites came to see dancing, and that is all they saw. As one student told Toelken, "If I hadn't believed it I never would have seen it." And, of course, this works both ways. Toelken's adopted Navajo father, on seeing a photograph of the Empire State Building, asked "How many sheep will it hold?"

Reckoning with American Indian religions meets the further difficulty of the number and diversity of native cultures and languages. One discovers not one, monolithic American Indian religion (as this collection's subtitle, though not its contents, might imply), but hundreds of distinct traditions. Amid this welter of data, nonetheless, the authors are able to accent two central themes. First, the Native American world is one of circular interdependence. The Indians give and receive in cyclical, ritual relations. This is in strict contrast to the linear, goal-oriented dynamic of the West, which has put us in such ecological straits. The difference, says Toelken, is between wholesale recycling and a straight-line economics which takes without giving in return. Among American Indians there is a reciprocity based on religiously-perceived relations. Second, these relations are rooted in what we call "nature." The Kiowa author of *House Made of Dawn* and the just-published memoir *The Names*, Scott Momaday, states that the American Indian ethic regarding nature is a "matter of reciprocal appropriation . . . in which man invests himself in the landscape, and at the same time incorporates the landscape into his own most fundamental experience." For the Indians, nature is personal, and because they are personally re-



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lated to it, it is an integral part of their ethical system. Its every aspect deserves their appropriate respect; thus, there is the case mentioned here of the Navajo who could not kill a deer (even though his pregnant wife and children were starving), because, as he said, "it is inappropriate that I should take life just now when I am expecting the gift of life."

American Indians derive their identity, indeed their life, from their relation with nature. Without nature, they cease to exist, as do we all. And the lesson of equitable reciprocity with nature is one we can learn from the Native Americans, and to a degree from this book.

Christopher Vecsey, an expert in Ojibway mythology, teaches American Indian Religions and History at Hobart & William Smith Colleges.

NOTICES

Three Ways to the East Within Us

By Michael Adam. New York; Knopf, 1976. Pp. 109. $10.00; paper $4.95.

Michael Adam's premise in this finely composed book is that there is within all of us Westerners an Eastern aspect, "something ancestral in ourselves" (Yeats), which we must discover to become whole. And the way to this discovery is as much or more through the heart and the eye than through the head. Thus, he attempts here—through Eastern art and simple, direct language—to open our sensibilities to this lost dimension of ourselves. Little that Adam has to say is original with him: one hears the ancient voices of the Upanishads, Lao Tsu, Basho and the modern insights of Blake, Jung, Watts, D.H. Lawrence, Eddington, Jeans. But it is a delight to hear them so well orchestrated in expression of a central theme. Though the theme is one, it is stated with rich variety: "Paradise is regained in the recognition that it was never lost... We are sleepwalking in Eden and may awaken to it"; "You the living, seemingly separate being, are the visible form of that which is deathless, invisible, and whole"; "What we lack is nothing we can look for. We lack *looking*, simply;" "Zen is simply seeing simply."

As these variations intimate, this minor symphony of text and illustrations has three movements. Chapter 1, "The Way of the Body," celebrates the ancient Indian

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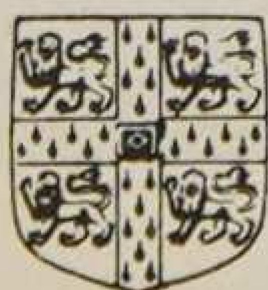

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sense—illustrated in its temple art and lively mythology—that the whole universe of being is one body, unified at the core by the primal energy of love. Chapter 2, "The Way of Emptiness," is a meditation on the Taoist vision of Lao Tsu and the Chinese landscape painters of the Sung period—seeing how all things subsist in one Reality that is No-thing and Nowhere. Then in Chapter 3, "The Way of Things," Adam explores how the Zen art of living with natural boldness and extraordinary attention to ordinary things yields a comparable identity with the whole. And throughout there is the refrain that modern science—with its atomic particles, uncertainty principle, theories of relativity, etc.—is the aspect of the West which at least subconsciously is waking up to the Eastern knowledge of the unity of being, the universality of energy, and the primordiality of space, of emptiness.

Adam is a spirited religious romantic who has little patience with formal religion, abstract doctrine, or asceticism. He tends to write off Western religions as trapped in a deadly dualism: God distinct from Nature and man, spirit from body. The solution to this dualism is its dissolution: we must become genuinely natural once more, rediscover our true, original nature, and then we will experience the sense of ultimate unity which all our striving for God can never give us. The Tao, he says, "is all that a man does when he acts naturally, in accordance with his true nature, undistracted, empty of dreams, *aware*."

Adam succeeds admirably in doing what he sets out to do: open us to an Eastern aspect of ourselves. Necessarily, he overstates and oversimplifies to score his point—there seems to me a Western aspect of him that needs recovering. But he is a wonderful religious amateur, in the root sense of that word, who dares to take the Hindu, Taoist, and Zen traditions and make personal, quite compelling sense of them.

John Loudon

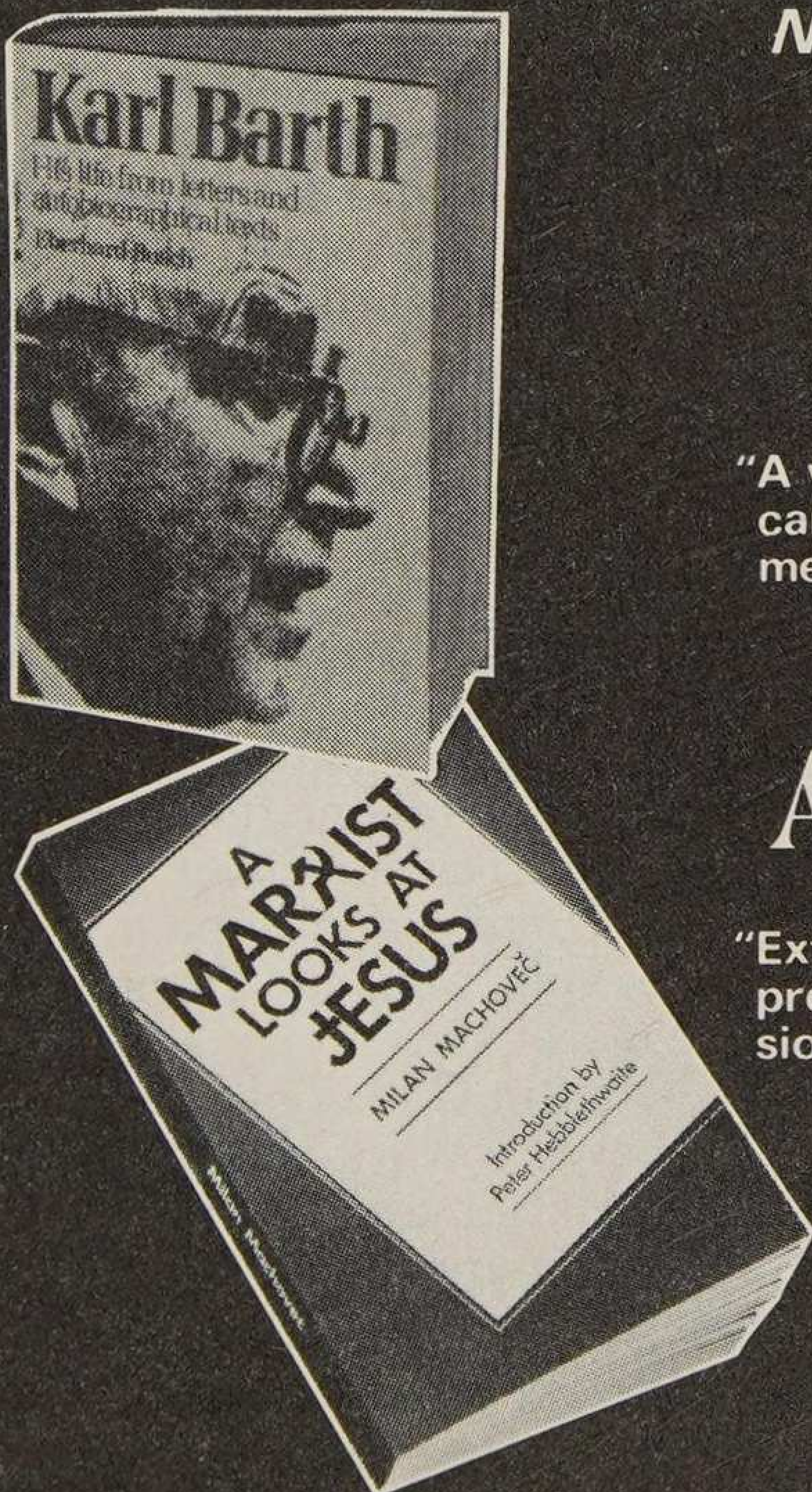
Forgotten Truth: The Primordial Tradition

By Huston Smith. New York: Harper & Row, 1976. Pp. x +182. $8.95.

Fifteen years after the publication of his first and only other major book, *The Religions of Man* (a useful textbook for beginning students of comparative religions), and after many years of teaching and traveling, Huston Smith has authored another work with the much-promising title *Forgotten Truth: The Primordial Tradition*. It must be said at once that the promise is not fulfilled. Dr. Smith refers in his preface to the convergence of the various world religions in a central truth which he compares in a spiritual sense to the human spine: a theme of enormous possibilities and interest, but one to which he does not return in his book. What he gives us instead is a collection of opinions and statements from many sources, tagged as to which are to be approved and which are not. The Index which dictates where faith may or may not be placed appears with increasing clarity, as the pages turn, to issue from what a contributor to this magazine has called "le côté de chez Schuon." Schuon (a pupil of René Guénon's who is now the leader of a sect of scholastic Sufism in Switzerland) and his followers are quoted again and again in terms of reverence, and even described as the metaphysicians who could save the world if it would but listen. This group represents the most recent influence in Dr. Smith's somewhat chameleonic religious career.

If *Forgotten Truth* falls far short of its rather pretentious title, however, it does in its wandering course present some fine ideas and beautiful quotations gleaned from among the author's varied enthusiasms, and some pages of pleasant reading. All too often, however, there are glaring flaws in logic as well as style, as if in spite of a 20-year gestation period the book had finally been written in a hurry; or (an even less charitable supposition) as if Dr. Smith did not have quite enough respect for his readers' intelligence.

But what is most lamentable is that the title, the publisher's blurb and the author's preface all lead the reader to expect something quite different and much more profound. The book is not about the primordial tradition nor does it raise forgotten truths.



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As for its style, though we are told on the jacket that its "effortless and finely simple prose" makes it "a hymn, a song of sacred love," we are confronted with such passages as the following: "Progress remains the kingpin of the modern outlook. Seeping and soaking, permeating, probing, it diffuses like mist, discovering every corner, saturating every cell." And something more than literary taste is offended by "O my people! Can you not see how it is hope, not fact, that powers this dream of onward and upward towards the dawning light?" or "Beyond this, where the film that separates Knower from Known is itself removed and the self sinks into the Spirit that *is* the Infinite. . . . Ah, but we can say no more. We have reached the Cloud of Unknowing, where the rest is Silence." Let indeed the rest be silence.

Ronald W. Brennan

C.S. Lewis: The Shape of His Faith and Thought

By Paul L. Holmer. New York: Harper & Row, 1976. Pp. x + 116. $6.95; paper $3.95.

Paul Holmer is a theologian who has undertaken the difficult task of articulating the religious, literary, and philosophical positions of a writer who generally eschewed theoretical positions. C.S. Lewis was a literary scholar who championed no approach, a Christian apologist who was wary of theology, a writer of fiction who belonged to no school. Lewis strove not to prove a thesis but, as Holmer puts it, to "improve the sensibility and to enlarge the capacities of the reader." As a creator of fantasy, particularly, he sought to release the "dramatic inner life" which exists within us all but tends to be imprisoned by the "conventional framework of current thinking" and trends. His goal was the growth in his reader of a way of seeing and thinking which was beyond the needs of the moment and was by definition moral and, for him, Christian.

In the series of children's books called *The Chronicles of Narnia* and in the adult trilogy which includes *Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra,* and *That Hideous Strength,* Lewis exposes us for what we are—stumbling, stubborn, misguided beings who, nevertheless, through the gift of consciousness, are open to the wisdom and happiness that true self-awareness can bring. The literary and aesthetic experience can provide a path to a state of being in which we become more able to discriminate, more sensitive and acute in our feelings, in short, more able to see what is ultimately real. The true artist, in Lewis's opinion, is he who taps not so much his own personality or his own pet school of thought as an eternally living tradition of meaning. In keeping with this, Holmer rightly concentrates on his subject's sense of the moral, stressing that the great moral teachers—among whom he would seem to include Lewis—do not create new moralities but lead us, often indirectly, to moralities that have always been, those implicit in the great virtues: wisdom, temperance, justice, courage, faith, hope, and love.

The most demanding aspect of Holmer's task is to discover for us exactly what Lewis thought in connection with the Christianity to which he was so dramatically converted in the middle of his life. And again he is precisely right in seeing that Lewis's position as a practicing Christian was fully consistent with his role as a literary critic and as a writer of fiction. Above all he refused the assistance of any second order discourse—theological, anthropological, or psychological—in his approach to religion. Rather, he urges us in his writings to try again, on its own terms, from within, the Christianity of the Apostles' Creed and the Gospels—a Christianity not mouthed unthinkingly or treated in a fundamentalist context but received with the humility that allows the child to accept the fairy tale or the adult the allegory of epic. To rediscover the nontheoretical, primary, and human world of fairy tale, epic, and the Gospels is to rediscover moral sensitivity and, ultimately, belief in God. The function of all of C.S. Lewis's work in literary criticism, in Christian apologetics, and in fiction is to prepare contemporary man, by demonstration rather than by preaching, to make this rediscovery.

It should be noted that Professor Holmer's book makes for difficult reading;

the thoughts it contains are at times maddeningly complicated and even apparently disconnected but perhaps necessarily so. No book goes further toward an understanding of the essence of Lewis's vision of reality—a vision which is at the same time complex and disarmingly simple.

David A. Leeming

Ojibway Heritage

By Basil Johnston. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1976. Pp. 171. $11.95.

The cultural heritage of a people may be transmitted in many ways, but one of the most interesting is through the telling of stories. Whether we call them myths, legends or folktales, these stories communicate the history, values and religious beliefs of a people in a way that is both entertaining and informative. Basil Johnston, a Canadian Ojibwa, utilizes the story-teller's method in presenting his understanding of the heritage of the Anishnabeg (Ojibwa, Ojibway or Chippewa).

Beginning with the creation of the universe as the fulfillment of a vision experienced by the "Great Spirit" Kitche Manitou, Johnston offers an interesting glimpse into the major religious beliefs and practices of his people. Instead of trying to impress the reader with detailed analyses of various aspects of Ojibwa thought, he uses stories to illustrate such concepts as the four "worlds" of creation and attitudes toward life and death. In his treatment of the two most important experiences in Ojibwa spiritual life, the vision quest and initiation into the Medicine Society *(Midewewin)*, Johnston includes more explanatory material, but manages to convey the essential features without getting bogged down in data. His brief descriptions of the major ceremonies and mythological personalities provide the reader with a useful introductory glossary for the study of Ojibwa religion.

The book is well organized and reads more like a novel than a "scholarly" treatise, which makes it a good introduction to the religious tradition of the Ojibwa. However, it should be understood that Johnston covers only a small (although essential) part of the Ojibwa system of thought. Many of the stories have been condensed and reshaped, and as a result have lost some of their depth and range of meaning. This is particularly evident in his discussion of the culture hero/trickster figure, Nanabush. Johnston depicts Nanabush as almost totally benevolent, rather than as a highly paradoxical figure who embodies both good and evil.

Despite this, *Ojibway Heritage* remains a fresh contribution to the literature on Native American religions. Too often, the classic works present a wealth of information without revealing that which holds a culture together and makes its system of thought meaningful. In Johnston's book, much of the information is not new, but the way in which it is presented allows the reader to view Ojibwa religion as a living, integrated whole rather than an antiquated curiosity.

John F. Fisher

Metaphor and Myth in Science and Religion

By Earl R. MacCormac. Durham: Duke University Press, 1976. Pp. xvii + 167. $7.95.

The sensible thesis of this book is that religion is neither so subjective, nor science so objective, as was once held by logical positivism in the days of its feisty youth. This may be a useful message to those who have not been following developments in philosophy of science and philosophy of religion during the past quarter-century. There is now no excuse for a double standard of verifiability: one more rigid for religion than could possibly be demanded in the higher, more theoretical reaches of science. At the same time, Professor MacCormac avoids the opposite error of supposing that the logic of religious and scientific ways of thinking and speaking are somehow identical merely because they are not absolutely dissimilar.

In reaching his thesis, MacCormac provides a summary of developments in philosophy of science, to show how it has been chastened (and loosened up) by Thomas Kuhn and others since the self-confident days of clear-cut verificationism. He provides a similar summary for philosophy of religion, plowing again some frequently turned earth; and despite his rather repetitive style and some odd omissions from the literature, he succeeds in portraying the awareness of

variety in modes of religious speech that now characterizes the field. At times he may exaggerate the naiveté of the theologians, and sometimes he may make suggestions of embarrassing obviousness (e.g. "logic might be more appropriate than mathematics for theology"), but these unadventuresome aspects of MacCormac's book are generally sound, though plodding.

His own contributions, however, concerning metaphor and myth, are a different story. They are not soporific, but they are of doubtful soundness. His theory of metaphor is at best difficult to pin down. On the whole he seems to adopt the familiar "tension" theory, in which the shock of literally impossible juxtapositions of words constitutes the metaphor. But at times he seems to confuse the metaphorical with the merely hypothetical, as when a precisely defined technical term like the physicist's "tachyon" is asserted to be metaphorical; and at still other times he proclaims even biblical literalism itself to be metaphorical!

On myth, MacCormac is determinedly negative. Although he acknowledges valuable elements in many myths, his goal is to eliminate myth, which he *defines* as mistaken, whether arising from religion or science, and which he wishes to "do away with" in favor of guiding metaphors more tentatively held. Awareness of our speculations *as* speculations is indeed a valuable goal, but MacCormac vacillates between insisting that myth is always a "false" attribution of reality and arguing merely that it tends to be an unguarded and "degenerate form" of theorizing. This leaves the line between (good) literal theory and (bad) mythic thinking logically vague, since all that can distinguish them in the latter case is that the former boast "overwhelming confirmation" while the latter "are well-confirmed, but not so well-confirmed" as to lose all speculative qualities. These and other problems pile up for MacCormac to the extent that he ends his chapter on myth in a burst of defensive arbitrariness. One wonders whether the subject of myth has not proven too subtle to be handled by MacCormac's rather wooden categories.

This book would have been strengthened, had it taken some notice of Ian G. Barbour's *Myths, Models and Paradigms* (1974), the best and the subtlest book currently available on the very same issues discussed here.

Frederick Ferré

A Little Boy in Search of God

By Isaac Bashevis Singer. *Illustrations by Ira Moskowitz. Translated from the Yiddish by Joseph Singer. New York: Doubleday, 1976. Pp. 209, $17.95.*

To the reader unfamiliar with the sacred texts of Judaism and the rich body of Jewish legends and lore, the stories and novels of Isaac Bashevis Singer have a fantastic, startling quality that is almost surreal. But to the reader familiar with this material, Singer's writings are immediately recognizable as an accurate reflection and continuation of the ancient tradition. There is no doubt but that this background provides all of the skeleton and much of the flesh of Singer's stories, and so it is fortunate that Singer has seen fit to write this memoir of his childhood, which tells us how this traditional lore was transmitted to him as a child, and, in addition, how he responded individually to its mysteries and quirks.

At an early age Singer discovered that the conventional sacred texts did not supply answers to his difficult questions, but that the books of the Cabala, which he studied in secret, did take up these questions. In these books, especially the *Zohar*, the child confronted the powerful spirits and demons who were supposed to be concealed from him until he was an adult. Thus the child's imagination, already active, was given an additional spur, and evil spirits such as Lilith and Naamah became vivid presences in his life, tempting, seducing and trying to lead him astray. In addition, his imagination was fed by "countless

stories of dybbuks, corpses that left their graves at night and wandered off to visit miracle workers or to attend distant fairs."

Although the adolescent Singer was temporarily to turn his back on these legends to explore the writings of Plato and Aristotle and others, this background later became the primary stratum on which his writings have been built. Thus his stories must be acknowledged not only as the literary masterpieces they are, but also as a valuable storehouse of the folklore and superstitions of the Hasidic community that were current during his childhood, which they accurately reflect. Yet beside the insights this memoir provides into the body of Singer's writings, it is also a distinct pleasure in itself. No one can surpass Isaac Bashevis Singer when it comes to evoking the flavor of the past, and *A Little Boy in Search of God* is a short masterpiece of such charm and honesty that it is certain to become recognized as the jewel in the crown of Singer's achievements.

Howard Schwartz

Hymns of the Rig-Veda

Translation and calligraphy by Jean Le Mée. Photography by Ingbert Gruttner. New York: Knopf, 1975. Pp. 240. $12.50; paper $5.95.

The Dhammapada: The Sayings of the Buddha

Translated by Thomas Byrom. Photography by Sandra Weiner. Preface by Ram Dass. New York: Knopf, 1976. Pp. xiii + 165. $12.50; New York: Vintage, 1976. Paper $5.95.

Over the last few years Knopf has published a handful of attractive editions of classic religious texts. Although each of the editions has had a distinct format befitting the special character of the particular text, all are beautifully designed and evidently aimed at getting readers to experience this literature for the first time or at least in a fresh way. In each case, a lucid, uncomplicated translation is mated with strong photographs to produce a book that hardly any reader with a taste for wisdom and beauty could resist dipping into.

For me, the format worked best, most naturally, in the first such volume, the excellent edition of the *Tao Te Ching* of Lao Tsu produced by Gia-fu Feng and Jane English. The present two volumes have real strengths too, but also some notable weaknesses. *Hymns of the Rig-Veda* provides strong, elemental translations of twelve out of the more than a thousand hymns which comprise the core of the Hindu canon. Theirs is among the most primal sacred language available to man, and the translations are accompanied by some fine photographs of East Africa which admirably capture the sense of timeless primordiality that the text evokes. However, Le Mée's helpful introduction to the book and his explanatory lead-ins to each hymn seem insufficient to make the Vedic wisdom genuinely accessible to novices. Without further amplification, the texts must I think remain more mystifying than enlightening. The problem with this edition of *The Dhammapada* is almost an opposite one: the Buddha's teaching of the way of truth is, of course, much more readily intelligible—at least at an initial level—and the verses are arranged in a way that encourages real meditation on them. But some of the photos—not so much those of nature, but rather the ones of poor children and older people—threaten almost to sentimentalize the text.

This last thought prompts a more general observation on the entire enterprise of presenting sacred texts in a readable and attractive format that brings traditional wisdom into contemporary life. There is a danger that one can be too accommodating. The fine packaging can invite not just eager, meditative reading, but perhaps a trivialization of the message. There is a threat of a kind of spiritual chic, with these volumes becoming its coffee-table accoutrements; whereas the real function of their texts is not to confirm our lifestyles but to challenge them. Still, such problems need not arise for most readers, who will appreciate these volumes as an excellent way of being introduced to—and challenged by—wisdom that is ever new and vital. The invitation these books offer is well put in *The Dhammapada* itself: "Find friends who love the truth" and "Unbolt the doors of sleep/ And awake."

John Loudon

PROFILES

William Corcoran Burke, Jr. grew up in the Midwest and now works as an editor and writer in New York.

William G. Doty is currently at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, teaching religion and classics. He co-edited *Myths, Rites, Symbols: A Mircea Eliade Reader.*

Conrad Hyers teaches comparative mythology and history of religions at Beloit College, Wisconsin. His book *Zen and the Comic Spirit* interprets Zen through the symbolism of its humor, laughter, and "clowning." His current book-project is *The Mythology of Comedy*, which examines the figures of the clown, the fool, and comic hero, and shows the parallels between religious and comic themes.

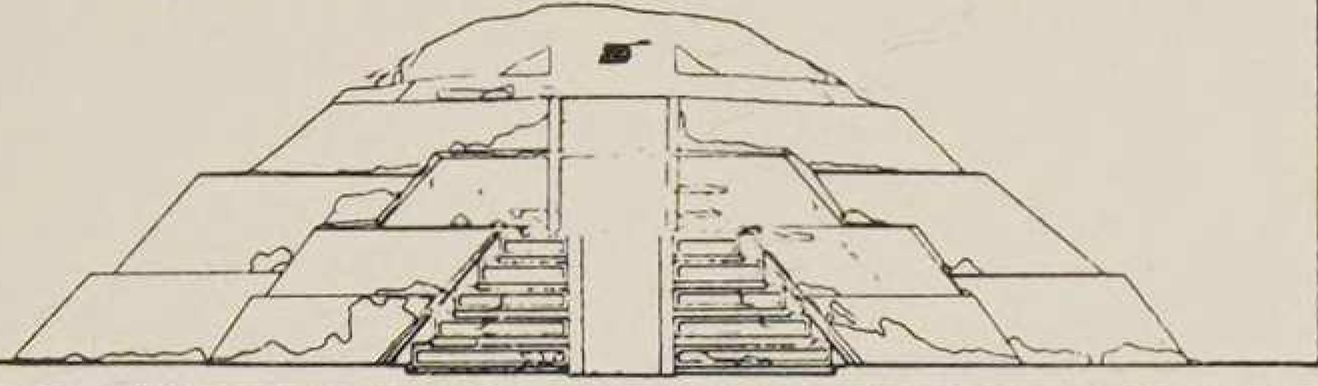
Howard Schwartz teaches writing and Jewish literature at the University of Missouri, St. Louis. He is the author of a forthcoming book of poems *Vessels* (Unicorn Press, 1977), and of three books of short prose. He also edited the anthology *Imperial Messages: One Hundred Modern Parables*, reviewed in this issue.

Isaac Bashevis Singer is a master of Jewish lore and legends who is himself something of a legend. His unique storytelling is featured in publications like *The New Yorker* and *Partisan Review*, and his books, both for children and for adults, are highly acclaimed and widely read. Born in Poland in 1904, he emigrated to the U.S. in 1935 and has been acknowledged as the most brilliant contemporary exponent of Yiddish prose. His work began appearing in English in the 1950s and includes such books as *The Spinoza of Market Street, Gimpel the Fool,* and *Satan in Goray.*

Brother David Steindl-Rast was born in Austria and has a Ph.D. in experimental psychology from the University of Vienna. Now an American Benedictine monk, he heads a small monastic community on an island off the coast of Maine. He has been very active in building bridges between different spiritual and religious traditions, and personally spent several years in Zen training. He has contributed to many symposia and anthologies, most recently *Earth's Answer: Exploring Planetary Culture at the Lindisfarne Conferences.*

P.L. Travers has just become the first "children's writer," as she sometimes likes to describe herself, to be awarded the Order of the British Empire. Before dashing home to England to meet the Queen, she completed a most successful whirlwind lecture tour here in the U.S., nonstopping at such places as the Cathedral of St. John the Divine and the C.G. Jung Foundation in New York.

Do the riddles of the ruins hide the geometry of the cosmos?



Deep in the jungles of Mexico and Central America loom the eerily beautiful remains of an ancient civilization —the majestic pyramids of Mesoamerica. Uxmal, Palenque, Copan, Chichen Itza, Tulum, and Teotihuacan's Pyramids of the Moon and the Sun—these, and hundreds of other strange, earth-encrusted structures have been a source of wonder to explorers, scientists, historians, and tourists for centuries.

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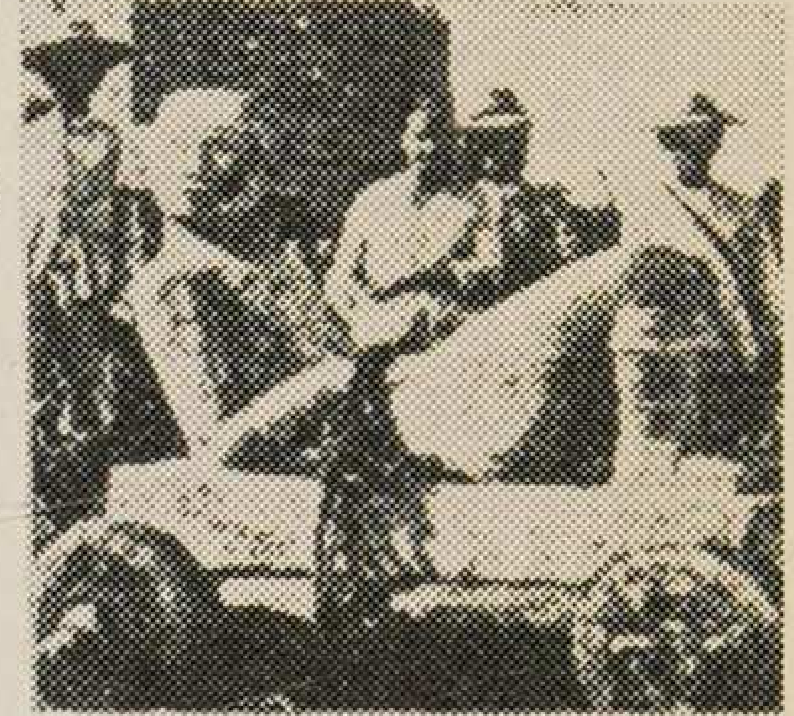

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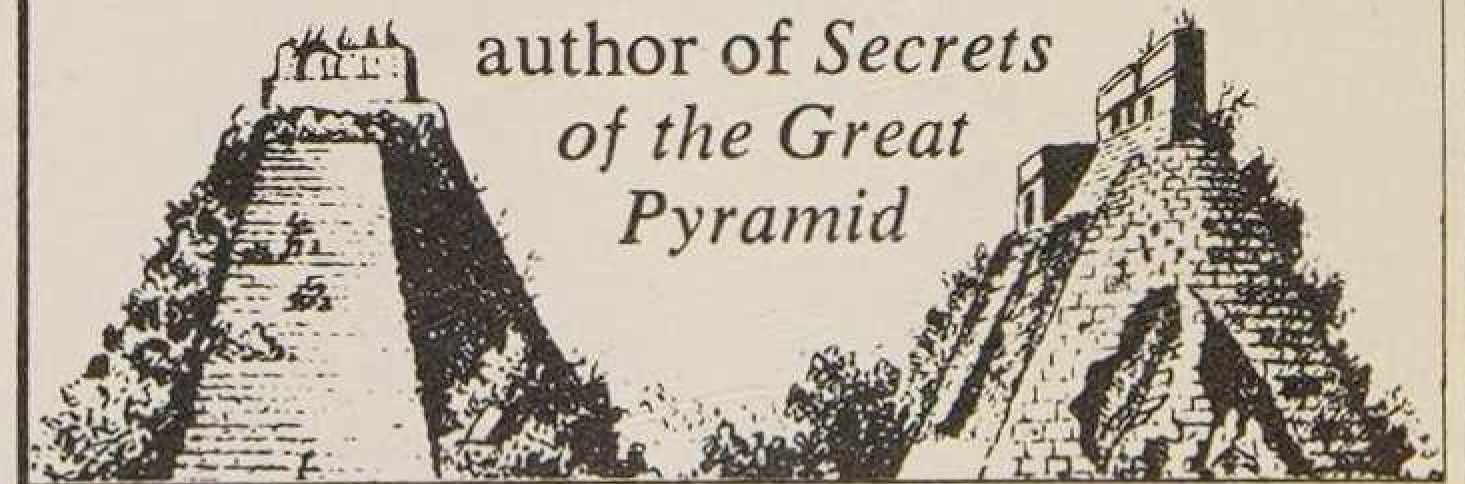

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