

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNION INSTITUTE  
440 EAST MCMILLAN STREET  
CINCINNATI, OHIO 45206-1947

THIS DISSERTATION HAS BEEN WRITTEN TO SATISFY THE  
REQUIREMENTS OF MY PROJECT DEMONSTRATING EXCELLENCE

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## SOPHIA: EXILE AND RETURN

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor  
of Interdisciplinary Humanities with a Specialization in Philosophy

October 12, 1997

*Sophia: Exile and Return*

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# INTRODUCTION

This is a portrait of a phenomenon that is at once embedded in the raw stuff of life-- death, fate, groups, violence, body, sex--yet elusive and mysterious as the unseen object of the longing of the soul. I named it Sophia--or rather, she named herself in and through my experience as it deepened.

Following my husband's death, a number of synchronistic events arose in conjunction with trying to fathom this tragic web of circumstance. The more I poked around, the more I was helped by myths, stories, symbols that pointed to a reality beyond consensus reality. I found that while many people are helped by religion, it is possible to get help from the very circumstances in your life: they become sources of information, requiring only a slight shift of attention or interest. In fact, it is the delivery of information by events, via one's emotions, interest, or repulsion, that formulates itself into a different kind of knowledge, evoking the figure of Sophia. This knowledge is available to each person who is open to the possibility that their life is much much more than cultural conditioning would have us believe.

My world collapsed when my husband Paul at the age of 32 died in an explosion and fire. I felt abandoned by even my way of life--a way of life that acknowledged soul through daily meditation and ongoing classes at his father's spiritual philosophy center. This philosophy center could not provide the container that I needed for my grief and confusion, for the relentless urgency to understand. So here I was, a wife, a mother, a spiritual seeker typical of millions in my generation, studying and meditating, thinking that I was living a non-collective, soul-saturated life. I was suddenly catapulted out of this illusion.

Within 24 hours of Paul's death, I was sitting alone in a relative's cottage in a stupor. An image appeared in my imagination. It was a boat speeding through the water. Following it was a huge wake. A message arose that the boat was his father, Anthony, a

philosopher and teacher whose spiritual genius had been noticed by his friend and advisor, the Dalai Lama. Another message drifted into my mind and settled there: it was Anthony's "wake" that killed Paul. (I think of such messages as being like dream motifs: some images can convey meanings that point out what the conscious mind misses.) Anthony being a yogi--one who intensifies his consciousness to a great degree, much more so than us ordinary folk--his "boat" or psychic energy would be travelling faster than other people's. The wake is an unintended effect generated by the power of good intentions and yogic discipline.

Although to this day, more than ten years later, I do not fully understand the meaning of these messages, the effect of them (what Jung would call active imagination) was profound. It gave me a life raft. My future, my identity, my belief system, my entire way of life, slowly dissolved with Paul's passing. I was being swallowed by the abyss that had yawned beside me during the nine days of unspeakable, agonizing horror that he had to endure following the fire, in which he sustained 95% third degree burns.

While some people might say that such messages were the intellect's way of compensating for a meaningless tragedy, I would say the reverse--that the refusal to allow for meaning or interior guidance is itself an intellectual construction, one which demarcates self-constructed boundaries over what life should include and what it should reject. That such a message might indeed be a compensation for my own incapacity to entertain the notion of brute chance--a "random accident" that statistically will happen to a few people (as several relatives assured me)--did occur to me. I felt that it was important--maybe not to me, maybe it was for the sake of my dead Paul--to find out why he died. On the other hand, there are limits to the human capacity to see clearly into the soul's reasons, to see what is veiled from ordinary human understanding, despite the claims of mediums, channelers, and visionaries. That is not to disclaim their experience of other dimensions, but rather that interpretation of that experience remains dependent upon their level of understanding, their cultural conditioning, and their belief system. I felt that either to believe the message uncritically or to capitulate to consensus reality was to shut down the very real living quality of my need to understand more of the complexity of life than I currently was able to.

I think now that most of me was pulled into Hades, into the abyss, with Paul. The life raft that kept me afloat was constructed of these messages that arose spontaneously and those that came from reading about myths and stories that resonated with my feeling of being abandoned, of being exiled from every satisfaction, comfort, and love that most people seemed to enjoy.

Rather than just believe the message that came up that day following Paul's death--even though it did carry with it a calm certainty--I decided to check it out, to investigate it and to find someone to talk to about it. Looking back, I think this was healthy, to retain both the doubt and belief in its reality at the same time. The message was like a little beacon of light in the abyss: it simply spoke, but what it was saying was beyond my capacity to understand.

I went to New York City to the Jung Institute Library where the most remarkable librarian, Doris Albrecht, took all of five minutes to find an article when I asked her where I could find information on the meaning of wakes. This article (Schwartz et al, "On the Coupling of Psychic Entropy and Negentropy") was a psychological analysis of wakes as entropy.

Thus began my underworld journey. It began with an urgent need to see the forces that erupted in my husband's death, forces that unfolded as this drama in which I was the actor as well as the audience, with my past issues and interpretations the script.

I stayed in our home one year, unable to sleep at night, feeling the lurid horror surrounding our home. Inundated by synchronistic events and images but unable to decipher their deeper scheme or meaning, I despaired of making sense of it there. One day, quickly, I decided to leave. I took my two little boys, aged three and four, rented the house, and moved to Virginia to be near my mother.

A number of vivid dreams punctuated decisive turning points that led me to return to graduate school. Everywhere I turned in an effort to heal, to not let myself become consumed and obsessed by the necessity to understand the daemonic terror that had devoured Paul and destroyed our lives, I confronted fire. I entered a graduate program in Humanities with a specialization in Jungian thought. Everything I studied in the graduate program brought up images, information, and synchronistic events that led me deeper and

deeper into the mystery of fire and its relation to the vital spark within the person, equivalent to and source of, according to the Greeks, genius and sexuality. The fire path pointed to a knowledge rooted in life and guarded by the dragon--the image of inertia, collective opinion that holds in its claws the radiant jewel of human vitality.

I received the M.A. in Humanities with a certificate in Jung Studies in 1991, from Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia. My thesis was entitled, "'But Where Shall Understanding Be Found?' Searching for Sophia, Personified Wisdom." Doing the research was the high point of my life: all the "otherness" of being woman in the misogynist world of philosophy and theology, of feeling inferior and marginalized, gradually went away, as the redistribution of power began to circulate. There were reasons why the feminine was so threatening to these desiccated male theologians! Everything turned around, as it dawned on me that what was truly worthwhile would never be welcomed by the status quo. Dogma and agendas are inimical to wisdom.

## WHY SOPHIA?

When I first heard about Sophia, she meant little or nothing. I was not moved to investigate her. I was in graduate school and taking a philosophy course on nineteenth-century philosophers. I had to do a term paper on any thinker covered that semester. With great reluctance and inertia I plodded to the library to gather material on Kierkegaard. I got to the section and tried to overcome waves of nausea and fatigue. I had to leave and went to the reference section. I decided to put off the assignment until the next day. I relaxed and began to poke around the Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible. I was randomly thumbing through, stopped and read the entry under "abzu" (the deep): here was the abode of Wisdom and Ea, father of arts and creativity. All of a sudden, lots of connections were instantly made: Sophia was wisdom; abzu was the unconscious; and Sophia was related to the source of creative inspiration, poetry and art. Wisdom and creativity paired! I changed the topic of my paper: never mind Kierkegaard, I'd do

Nietzsche's question "What if Truth was a woman?"--truth being Sophia, personified wisdom. Her abode, abzu would correspond to Nietzsche's Dionysian realm.

The emotional part of this experience--the reason why it pulled me into it--I think was because not only were creativity and inspiration interesting but their association with the feminine Sophia drew me right into my inferiority about being a woman. Here was a place (the abzu quote) that associated all these things inside: my desire for understanding personified as this feminine deity Sophia, my attraction to the unconscious, to creativity. I copied the quote, went home, spent the next two weeks on the paper. The energy was abundant; I was "in the flow."

What I discovered while doing the research on Sophia was this: all the feelings I had had all my life of being different, of not fitting in anywhere, of an inability to fit into groups, of the humiliation from hearing the cultural message of woman's inferiority and stupidity, all of these feelings were stirred up into consciousness. The ejection from my lifestyle following Paul's death was not so unfamiliar, after all. What the history of Sophia revealed was that she herself was exiled, pushed out, was neutered or masculinized by theologians. The feeling of not being alone anymore, that out here in the trash bin was such a powerful, feminine presence was intriguing. Imperceptibly, a shift began to happen in my own soul. I began to realize that the forces of exclusion and oppression were the same ones that banished Sophia from the mainstream. I was in good company in exile!

The path through Hades led me into the academic world, but what I found in the research led me into mythology and symbols. It is this back and forth from personal experience to study, from myth and symbol to the struggle to understand, that carved a "twisting circuit of Sophia" through my life. Here's an example: Our entire Western civilization is based upon Homer's story of the battle of Troy. Throughout history, from Alexander the Great to Napoleon, generals and scholars and ordinary people have visited Troy and sung eloquently about the heroism and battles that gave birth in Homer's epic poems to our Western consciousness. But what few people notice (except mythologists and archetypal psychologists) is that the ten-year battle fought over Helen originated in a beauty contest between the goddesses Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite. Helen's mother was

Nemesis, a nymph who was raped and wreaked her vengeance by the ensuing madness and war. The point is this: from kings to professors, attention is paid to the narrative literature, to the battles, to the supposedly historical events but very little serious attention is paid to the mythological component of the story, which is certainly the foundation, the very source of the historical part. Why isn't the metaphorical-mythical-poetic given the same serious consideration as the battles? Sophia is the trail that connects our attention to what is left out of the academic, military, or political agenda. She represents, or evokes in us, the memory of what is forgotten or abandoned in order that understanding can begin to MOVE, to circulate. This movement is a kind of tension between what is known and what is unknown. The "what" that is unknown is not a specific content that someday will be known, but rather unknown in the sense of the power of fate, the mystery of time, the abyss of death and non-being, the sense of the sacred and divinity.

Figures and myths that are the legacy of centuries of devoted focus have a pull of their own that may draw us to them in a way that contains our life in some way; they may even speak directly--meaning that they deliver a meaning that is highly personal. Myth is the expression of the soul's journey of self-knowledge. What that means to me is this: something is going on here--our life--that is above ground and visible and also below ground, invisible. Our life is like a tree: we can see the branches but not the roots. The ground we stand on is our perspective, but it cuts the tree in two, so to speak. What is visible and shared about our common experience above ground is verbal, capable of conceptualization. What is below ground--the emotional stuff, the instincts, the spiritual forces or ends, fate--we could say is out of range, invisible, and not easily verbalized. Myth seems to tell a story about how the visible and the invisible parts relate to each other. Myth is able to contain the contradictions inherent in living.

The reason why myths are worthwhile guides as well as fun to hear is because they tell us something about our own life. The story is vaguely familiar. The feeling of having made the same mistake, of stumbling in confusion, of being lost and abandoned and redeemed is deeply reminiscent of something that feels distant but familiar. The feeling of searching for this familiarity, to feel it grow stronger, to ask it questions, to live

with the questions until they express themselves in you--this is an adventure; like meeting lost cousins and finding about the rest of the family you didn't know you had.

Myth expresses the multi-level, multi-dimensional complexity that life is. As such, a story like Demeter and Persephone can simultaneously speak about the relations between actual men and women, mothers and daughters, the individual and her embodied soul, the seasonal rhythm of death and rebirth of vegetation, or even the evolutionary introduction of sex and death through the male, as some biologists interpret it.

Personifications such as Sophia can exert a powerful force of attraction upon us. People dream about Sophia before ever hearing about her. Many years ago I met a woman writer who dreamed about a large powerful opera singer singing outdoors in a thunderstorm who said her name was Sophia. At the time of the dream, she had no idea about the historical or spiritual Sophia.

I just met a woman who legally changed her name from Brenda to Sophia without knowing its significance. She had recently found her own voice, her passion, and her mission in the world regarding her work with grief and death therapy. Another young woman had a profoundly moving dream of Lilith as a wounded tiger that changed her life. Marion Woodman, in her book Dancing in the Flames, recounts numerous dreams of clients about dark powerful female figures who instruct, guide, and teach the dreamer. A friend of mine has had several dreams of a large African-American shamaness figure who gives him healing treatments along with cryptic messages.

This portrait of Sophia is about a pattern that helped me make sense of the darker side of life. Over the years, traces of Sophia appeared--in the residue of abandoned relationships, in the dark web of groups and their scapegoats, in the dismantling of my most cherished beliefs about soul and transformation--Sophia was there, in exile. I think that Sophia can be a worthy guide, an image that shifts our attention so that we can see our own life and relationships as a path of knowledge. Such a path does not necessitate the use of therapy, does not require advanced degrees to understand. Her guidance, in fact, is most visible when the contortions of social acceptance and rejection are questioned and held accountable.

I used to think Sophia said it all, that Sophia was the missing half of the Judaeo-Christian God, or maybe even the real God, as in the missing God--that finally here was a divinity that expressed everything the other God was lacking: immanence, relatedness, humane qualities. For me, Sophia recalled the passion and vital that does not turn away from life but rather is life's power--not just to grow and reproduce but to turn back on itself as joyful witness. Sophia represents the freedom-to-be without rules, to balance--even overthrow--the tyranny of the jealous, angry, vengeful father figure.

Now, however, as the circulation of Sophia loosens the bonds of belief, as the questions of clever, thoughtful people ask me, "why divine"--as my thought structures crumble in a steady succession of dismantlings--I have been forced to realize that if Sophia is anything, she demands to remain undefined or else reveals a succession of deeper and deeper meanings. She is almost the personification of the refusal to become an abstraction or dogma. That does not mean, however, that we cannot discuss her, attempt to understand. If she is anything, she is the guide and protector of the human impulse to understand. She has to do with irreconcilable dualities: life and death, knowledge and the unknown, order and irregularity, significance and meaninglessness.

Sophia is an image produced by the psyche to account for both the transcendent and utterly empty, impenetrable aspects of life. It is unbearable to live in the latter, in a state of nihilistic doom. If we choose to inhabit the former, however, we live in a euphoric state of "make your own reality" nonsense: a one-sided trip into solipsism and self-centeredness that will crack under the first encounter with brute indifference. Sophia appears to be the turning, twisting path of tension between the two: a journey which requires our attention, which quickens our emotions, our resistance and our passion to be crucified, penetrated, carved, molded, branded--maybe even fertilized--by life, according to a deeper, perhaps even cosmic design. This book is about identifying the design, the pattern according to which we are stripped, stretched, and made ready for something yet to come--or something out of a past we cannot fathom or recover.

Sophia may be the "highest" or deepest level of soul (psyche) in its role or function as mediator of "other realms" (what Jung would call the collective unconscious); however where Jung claims Sophia personifies the most spiritual expression of the male anima, I claim that Sophia's light and dark faces are the image of the "boundary" between what is accepted and what is rejected.

Often Sophia is mystically perceived by saints and alchemists as a glorious (no-doubt blond) radiant divinity; however, every archetype has its dark side. The archetypes are never one-sided but contain the opposites, light and dark, good and evil. Sophia, too, has a dark face. Understanding Sophia's dark face helps us to make sense of many of the evils that afflict us. Jung writes about Sophia's shadow side:

. . . From the proper name Sophia are derived the names of saints, among them the so-called "Wicked Sophie." . . . Wicked Sophie can probably be connected with the witch-hunts, for the inclemency of the weather was frequently attributed to witches. Sophia cannot be brought together with Eve, since Eve has nothing to do with magic, but she probably can with Adam's first wife, Lilith. . . . since such figures always have a shadow, Sophia has one too. This shadow would be perversion of the divine into the dark and magical. Naturally this is the witch, or the arch-sorceress Hecate, who, three-headed and three-bodied, represents the lower equivalent of the Trinity (psychologically, the lower function triad). (Jung 1973 (Letters, vol. 1 (5/20/47)), 462)

Sophia is light and dark. The dark is not transformed into the light. The light is not superior to the dark. There is no inferior or superior. There is simply one phenomenon--thought--viewed from two different perspectives. Fear of what lies outside the boundaries is cast off by the psyche, disowned and projected onto Other. When thought is frozen or coagulated into a belief about reality, such that parts of life are excluded and demonized, this rigidification hardens into an image--of itself. This image of hardness and division is Hecate. She faces three directions; there is a split into us, them, and the wall that separates the two. Once thought is examined, one can manipulate it, step aside, and not be caught in the trap of "either-or." This release from one-sided literal frozen thought, is experienced as movement, as circulation, and then Sophia in her cosmic, liberating mode is felt to be present. The entrapment, the separation and division,

was mythologized in antiquity and celebrated in the Mysteries at Eleusis. The separation and reunion of Demeter and her daughter Persephone was dramatized annually for over 2,000 years in Greece, and will be examined in Part III (in chapter 7) as revealing the essential seed of the Sophianic rebirth.

## THE THEME OF EXILE: GLYPHS AND DEFINITIONS

It has been extremely difficult for me to put these thoughts and interpretations about Sophia before public scrutiny. I am not writing as a scholar, visionary, mystic, victim, psychic healer or channeler. I do not write from within a tradition, but rather from the context of a life. I went through experiences that happen to many people, a few were horribly tragic. The context of these events and relationships conveyed information to me that turned the senseless misery of the tragic elements into the means by which an extraordinary new world unfolded. This new world made apparent a form of knowledge, unlike anything the world considers to be knowledge in the conventional sense. The switching of perspective altered me in ways I never imagined could happen. I realized that life itself is a text, that can be read. When I read this text, when I trust it to guide me, I regain a vision of the world that approximates the raw clarity of my childhood--but with the protection of age and experience.

There are a few themes in this book that ought to be laid out now to help the reader identify the trail of Sophia, personified wisdom. First, the book is organized around the theme of exile. Exile means to be forced into leaving your own community. My central theme is that the path of inquiry--the search for wisdom--is something beneficial to individuals and society. Wisdom's rightful place is here, in this world of everyday human interaction and between ourselves and nature. Yet, we do not live in a world that values the search for wisdom. Wisdom is exiled from the everyday world. There was, however, a time when wisdom was considered to be the highest virtue, the prerogative of monarchs. Wisdom was valued and thought to be necessary in business transactions and political affairs. With the coming of Christianity, wisdom left the

Western world. The loving verses about Sophia grew silent. No longer did rulers employ sages to instruct them in the art of ruling wisely. Sophia reappeared in the esoteric underbelly of the major religions, in the mystical visions of saints, mystics, and visionaries.

The three parts of this book develop the theme of exile: (1) The historical exile of Sophia and the consequences for the world; (2) the exile we suffer individually as a result of racism, grief or personal loss, disillusionment and withdrawal from groups, etc.; (3) and the return from exile as it is accomplished by the individual speaking from the place of conscience (the daemon or genius): we effect the return of Sophia--wisdom--to history, individually, person to person, by expressing our truth--the voice of experience and integrity, circulating the value of our own unique experience.

The purpose of this book is to simply point out some features of the land of exile that are probably not apparent unless someone points them out. My husband and a few friends pointed them out to me. My intent is also to suggest some techniques for handling the raw power that is unleashed on this path. I wish that someone had alerted me about the dangers, pitfalls, rest stops, and tricks of this particular route of inquiry. But then again, Sophia's way is through error--it is a kind of backwards path that reverses all the conventional ways of looking at experience. Just as every "good" has an underbelly, so too does every error. Our trail of errors leaves a residue from which we gain knowledge of how to live. For who else is the "Mother of Exiles" but Sophia, whom Caitlin Matthews so eloquently identifies as "Mistress of the Marginalized"? (from Caitlin Matthews' address at the August 1996 Sophia Conference, Litchfield, CT)

Following is a brief summary of definitions, and the central themes and issues.

## SOPHIA

Sophia is the Greek word for wisdom. Sophia was personified in the ancient Near East and symbolized integrity, honesty, and clear perception. She appear in the Old Testament, was equated with Jesus, and then was deleted from mainstream religion. My interpretation is that Sophia refers to an image produced by psyche that arises when we

adopt a certain attitude towards the unknown. This is an attitude of friendliness and concern and openness. Sophia personifies the bridge between the known and the unknown. She releases us from slavery to living only in the known.

### GNOSIS

The famous quote by William Blake about the eyes of "Single Vision and Newton's Sleep" refers to a stubborn refusal to accept the fact that life is more than literal; that it is also metaphorical, of the stuff of images--and that these are important and real sources of knowledge about reality. If we take as literal truth, the existence of a male god, for instance, without including the possibility of its reality as metaphor, then we live inside our abstractions, in "single vision." This is an attitude that tends to set up as Truth an intellectual abstraction or belief at the expense of our changing, evolving humanity and living relationships. Jung often noted that humanity has forgotten how to think symbolically. The imagination is a valid way of gaining knowledge about reality. This is gnosis, "a way of knowing won through total relationship, not conceptual knowledge 'about' something when the knower is not implicated in the known." (Baring and Cashford 1991, 678)

### FRIENDSHIP

We find our way through friendship rather than dependence on authority. It is friendship rather than consensus; friendship--not identity and union--is the attitude necessary for this journey. Friendship is loving someone without the desire to possess but to understand, to reach all the way into that person. We want to know why she does what she does. We are worried when a friend lets herself get punched around by an abusive lover. We will not tolerate that. But we know better than to impose our beliefs on our friend. On the other hand, with a friend we are not afraid to stand up for what we think, because there is mutual trust. We can argue and question and examine something. It is probably only in authentic friendship that we can whisper our deepest fears and longings,

and confide what we really and truly feel about a person or situation without being accused of pettiness or disloyalty.

Friendship is a major theme in this book: it was through friends and not through an authority figure--in text or in person, in dogma or in ashram--that I became aware that the place of exile had value. Friendliness rather than unity implies the maintenance of distance. I do not want to marry my friends. Friendliness requires both relationship and separateness. An attitude of friendliness in the world, with nature, to other people allows for difference to be displayed and witnessed. I think that even our pettiness, our egotism, can be treated in a friendly manner rather than trashed; in fact, that this is the best way to keep our selfish traits out in the open.

#### WHAT IS THE "KNOWN"?

The "known" world is the prevailing world view, consensus reality. Ordinary day to day human interaction can occur because everyone buys into the same interpretation of reality. What is known is fine; it provides order and stability. When that is taken to be all there is, however, then it can become rigid and interfere with growth and understanding. Here are some terms used at times interchangeably with "the known," depending upon the context: consensus reality, world view, cultural (or social) conditioning, collective opinion, intellect (as opposed to life, experience or the vital force), meme, the box, the agenda, the status quo, current paradigm, belief system, dogma, trap, system.

#### RIGOR MORTIS

When a system becomes more important than the humans it was designed to serve, then a kind of death prevails. Creativity, independent thinking, and questioning authority are interpreted as threatening and punished. When a system has become so dehumanized, I call it a state of rigor mortis.

#### WHAT IS THE "UNKNOWN"?

The "unknown" is a term applied to the mystery of life that surrounds us. When we look up at the heavens, at the firmament of infinity, the stars, planets, space; that is mystery. But our own lives are permeated with mystery also: how our body can assimilate food and make it energy; what happens at death; is there an afterlife, if so where do we go; what makes a seed grow; what is the magic of love; if a god made the world, who made the god? I will sometimes use the word Mystery, sometimes the phrase "vital force", Life, or Nature as the life not captured by abstraction.

#### THE VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

I will use the word experience to designate a quality of knowing that comes from a different source than intellectual knowledge. Intellectual knowledge concerns itself with the acquisition of information and concepts, their storage and manipulation. Experience, on the other hand, is a kind of residue of life that has been lived that gives us very different knowledge than that of concepts and information delivered in textbooks and on the TV and internet. Experience belongs to the body: been there, done that, know better now.

A lot of the observations I make in this book are the direct result of my experience. I do not think that intellectual knowledge is bad or less than experience. One informs the other. To use the friendship model, I would say that there has to be RELATIONSHIP between them: we have to test experience, we need to give an account of it to see whether it aligns itself with something true or false, healthy or dysfunctional. I have tried to do this here; so this book is a result of going back and forth between research and experience.

Sometimes I will use the word "heart" or "vital" in place of "experience."

#### VITAL

I use the word vital to refer to the part of soul closest to body. It is what bubbles and boils in us, that animates our projects and hopes. It moves--yet it can get stuck. It partially gives itself to thought constructs and yet remains outside of that thought construct. It is

that part of us that gets caught in the dragon, it is the jewel that the dragon holds. The vital is the part of soul that gets caught up in life, that must be rescued, that was the focus of the Mysteries at Eleusis. We experience it in two places--caught by the dragon, dragged into Hades--and yet, it is also that which is calling from the other side, the part of us that knows that something is missing, gone, and in need of rescue. The vital is the potential "wholeness" of soul in the sense of the source of our individuality and unique experience.

### THE HOLE IN WHOLENESS

We think of wholeness as being complete, as recovering parts of ourselves so that we act in accordance with a "center" or from greater depth than the persona. Wholeness, the way Jung described it, is rather a "hole" than the perfection or static quality implied by the term "wholeness". The "fourth function" for Jung was the "hole" through which contents of the unconscious could enter and fertilize the conscious personality. One never could socialize or perfect the fourth function, and this was fortunate, for the primitive quality of this hole insured that we never could remain rigid and stale for long. The "hole" is preferable to "whole" because it reminds us that no matter how much "truth" or attainment we suppose we have achieved, that there is this little leak in the armor through which attention can leap into relationship with mystery, with the unknown, with the human Other.

### METHODOLOGY: PATH OF CRUMBS:

The path of crumbs refers to a process of acquiring gnosis from what is easily overlooked and also to what other people consider worthless trash. When I say that "life is a text" that can be read, what I mean is that often, there are very small, hardly noticeable trace events, feelings, or thoughts that simmer underneath or outside of the agenda of ego or institution. It is possible to get in the habit of turning to these, paying attention to them as treasures and clues to another world of knowledge and consciousness. Through reflection on them, a unique guidance enters one's life, instigating a very different adventure of

knowledge and being in the world. Sophia brings our attention not to where everyone else's is but to what is left out of a given agenda. In a description of Sophia as Shekhinah in Kabala, she is described as "so great that her body extended for millions of miles." Yet, she "is so tiny that her presence could be accommodated even in the ark of bulrushes that held Moses." (Baring and Cashford 1991, 640)

In the powerful speech of Sophia "The Thunder: Perfect Mind" she says of herself, "For I am the first and the last. I am the honored one and the scorned one. I am the whore and the holy one . . ." (See chapter 10 for more of this tractate.) Wisdom is found in the unnoticed underbelly of pain, sacrifice, and exclusion that is the foundation upon which culture and its institutions rest.

Baring and Cashford note in their book, The Myth of the Goddess, that it is not so easy to recover the myths and awaken their reality in our lives, after being suppressed for millennia. On the other hand, the power of the feminine was around for a lot longer (20,000 years) than the current tyranny of monotheistic oppression. These authors would agree that the person on a Sophianic path have to peer into dark corners, catching a whisper here, and a veiled clue there. The myth of feminine potency changes its mode of appearance, making it difficult to track down and impossible to simply summon at will:

. . . it (the myth) has to be sought, elicited, tracked in the shadowy underworld of subliminal image and symbolic implication; discerned in innuendo, pause, juxtaposition, contradiction; and persuaded to re-emerge in the gaps between what we call rational thinking. (Baring and Cashford 1991, 664)

The significance of what is rejected can be noticed in this example of Sophia's path of crumbs: there is a farm in upstate New York (Farm Sanctuary) that rescues pigs, calves, turkeys (and laboratory animals) that were injured or became ill during transport and so could not pass inspection to be slaughtered. Even though these young animals are not dead, they are thrown on the pile of corpses and left to suffer and rot in the hot sun while still alive. In ordinary Western life, this brutal underbelly of the meat industry is almost completely erased from consciousness. What we see instead is cut up meat in nice packages. Unless you work in the slaughter industry, you would not normally see this

inferno of pain, blood, fear and suffering of the animals. This is the underworld that lies beneath our unconscious habit of meat-eating. The path of crumbs is the awakening to awareness of what most people refuse to look at--what the world despises and trashes. This farm is a sophianic enterprise, for it "speaks from the trash heap," educating people about the "other side" of a taken-for-granted cultural habit.

Animals, the forests, the ocean, air, and rivers have become de-natured "things"--objects to be exploited and consumed and polluted for greed. Human beings, of course, are trashed as well. The crumbs on this path refer not just to the barely-noticed, but to residue, to what is left behind or considered useless--what the powerful consider trash.

Jung felt himself to be an outsider. He knew this fact and built his entire philosophy of the shadow around it. He was often criticized for disturbing traditional science with inclusive methods that spilled over into other fields of thought. (Conger 1988, 18)

He paid attention to his feelings and instead of dismissing them, he listened to the information conveyed by his discomfort and the images that arose in his imagination. The vision which was decisive in directing his life and work towards recognition of the shadow happened when he was 11 years old. He was obsessed with a vision of God on a throne above the Basel cathedral. Something else was trying to get through, and he tried in vain to suppress it. Finally, after days of anguish, he let his mind deliver the entire vision: a huge turd dropped from the throne and fell upon the cathedral, destroying it. He experienced no guilt, but rather a sense of grace and release. (Conger 1988, 83)

This tendency to reach for or even identify with what is outside, with what is despised, to include it rather than demarcate and exclude, is Sophia's presence. If there is an evolutionary consciousness, what we do not know is not lying in the future waiting for us. Our future consciousness, according to this path, is what is dismissed or exiled from the present status quo.

### GLYPH OF SOPHIA

This is a horizontal 8, the image of which appeared to me one day having lunch when I was searching for a thesis topic many years ago. In the left circle was the word "philo"

and in the right circle was "sophia." Later, I discovered that this was the symbol of infinity and resembled the computer image of chaos. The glyph looks like owl eyes and was found on the most ancient statues of Athena, goddess of wisdom. Owls are associated with Sophia's dark faces, Hecate and Lilith. (See Figure 1.)

### CIRCUIT OF SOPHIA

This refers to Sophia's path. What I noticed was that a genuine path of knowledge opened up when I began to take seriously what other people on a "spiritual path" labeled as "negative." As I began to include what others considered trash, a movement or shift in consciousness occurred which exposed the underbelly, so to speak, of the "known" world, the agenda. In conventional spirituality, emphasis is on the inner world. Through meditation and prayer, one opens up to mystical union with the soul. If one believes in God, there is a sense of a vertical path: one goes upward to God and dives within to the deepest recesses of the soul. Sophia's circuit is not opposed to this but rather complementary. Sophia--at least the aspect that appeared to me--led outwards to other people. This leading out precipitates a crisis of encounter. I bump right up against the wall of silence, the buffer zone that protects the status quo. Speaking from the heart, from experience, from the place of integrity is a form of magic: it ACTS UPON the present moment. Whatever constellation of attitudes is present, when a person speaks from the heart, that constellation begins to disperse.

This horizontal complementary path as completes the vertical path which likes to leave the immanent and go off to the transcendent. Sophia's path is immanent and is focused on a return of integrity to the marketplace, to the streets, to the interaction between women and men in groups, in relationships. The horizontal path and vertical path combined is expressed by the world symbol. (See Figure 2.)

William Irwin Thompson describes myth as "always the relationship between the known and the unknown." (Thompson 1989, 74) If this is accurate, then Sophia is the circuit of creation and dissolution of the boundaries between the known and unknown; she governs and guides the transition between knowledge and mystery. Myth is the expression of this movement.

Sometimes I will use the word path or journey because it suggests that there is both a destination or telos as well as a pattern to follow through a thicket of ambiguity. The word circuit is a more general term that reminds us that there is reversal, a going back to remember and recall; a circulation as well as growth (seed to tree idea) and transformation. This reversal goes along with the idea of relationship and friendship. I do not want to transform my friend into myself; I want to encounter that friend. The mystery and adventure of Sophia is in this middle ground of relationship: a new frontier, "where no one has gone before."

### THE IN-BETWEEN

This is a term borrowed from Martin Buber. I use it to refer to the middle realm that separates one person from another; that cuts off a person from society, from her family, her group, her religion or whatever it is that casts her out into exile. This in-between state is where Sophia comes alive; where her power is activated in ourselves and in the world. Sometimes I will use the term gap (as used by Maria Tillmans), middle realm, transition place, intermediary space or realm.

There is a distance between God and human, between body and soul, between person and nature, between subject and object. This distance is accounted for today in discussions about dualism and how to counteract the devastating consequences of these splits. We want to re-connect, but how? Under whose terms? This in-between is where the dimensions shift, where the 8th clime of Sophia, the alam-al mithal of Persian Sufism, becomes apparent. This space is the locus of the turning, in which the literal is seen through; in which literal and symbolic turn into each other and go apart, and never return to quite the same condition. The space in-between the Mystery that surrounds us and our tiny self has been mediated for thousands of years by dogma, church, priests and authority figures. The power that we have turned over to man-made mediators belongs to the individual and we need to take it back to restore health and happiness. Sophia is the only mediator. Sophia is the human psyche activated and turned towards the beloved: the Mystery that must remain unnamed. This Mystery is not a god, not a belief, not a tradition. It must lie outside all interpretation. It is utterly beyond the reach of intellect.

Sophia is the activity of psyche that intuits that all interpretation is limited and insufficient; that there is always something left out of every agenda, no matter how spiritual and light and divine it appears. She is the reminder, the memory, that the man-made mediation is artificial, what in Judaism is called worshipping a false idol. The belief, the interpretation of reality, is not the same as reality, whatever that might be. Our focus of attention, Sophia reminds us, ought to acknowledge or travel to distant, remote places--towards the unknown--not to permanently leave, but to travel back and forth across the great divide, the in-between the known and the unknown.

### LOGOS

The Sophia that touched my soul did not appear in heavenly visions but as a pattern. Logos means a kind of living pattern of connection. Because of its association with language, I will use it to mean the kind of speaking that shifts the worlds, that puts one into the "8th clime of Sophia." When there is no logos, the middle realm is a dangerous place full of traps and masks that are images thrown off from the "known" world, that of collective opinion. We can "do logos" in private or in groups or with other people, with the natural world, with our own past, with history, with family. Logos brings two worlds together, two worlds that are not opposites but rather like the known and unknown. The unknown is not an opposite because it cannot be grasped or qualified.

### DRAGON

The dragon is a rich and vivid symbol of energy found in the mythology of antiquity around the world. Some of its meanings include the magnetic energy of the earth, the personification of the astral plane, the wisdom of the earth, the instinctual forces of nature, the force of entropy, and the illusory belt of images around the earth. The dragon holds a precious jewel, representing soul. It is often pictured with wings and many eyes, and is associated with the serpent. It is interpreted in both positive and negative terms: In the East, the dragon is highly regarded; in the West, the dragon is fought and slain.

The dragon is collective opinion, the known when it is invested with a lot of emotion. The dragon is the field of the middle realm, the in between, when it is closed up and blocked by an interpretation of reality that has remained unchanged, unexamined, yet maintained and nourished by our emotional needs, fears, and attachment. The dragon is a cluster of conceptions that is alive because people believe in them. Occultists call these clusters "entities" or "elementals." Contemporary psychology calls them "memes."

My husband and I, when we first noticed the phenomenon of an emotionally-charged entity created by thought-forms, called it the dragon so I will continue to call it that here. The dragon personifies the inertia of a belief. It happens when an interpretation or belief hangs around too long. The dragon or interpretation is not evil or bad intrinsically. The danger to human health and well-being occurs when the dragon or cluster of conceptions is invested with emotion: fear, needs, desire, lust for power and control, etc. Then the dragon takes on a terrible form, seeking to devour the jewel of the vital soul which clings to it. The dragon becomes visible when a person begins a Sophianic journey.

It is the sight of this dragon that thrills the soul once it knows where the real battle is. The adventure begins with the sight of the beast and is the first whisper, first glance or touch of the soul with its source: for now you know what you are not. You are other than this dragon and it is following you. A new organ of vision, located within the body, is what sees the beast's contours. The organ of perception arises with the dragon. Is it the dragon that sees itself? The dragon is like a force field, a pressure that is exerted not from another individual but from a simultaneous appearance of emotion that can appear in an individual or all at once in a group situation. It is an uncomfortable feeling because you have a sense that the dragon is within you also, and speaks in the endless monotone of voices from internalized authority figures: you are no good; do not trust yourself; do not question; you will be doomed and damned; do not be negative; do not question authority; do not be disloyal to your group; and so on. The dragon is an ambivalent image: it is the field upon which one learns to use the forces that will restore Sophia to the world. It is also dangerous because it is both within you and outside you. You also become aware for the first time that exile might not be exile after all, but more like the home you never had

but long to return to. The world of consensus reality takes on a different cast: it looks more like a hell, a Hades of ghosts and death rather than a place any living creature would want to be. An example of the dragon would be a world view in which some people are dehumanized because of gender, sexual preference or race. If you have grown up in such a cluster of attitudes and then seriously question it to your friends or family that participate in this cluster, you will see their reaction turn from surprise to anger, rejection, expulsion. You realize that this entity is alive and connected to you--it comes after you; it does not want you to leave; it needs your vital interest, your attachment in order to survive.

#### SOPHIA'S OTHER FACE AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Sophia has another face. She is not only light and bright, goodness and love, but has a Kali aspect, called Hecate or Lilith in the Western tradition. This is the mask created by the boundary of the dragon. It is worn by those who are rejected from the prevailing interpretation, that cluster of conceptions invested with emotion. People do not want to fall into these masks. The masks are images of the exclusiveness of the box, created spontaneously by collective attachment to dogma or the status quo and perpetuated by fear. Here's an example: a gifted, educated African man visited France and was infected by the racism there. He found himself automatically shoplifting and committing small crimes. As soon as he left France, he stopped. Of course he is responsible for his actions, but the point is that the racism creates a picture or image of a black person being a thief, a lowlife, and these images exert a horrible pressure on the black minority. For example, if I am black, these images exert a terrible pull on my soul that scream at me from every white person: "This is who you are: no good, inferior." Racism and prejudice can be viewed as a kind of black magic in which the ethnic group is isolated and visualized as being a certain way. Sophia's path offers all people a technique, a road map, to avoid the deadly traps of these masks. How? Through understanding and clear perception of how some forms of evil originate from exclusion.

The fear invoked by a Hecate image (that of the cast-off ugly "hag") is due to our inability to cross the threshold of the "known," the world of collective opinion and social

conditioning. When Hecate is embraced or honored, we are granted safe passage in our voyage through the intermediary realm of the in-between. A woman may wear the Lilith image (of unbridled sexuality) for a fearful man when she is independent and demands equality. It is easy for an abandoned, neglected woman to become Lilith-like. She wants to destroy the man, his home and peace. She embodies the fear of every woman, deep-seated from thousands of years of suppression: being cast off from the tribe because independence in a woman is considered evil by the prevailing world view. Such a woman, if unconscious, seeks desperately to rejoin the tribe so her primary motivation is to quickly find another man, for that is her ticket back to acceptance in the dragon of cultural misogyny. If she examines her place "outside" the status quo, reads about Lilith, listens to the messages of her life, she may discover the wealth of personal power and knowing that comes from owning her exile. It is the acceptance and understanding of what is rejected that releases Sophia.

It is scary to leave the safety of the known for the indeterminacy and risk of voicing the vital. Sophia's path through the underbelly discovers that this risk, this journey, is a case of authentic wisdom. Images of the dark Sophia can assist the traveler in the experience of this path as an instance of genuine gnosis, one that not only includes the emotions but allows the body to recover its instinctual integrity.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The history of Sophia's exclusion from mainstream Christianity because she was problematical for theologians and did not "fit" into the exclusively male, monotheistic trend of Judaism and Christianity can be viewed as a model or archetype of the exile of the soul. Sophia appeared in the writings of the mystical poets and religious visionaries in traditions throughout the Near East. Yet, she was eventually excluded from mainstream theology, and therefore was not available to most of humanity for the last 2,000 years. She survived in the esoteric traditions of the main religions, and reappeared in the visions of mystics and poets throughout the darkest ages of repression of the eternal feminine.

What does this mean for the person who is seeking to understand relationships, who is trying to make sense of the crucifying contradictions in her life? It is Sophia's exclusion--her banishment to the back alleys of the world stage that is highly significant for the modern seeker. Sophia becomes the guide in exile. To those individuals who see what is going on--Sophia is the protector. She is the friend in exile--the exile that is sure to be inflicted on the person who refuses to shut out the contradictions and discrepancies that the rest of the world conspires to hide.

A little background: Sophia figured prominently in the wisdom literature of early Judaism, in the five wisdom books of the Bible. A great deal of effort was made by Paul and New Testament writers to identify Jesus with Sophia. Sophia personified in the writings of the ancient Near East an attitude toward knowledge that revealed its connection to integrity, character, and conscience. She spoke at the city gate, at the marketplace, indicating that wisdom was effective in politics and business dealings. Wisdom was sought in antiquity and highly valued: every king had a council of wise men who were sent off to other kingdoms, to India or Egypt to learn and bring back spiritual knowledge so that the king could rule wisely.

Sophia disappeared over the first centuries of the common era. Perhaps it was coincidental, but she left as a vivid figure from the writings of a culture when she became identified with a particular dogma or religious figure. Judaism equated her with Torah, she left. Christians identified her with Jesus, she left. In philosophy, Philo identified her with logos; she left. (There were also a number of events that further removed her from the potent image of integrity, such as the Roman invasion of Palestine in 50 C.E. which resulted in prohibitions against discussing wisdom in the "filthy streets.") I concluded that Sophia is a symbol produced by the psyche when a person relates consciously--with love and desire--to the unknown as a living presence. When the mystery of life is kept open and related to instead of being equated with doctrine or deity, then she was present in that tradition, as she was in early Judaism.

We have lived under the domination of a particular world view since Constantine made Christianity the state religion of the Roman empire. As Elaine Pagels analyzed in her book The Gnostic Gospels, there was a battle for dominion over the minds of

antiquity. The Gnostic gave priority to Christ as an inner event, that which made it possible for the individual to access divinity within the privacy of her own heart. But the view of Christ that prevailed, the only one most people are aware of, was one which focused on the historicity of Jesus, his suffering and crucifixion.

Furthermore, the interpretation that prevailed put God at the top and humanity and the earth, far below. God gives the keys of heaven to Jesus who gives it to Peter who in turn gives it to his chosen bishops who pass down the rules and keys to men below them who in turn hold the power over the people. This hierarchy has stood in the middle, barring the individual from access to divinity except as mediated by church rule.

Our institutions followed suit: to get healthy you turn to your therapist or physician who bars entry to the condition of health, holding the key to the drugs you need or the right therapy model, until you pay for it. If you want to get educated, you have to go through the intermediary of school, credentialed authorities, and obey their rules about what you need to learn and how you need to learn it. If you want religion, find a church and sign up and the minister and his dogma will open the gates of heaven. The price is your money and your soul.

In the story of Adam and Eve, Eden is described as a paradise. The price that must be paid to remain in this blessed--static--state is denial of the right of knowledge of good and evil. One must forfeit knowledge to keep the peace, to behave. To remain in Eden one must obey the rules and not ask questions. Not all people think that Eden is a worthy image of a goal to strive for. Maybe there's something deeply human about disobedience; and that disobedience--while getting us ejected from God's special garden--holds a prize even more worthwhile than its peace.

## BEGINNING THE SOPHIANIC JOURNEY

I suspect that at some level all of us are afraid of falling from grace, falling into the oblivion of exile where one has no identity, no home, no purpose, and no means of being understood. We fear the removal from the tribe and conduct ourselves in groups

according to unspoken rules of conformity, to distance ourselves from the imminent threat of expulsion. The terror this evokes is real, tangible, and operative in human groups, even in young children. It is experienced in businesses, churches, civic organizations, ashrams, convents, professional organizations, classrooms--wherever a group of humans interact.

Ever since I was a small child, I have sensed the uncanny power of the group. It was the horror of my husband's death that brought this phenomenon crashing into my spiritual house of cards, driving a spike through my heart, sundering me forever from the illusion of safety within any group, and initiating a quest to understand the black secret that no one wants to discuss.

Obsessed with the need to discern and grasp the meaning of the forces that erupted in explosion and fire, enshrouding Paul's death in horror and darkness, I began a quest to understand. I have come to a temporary and tentative conclusion that no spiritual journey is possible without taking into account the human dimension of group interaction and how it determines the outcome of spiritual practice for students as well as teachers: specific, highly determined behaviors constellate in relation to the authority accepted, be it secular or spiritual. There seem to be subtle yet predictable forces at work when people come together to pray, learn, meditate, trade, or heal. I suggest that it is essential to well-being and health that these subtle forces be recognized in order to prevent emotional disintegration into fear and scapegoating, tragedy, or death.

Who or what can guide us in this slippery task? The "American way" to solve a serious and chronic problem is to find a competent authority, pay the person for his or her skill and training, listen carefully and carry out the instructions. Or, we become a member of some organization or institution, obey its rules and authority structure, and so alleviate the distress. But what happens when the conventional solution becomes the problem? In other words, what happens when it is the institution or authority that is itself the problem? A situation arises that is unique and problematical in the history of humanity--yet paradoxically is found to be at the core of humanity's historical unrest with itself.

What became apparent to me as I sought for clues on my private journey, was that this issue--making an authoritarian structure the intermediary between self and whatever ideal one has (divinity, health, education, etc.)--has its roots deep, deep within the web of history and religious events of Western civilization. Furthermore, I discovered that an ordinary person like myself could find a suitable vessel to navigate the turbulent waters of the unknown in the quest for understanding issues having to do with life, suffering, spirituality, the search for meaning, and even death. For me, this vessel was the appearance of Sophia--not in the form of an ecstatic vision as so many mystics have seen her, but rather as a pattern, what the Chinese refer to as *li*--an underlying or foundational form or movement that indicates an order within Life with a capital L. This is not a man-made order, not order as we see in a mathematical formula, but an order that orders us, internal to the life we are living. The name Sophia became associated with a pattern, in these objectified images that came up in my mind's eye during ordinary moments, such as eating lunch.

I am suggesting that for any person who is suffering and chooses to understand rather than self-destruct in bitterness--that it is possible to walk the maze without recourse to a "system", a therapist, drugs, alcohol, or graduate school. (This is not to say one should forego therapy or outside help, if the situation is serious, but rather suggests an alternative to conventional "treatment" of life wounds. A person may consciously initiate one's own path through the labyrinth of circumstance and emotional upheaval.

This book is also an effort to point out the need for a monumental task of housecleaning the collective psyche of all the trash which has accumulated over the last two thousand years. I suggest that each person get a broom--the vigor of a clean, clear perception--and disengage from and then evaporate all the moldy dogmas and stale interpretations of reality. What was once original and vital--carrying the spirit of the times and the emotional vigor of an intelligence vitalized by the body's capacity to act quickly--becomes irrelevant if it is not newly examined and penetrated and impregnated by the vital spirit of the followers. This activity transmutes like alchemy both the followers and their institutions. The spirit of the times is calling us to clean house, get a life, become emotionally or vitally re-connected to our intelligence. That means saying

no to conventional religion, conventional schooling, conventional healing, conventional everything.

We have constructed giant boxes for ourselves: schools, hospitals, prisons, banks, businesses, therapy rooms, museums, and concert halls. We put the glory and passion of the creative soul into boxes. Maybe these boxes had an excellent reason for being built--to protect and preserve. But sooner or later, preservation must give way to transformation or else we suffer a premature rigor mortis. It is time to release the vital from our man-made cages that stifle our creativity. This will feel threatening to many people, because it reeks of chaos and noise. But as the beauty and science of the fractal world teaches us, there is a wider or deeper, more inclusive order that underlies the appearance of chaos and the disturbance of change. With awakened intelligence, chaos becomes the creative turbulence necessary for new forms to emerge.

We need new ways of envisioning interaction with each other--and also the Other as Nature, as Body, as the marginalized and forgotten. Our problem is not lack of knowledge, not even lack of wise women and men, for they are around, quietly acting with integrity without proselytizing their virtue. The problem is how to restructure the balance of power so that the bars of the cage that create an artificial separation between belonging and exile can quietly go down, allowing for the healing water of the vital voice of each and every person to circulate in human affairs. As old ways of doing things crumble, it is not new order or new beliefs that we need first, but a fresh clearing of debris so that our hearts will be able to hear the guidance to create, to imagine, to build, to express the beauty the soul discerns.

The power of speech is our primary tool to cut through the baggage of verbal junk that perpetuates the polarizations that infect human discourse. We have been socialized to use speech to lie, to impress others, to persuade, to sell, to "make nice," to manipulate, to promote our agenda. The sword of speech that comes from the underbelly of suffering, however, is quite different. It carries understanding rooted in experience, what is in the body, the archaic animal limbic voice of nature, the messy stuff of lived life. It has the mud or dirt of the earth on it--and its voice rings true and sure.

So the purpose of this book is to share with the reader the exciting, tragic, funny, and very strange path that has been a source of genuine gnosis, unlike any other spiritual path; one which is absolutely, unequivocally ordinary and available to any person who has the motivation to research what turns up in the path of ordinary events. What appears ordinary, in fact has a rich family history and its own underbelly of extraordinary connections. Such a path, however, requires sufficient self-discipline to refuse to become enslaved by (or at least to question) someone else's belief system (including anything found in this book) and ample doses of doubt to undo and discard interpretations once they get stale.

The Tibetan monks make incredibly colorful delicate and intricate sand paintings; during a special ceremony, they throw it into the lake to symbolize the transitory nature of life and human endeavor. We in the West are obsessed with preservation: our lives are ossified, boxed, static, and bound; we fend off dissolution and change.

We know that institutions and old ways of doing things are breaking apart. Accessible to the entire world is information about everything through internet access. Every religious or philosophical system, every theory of sociology and psychology is immediately obtainable. Yet to what avail is all this knowledge if we cannot discern how to live wisely?

While some people tell us to create our own reality, a Sophianic journey leads us to take responsibility for returning integrity and honesty to our everyday lives. We first have to create our humanity--then our reality will be humane.

For Sophia unveils her power at the intersection of radical spirituality and daemonic philosophy. She is the image, the symbol, the personification of wisdom. This wisdom is not the vacuous, airy-fairy, ambiguous wisdom so often associated with very old men about to die, who preach compassion and piety to people on the verge of spiritual and emotional collapse from a psychotic society. Sophia is the understanding, the experience, and the voice of the individual. Sophia is the return of the power of individual integrity to the workplace, to the marketplace, to the city gate of political decision making, to the community of human interaction.



# Part I: Sophia's Historical Exile

## CHAPTER 1

### THE PATH OF CRUMBS

Who is Sophia? What does she represent? Throughout the last two millennia she has sung about herself--the splendid power and rhythm of the universe that is at once beyond us and within us as the life force. She expresses herself through her poets, sages, troubadours, visionary mystics, and the writers who put into form what became the holiest books of Judaism and Christianity. Her message is fairly consistent in the wisdom traditions where she speaks to human beings: acquire clear perception, seek wisdom instead of gold, pay attention to your own life--to character and consequence and acting with good judgment.

Sophia has many faces. She is painted in a broad spectrum; her interpretation colored by the understanding, spiritual framework, or cultural conditioning of her seeker. "Sophia" is the Greek word for wisdom. The texts which depict and interpret her focus on a range of meanings of the word wisdom that evoke knowledge of the heart. Wisdom is a non-conceptual life-oriented knowing that relies on discernment rather than accumulation of facts and figures.

The wisdom that Sophia personifies is a kind of knowledge that is alive and moving, an effect of a response to the unknown. Her wisdom leads us deeper into mystery; it is unlike or even antagonistic to what is taught in school--that is, the kind of knowledge valued by a consumer society and transmitted by traditional schooling. She is not present in learning quantified as information and facts, measured by IQ, and organized into concepts and separate disciplines, nor is her wisdom an ability to organize abstract or metaphysical concepts into doctrine. Although she has been associated with knowledge and the liberal arts since antiquity, she is not welcome in modern academic

settings that are cut off from life or where a committee must decide for the student whether a subject of inquiry is worth pursuing.

Sophia awakens the spirit in spirituality, shaking the words from its many definitions, so that it dies as sentences and awakens as a moving vibration. She awakens a strong religious feeling but one that remains connected to body and the natural world--more earthy and vital than what is found in religious dogma. The wisdom of Sophia suggests a kind of spirituality that is the living antithesis of that found in organized religions, spiritual groups, or ashrams--groups that measure and quantify the reverence of their members.

In a way, she guides the spirit of contradiction--not to oppose for its own sake, but to shine light on what is missing from every agenda, no matter how noble and holy that agenda might be. Sophia recalls attention to what was excluded from the foundational assumptions of human order-making.

When authorities set themselves up as knowing who she really is, she disappears only to reappear later in what is rejected and excluded from that formulation. That may be why her story is most often told by poets, artists, nursemaids, or wandering minstrels. Sophia's "circulation" is discovered most often in myth, symbol, and legend, passed on by the despised, the marginalized, those who are not valued by the prevailing power structure in any society, in any period of history. William Irwin Thompson sees that myth is like a vault of secret knowledge that keeps safe the old ways and ancient gods: "Myths and fairy tales can therefore remember more than the teller may know. As the stories told under stairs, . . . legends and fairy tales are part of the underworld of the conquered and the powerless: of women, children, and artists. As the remains of old mythologies, lost religions, and vanished rituals, the fairy tales can survive only if the implicit is not explicit, for the explicit cosmology is the property of the ruling high priests of the culture." (Thompson 1989, 51) (emphasis mine)

Sophia lives and moves between two worlds. We experience her movement when we acknowledge the shadow. The expulsion of deities and divine figures like Sophia is often accompanied by demonization: what is expelled from the tribe carries the sins of the tribe like Azazel the Hebrew goat, the scapegoat sent into the desert once a year.

Sophia's own face changes back and forth through the course of history from beautiful co-creator with God to the horny wild demoness Lilith or the hag of trash, Hecate.

Sophia's historical banishment and the problem she posed to theological authority makes her the special guardian of those individuals who have themselves been emotionally banished from their tribe--their family, ashram, religion of origin, the multiplicity of groups from classroom to office--and consequently suffered exclusion, ridicule, or scapegoating.

People suffer banishment because of the isolating effects of great grief, the trauma of war, deep sensitivity to the anguish of others and human cruelty. Some individuals, simply because they notice things--injustice or perhaps the denial and co-dependence in a dysfunctional family--attract the fascination--the evil eye--of other people, their fear, desire, envy, or revulsion.

At some time or another, most people will meet the face of rejection and find themselves abandoned in a space vacated by the rest of humanity. Such events eject a person from ordinary existence. The "space" or abyss one falls into does not have to be navigated alone. We can find the trail of Sophia, maybe even her presence in this place where no one else lives.

## SOPHIA'S TRAIL

Her path in and out of collective consciousness leaves behind a trail of familiar and friendly cookie crumbs for us to follow--but they lie on the ground, they are small and easily dismissed as unimportant. Like Hansel and Gretel, we can find our way home again when we find them. This humble path is a genuine spiritual path and deserves consideration; it may not be the best or correct one, nor does it mean that traditional paths are wrong. The language of either-or, good and bad, right and wrong, belongs to the very systems of authority and control that are the usurpers of Sophia's presence as mediator between the individual and Mystery. It is possible to re-imagine a Western gnosis that

does not rely on external authorities, be it doctrine, guru, tradition, or belief system, but rather reconnects us to the vital immanent in our life and relationships.

Sophia's cookie crumb path is one of looking down rather than up, of searching for and identifying residue, that which has been left behind in the parade of the powerful: ignored and neglected by those holding the spotlight. Sophia's path does not require one to join a group; in fact, once a group becomes the focus of attention, Sophia slips away. Sophia's path does not require the mastery of a doctrine, a yogic discipline, or an ascetic way of life; although it does require study, reflection, and inquiry fueled by the desire for understanding. It helps to have the quality so despised in spiritual groups and institutional settings: a ruthless inner demand for honesty and a willingness to keep our eyes open to all of the facts. Wisdom wants the whole story, complete with warts and moles, contradictions, anomalies, paradoxes, and damaged idols, rather than a one-sided, make-nice image that pleases our sensibilities or conforms to our belief system. Find the shadow--kiss it!

This path is enriched by study, but not for the sake of a grade, professional prestige, better parroting, or more dominant posturing. When we nourish our thinking with ultimate questions, shake loose our rigor mortis with music and dance, or stimulate the imagination with authentic language about living ideas, with poetry, stories, legends and myths, then we can more easily recognize and identify the crumbs of Sophia, this residue left behind. The movement or circulation of Sophia is a kind of "tension of attention" between life and intellect ignited by ideas (justice, truth, beauty, etc.). We continually move between life--our inner responses, emotional reactions from the body, noticing, observing and feeling other people's reactions--and intellect--the images, interpretations, conceptual constructions and descriptions of that life, in order to find our way around the spiral circuit of Sophia as the understanding within life.

## THE DUAL ENERGY OF SOPHIA

There is a venerable history to this idea (the tensing of attention between life and intellect). In India, the all-powerful goddess is described in the Devi Bhagavata Tika as a "dual Energy, presiding deity of life and intellect, . . . called the universal ruler. [The gift of] liberation depends on it. Liberation depends on the union of intellect and life, their uniting and going apart." (from Danielou 1964, 265).

Conventional belief about liberation among Western seekers is a final union, a destination in the future at the end of a linear progression. It is a liberation from ego into a state beyond duality, beyond the opposites, a merging or experience of the One above the Many. (The One is conceived as being the source and goal of the journey of soul's immersion in the "ten thousand things." The One is "more" ultimate and real than the Many; it is superior to the Many.) In many mystical groups, the Many, if not the Enemy, is that which must be overcome or "transcended."

In this conception of liberation the "going apart" is as necessary as the "uniting." I interpret the "going apart" as the extraction of vital energy from the concepts and images (including Sophia) that cling to the life force. Sophia is the symbol (in the sense of a living intuition of mystery and significance) of the motion of uniting and going apart. It is the conscious attainment of awareness of this motion that constitutes a special kind of Sophianic gnosis. The necessity of "going apart" was part of the rituals of early civilizations, portrayed in rites of the annual death of the king.

The fear of going apart, of the dissolution that follows every uniting, is imaged as Sophia's dark aspect: Hecate, guardian of the crossroads, the image of duality we create with our fear of dis-uniting.

The path of crumbs has its ancestry in the roots of our collective psyche. In Hindu mythology, the serpent embodies residue. According to the Bhagavata Purana, when Visnu sleeps, "that is, when creation is withdrawn, he is represented resting upon a thousand-headed gigantic serpent called the Endless (ananta) or the Remainder (Sesa): Then the whole universe is like an ocean. The Supreme God, having devoured all beings, sleeps on the lap of the serpent.' (Visnu Purana 1.2.64-65). When creation is withdrawn it cannot entirely cease to be; there must remain in a subtle form the germ of all that has been and will be so that the world may rise again. It is this remainder of destroyed

universes which is embodied in the serpent floating on the limitless ocean of the causal waters and forming the couch on which the sleeping Visnu rests." (Danielou 1964,163) As the beliefs and institutions that have fed humanity wither and die, what will take their place? The serpent of the remainder holds the residue of the treasures of lost worlds--the material to build a new one. And the builders? The keepers of the treasure--the powerless and marginalized.

In Kabala, legend has it that the name of Yahweh is composed of the letters Yod, He, Vod, He. The two "He's" are feminine. The first is no mystery: it is the outgoing, productive feminine. But, it is said, the mystery of the second feminine remains a secret. This perhaps is the returning feminine.

There is another aspect of the feminine which is becoming acknowledged today--Sophia. The returning feminine is Sophia as the dance of life and intellect--their union and disunion; as the vital voice unfettered by intellectual dogma. Life produces, nourishes, and sustains life; life also includes its own cessation, death, and resurrection. The early Mysteries, as well as the rituals of primitive tribes, and of course, Christianity have as a dominant theme the death and resurrection of a divine or mythological figure, who embodies the renewal of the life force.

Sophia's dual aspect includes a negative fearful side, Hecate, as well as a cosmic Soul-of-the-World aspect. I think that the negative side has to do with the black hole of silence and indifference that surrounds ordinary (unconscious) existence. When we arrive at the big doors, the portals of change into another state of human existence, we are met with resistance, just as we would meet with resistance if we have been writing all our life with our left hand and now try to write with the right hand. Or if we have been driving the same car for 11 years and suddenly have to drive a completely different car; we can't just continue on "automatic pilot" anymore, but have to pay close attention and figure out how to get around the "stopping" of our habitual mode of behavior.

Sophia's dual face suggests the dangers of transitional phases as well as their successful negotiation. Two worlds appear whenever there is upheaval resulting in abandonment, depression, scapegoating, and loss. The notion of two worlds appears all over the canvas of culture. Psychology recognizes the conscious and unconscious. There

is the world of the known and the mystery of the Unknown; there is life as we experience it in the body and the unknown void and seeming cancellation of death; there is, in language, the division between the profane and the sacred. The very roots of primitive and ancient religion were based on a dual rite of impulsion and expulsion: drawing abundance into the community and expelling evil, often in the form of a scapegoat. In the West, we tend to first make such contraries frozen and then make them mutually exclusive and equal opponents. We don't have methods of language, feeling, or ritual to relate what appears to be irreconcilable worlds. The stories and verses and myths about Sophia invite us to create a dance between worlds. Such a dance might invoke a daemon, a spirit, which would reflect the way in which both worlds appear and greet each other. This does not have to be a literal dance, but dancing suggests both the embodiment of power which cannot be fully articulated in language, and movement, which is necessary to dislodge our attention when it becomes stuck in one of the worlds.

## FINDING THE CRUMBS

What would such a "dance" look like? Once many years ago, I heard a story about a family during the Nazi round-up of Jews. I believe it took place in Holland. At the time I heard it, it did not really strike me deeply. Years went by and the story began to sprout and grow like a seed, gathering meaning around it with the passage of time. It seems a family had offered their home to Jews who were escaping from the Nazis. The family would provide food and shelter until the refugees were taken out of the country to safety. One night, the family was just sitting down to dinner: a father, mother, grandparents, and children. The doorbell rings, interrupting dinner. It is a family of Jews being delivered. The parents rush to help the frightened refugees to the hiding place within the house. Dinner waits. One of the young children begins to scream. He throws a tantrum, angry about the interruption of dinner and the intrusion on his family. Two worlds appear: the world of this extraordinary family with their exceptional bravery--and the bitter wail of the child whose dinner grows cold. Instead of removing the child or expressing

annoyance and revulsion at his self-centered reaction, the grandfather goes over to the child, grabs him up and hugs him tight, planting a big kiss upon his cheek.

The tantrum is a reminder that something is left behind in the act of kindness and courage. We could imagine that for many people, the tantrum would be repellent, a sign of selfishness. The grandfather's action was not a reaction, but a response. He did not get rid of the screaming child. He brought a genuine hug and kiss. This action, this love, was a turning, a teshuvah, as Martin Buber would call it, which brought into being both the adult world and the world of the "selfish" reaction. The kiss embodies the turning, it is a dance because there was a stopping of the agenda and a movement towards the "opposition" which did not cancel it out, but brought it out more fully. The action actually blessed, with the kiss, the abrasive display of self-centeredness! The agenda--to help hide the family--is of course, one of the highest and most spiritual displays of integrity and courage. The point is this: when a person, group, or family such as this one, only accepts as its identity the unselfish act, then there is an exclusion and devaluing of what is left behind--the shadow of selfishness. Our reaction is usually so automatic--to get rid of what interferes with our agenda--that we remain unaware of the moment's invitation to bring into existence and thereby honor two worlds. This is the circuit, the signature of Sophia. To bear the encounter with both, to hold both, to face both, to receive both, to move and turn to include what will never be part of the agenda, even when that agenda has been deemed the most holy, is Sophia's invitation.

The appearance of what lies outside the agenda, however, repels us. This is understandable, for it represents or brings up the chaos, what will disrupt and bring down civilization. The agenda is there for a rational, "spiritual" reason. Agendas bring new order, new meaning to dispersed, fragmentary situations. Without an agenda, nothing would get done, no ideals would be brought into existence. Agendas that seek to maintain themselves by excluding and denying the reality of what is outside it, however, are doomed to self-destruct. Medical technology shows that disorder, irregularity, or "noise", in a heartbeat is essential to sustaining life. The healthier the heart, the greater the noise. As death approaches, the disorder diminishes, and the orderly pattern dominates. At death, only the orderly pattern remains. Irregularity in the heartbeat--the "noise"--is

present to the degree that there is communication between the heart and the autonomic nervous system. Perhaps when we love the disorderly noise we are connecting with a larger organism, our instinctual humanity. It is our conscious loving attention that acts as a container for both the agenda and the "noise" of dissent.

In the history of philosophy, this dual aspect of life is called the Apollinian and Dionysian tendencies. Articulated and developed at length by Nietzsche, the two tendencies are described as the foundational structure of human consciousness. Apollinian refers to the tendency to make order and Dionysian to break it down by merging and canceling all boundaries.

Plato developed his philosophy according to his two archae, or ruling beginnings, the same and the other. He never reduced them to unity, but by keeping them distinct, demonstrated how all the worlds of human experience, from the Forms to the shadows, come into existence. It is important to note that these two principles are not the same as yin and yang. They are not "equal" and therefore cannot be dealt with as ordinary opposites. They are, in fact, two worlds that have a right, according to these philosophers, to be themselves in their own reality. One is not better or worse, nor does the Other collapse into non-being in the arms of the One. They do not unite, according to Plato; they do not constitute a unity or whole at some level, either. They stand rather, in their own being, and come together through logos, Plato says. This logos is a weaving. It is language (not language as in the conveying of information) but a "language of relationship"--authentic, appropriate language.

Grandfather's kiss was a kind of relationship or logos, for it connected the noble agenda of saving the Jews with the other world of instinct, selfishness, "ego." The medicine that cures egotism is homeopathic: by kissing the selfishness, grandpa acknowledges its place and lets it be. By letting it be in its own place instead of shooing it off into the closet of denial and embarrassment, the nobility of the family's act is freed from all traces of ego-need, pride, or ambition. The integrity of the Act shines forth, on its own, precisely because the noise was not silenced.

## CHAPTER 2

### WHO IS SOPHIA? HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Who is Sophia? Today, many books and organizations are devoted to the exploration and study of this spiritual figure which symbolizes a certain life-rooted intelligence and potency of the feminine archetype. She evokes a spirituality that honors the earth and the human, and an ethics focused on integrity and honesty rather than obedience and conformity to rules and dogma. Institutes, retreat centers, church groups have organized around the theme of Sophia, demonstrating the hunger of people for a more nourishing, earth-honoring spirituality than conventional religions offer. There is the Institute for Creation Centered Spirituality at Holy Name College in Oakland, the Institute for Feminist Spirituality at Immaculate Heart College Center in Los Angeles, and the Institute for Formative Spirituality at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. (Cady et al. 1986, 94 n1) The international Sophia Foundation in Nicasio, California, is based upon the vision and teachings of Rudolph Steiner and was founded by Robert Powell.

A quick overview of the Sophia literature shows that she is written about today from four different but related perspectives: religion, including feminist spirituality; archetypal psychology; goddess historical/anthropological scholarship; and the Western esoteric tradition.

Feminist theologians and scholars of religious history such as Susan Cady (with Marian Ronan and Hal Taussig), Burton Mack, Joan Engelsman, Gerhard von Rad, Arthur Verslius, etc., locate and analyze Sophia within historical Christianity and Judaism.

In the field of archetypal psychology, Carl Jung unearthed the person of Sophia from the dusty treasure chest of alchemy and Gnosticism, where she was protected from religious literalism. Since Jung, Erich Neumann, Robert Sardello, Marion Woodman, and others have examined Sophia as a specific manifestation of the psyche. As an archetype, Sophia would be defined as a spontaneous image produced by the psyche under certain conditions.

Anthropologists such as Riane Eisler have uncovered the roots and sources of the Sophia image in the great goddesses of Neolithic times. A book which details the source of the late-appearing Sophia image in the Great Goddess of the Neolithic age is The Myth of the Goddess: The Evolution of an Image by Anne Baring and Jules Cashford (1991).

A now-classic source book about Sophia that does not begin with any religious or psychological assumptions about her, was written by Caitlin Matthews, Sophia: Goddess of Wisdom. Matthews sees Sophia as an uncompromising presence within orthodox spiritualities that have either ignored and veiled her, or else exalted her into an abstract divinity. (Matthews 1991, 5) In this book, Matthews tracks down the elusive Sophia as she disappeared from history during the unfoldment of orthodox Christianity. She skillfully locates Sophia in both the exalted, transcendental images of the Eternal Feminine or the Virgin Mary as well as in her more earthy visage, such as beloved, humble Black Madonna figures.

Sophia awakens in the seeker's contemplation in the borderlands between philosophy and religion, when the necessity to take responsibility for thinking turns naturally towards the struggle for integrity and honesty. Sophia runs clear and pure like an underground stream in the Western esoteric tradition. Pythagoras was the first to call himself, not wise, but rather a "lover of wisdom" and so the term philo-sophia was coined, from the Greek word meaning (brotherly) love and sophia, meaning wisdom. Spiritual philosophers who sought the natural, human, earthy well-springs of thinking awakened Sophia within and recorded their visions for future generations include Boethius, Jakob Boehme, Meister Eckhart, William Blake, Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, Novalis, and Fichte.

While Sophia was exiled from mainstream theology in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, she did not disappear from Russia. Sophia remained as a central figure in the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Church of Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) in modern Istanbul still stands as the magnificent cathedral that inspired a pagan prince to become a Christian, just before the turn of the first millennium. Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900) was one of Russia's greatest philosophers. He is remembered as the founder of the

Sophiology movement in Russia. He had three visions of Sophia during his life, which led him eventually to Egypt. He called her his Eternal Companion.

## SOPHIA IN THE HISTORY OF RELIGION

Sophia played a part in the origins of Western religion and culture: she was named and given a voice by Greek-speaking Jewish writers of the literature known as the "Wisdom Books" of the Bible. She has a wide and colorful spectrum of powers and roles as described below. We can look back in the history of religion and see where she speaks and what she represents. The kind of spirituality she symbolizes became incompatible with the theological direction taken by the leaders of Judaism. Many of the texts in which she speaks are unfinished or not fully developed. She dwindled and then disappeared as a literary device, as an image of a certain kind of knowledge, about the time when she was identified with the Torah. She was deleted from the explicit (exoteric) formulation of Christianity and Islam, as well, but reappeared in the esoteric, mystical teachings of all three religions during the Middle Ages. It is the disappearance of her as a spiritual figure, as an image of the potency of the feminine archetype from the world that intrigues me: where did she go? Why did she leave? What does it mean when she reappears in dreams, visions, and poetry as she has during the period of her exile?

This chapter discusses Sophia's development as a biblical figure, her exile from mainstream religion, a brief review of her appearance in the Western esoteric tradition, and a comparison to Near Eastern goddesses--Maat, Themis, and Isis.

### BIBLICAL ORIGINS

Sophia historically was a feminine personification of wisdom. In the last several decades, spiritual seekers--especially women who have become exasperated with the absence of the archetypal feminine in the male-dominated western religions--have rediscovered this powerful divine figure in Biblical verses known as the wisdom literature: Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), and Wisdom. Sophia was developed as a divine

person by Greek-speaking Jewish male writers. The wisdom literature was written down from 500 B.C.E. on. It is reminiscent of texts found throughout the ancient near East and India, written and preserved for thousands of years before its appearance in Hebrew scripture. Both the Greek word "sophia" and its Hebrew counterpart, "hokhmah," are feminine. "Hokhmah" was wisdom's name in Proverbs and the earlier literature; then later, "sophia" in the Greek writings of the common era. Both Jews and Christians used "sophia" during the Hellenistic era. (Engelsman 1987, 166 n 1)

In the three major religions of the West, the creation story of Genesis prevails in people's minds as the only one or the right one. Seldom is equal time or attention paid to another mention of creation, this one in proverbs, where the playful Sophia assists Yahweh in creating the world:

Yahweh created me when his purpose first unfolded,  
before the oldest of his works.  
From everlasting I was firmly set,  
from the beginning, before earth came into being.  
. . . When he fixed the heavens firm, I was there,  
when he drew a ring on the surface of the deep,  
when he thickened the clouds above, . . .  
. . . when he laid down the foundations of the earth,  
I was by his side, a master craftsman,  
delighting him day after day,  
ever at play in his presence,  
at play everywhere in his world,  
delighting to be with the sons of men. (Prov. 8:22-31 NJB)

(Note: The phrase "I was by his side, a master craftsman," does not translate easily. No agreement has been reached concerning the exact meaning of "craftsman." The original Hebrew word is "amon," which could mean any of the following: infant, confidant, architect, counselor. The sentence could even be translated, "I was at the side of the master builder." (Lang 1986, 65)

Sophia represents a knowledge that is utterly different than conventional schooling, for it is knowledge based upon the ability to discern what is really going on:

Listen my children, to a father's instruction:  
Pay attention, and learn what clear perception is . . .  
Acquire Sophia, acquire perception;  
Never forget her, . . . do not desert her, she will keep you safe,  
Love her, she will watch over you. (Prov. 4:1, 2,5, 6)

Her wisdom has to do with integrity and justice--what kings need to rule wisely:

. . . Take my instruction instead of silver,  
and knowledge rather than choice gold;  
for wisdom is better than jewels,  
and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.  
I, wisdom, dwell in prudence,  
and I find knowledge and discretion.  
. . . By me kings reign,  
and rulers decree what is just;  
by me princes rule,  
and nobles govern the earth.  
I love those who love me,  
and those who seek me diligently find me. (Prov. 8: 1-17)

Her wisdom is not abstract, ivory-tower speculation. Justice, integrity, and discernment belong in the marketplace and in politics:

Sophia calls aloud in the streets,  
she raises her voice in the public squares;  
she calls out at the street corners,  
she delivers her message at the city gates,  
'You ignorant people, how much longer will you cling to your ignorance?  
How much longer will mockers revel in their mocking  
and fools hold knowledge contemptible  
now I will pour out my heart to you . . . ' (Prov. 1:20-22)

It is our own life that reveals the secrets of wisdom, for Sophia is life:

Sophia brings up her own children,  
and cares for those who seek her.  
Whoever loves her loves life,  
those who wait on her early will be filled with happiness.  
Whoever holds her close will inherit honor,  
and wherever they walk the Lord will bless them. . .  
. . . for though Sophia takes them at first through widening ways,  
bringing fear and faintness to them,  
plaguing them with her discipline until she can trust them,  
and testing them with her ordeals,  
in the end Sophia will lead them back to the straight road,  
and reveal her secrets to them. (Ecclesiasticus 4:11-18) (emphasis mine)

#### MEANINGS OF SOPHIA IN EARLY RELIGION

These passages reveal the cosmic contours of Sophia's influence from co-creator to the busy streets. Sophia is not just divine consort. She is specifically oriented towards the human world. She addresses men at the marketplace and at the city gate. (Note: the use of Sophia to exclusively address males has been noted by Sophia scholars as an effort to justify and support patriarchal power structures. The fact that the wisdom literature uses Sophia to address only men is evidence of a larger context of male religious symbolism that excludes women. Feminist scholarship has noted that this symbol system has reinforced and perpetuated male domination at every level of society.) (Cady et al. 1986, 83) Sophia's presence is with creation--in the hubbub of life, politics, commerce, and relationship. The wisdom she represents requires the seeker to pay attention to life. Discernment of life--clear perception--is vividly presented as primary. Although she advocates study and discipline, these activities are to be life oriented. She does not say obey rules, learn texts, and ascertain God's will in order to get saved. She does not say to go off into the privacy of temple or study and avoid life. On the other hand, Sophia is very clear about the attitude of the seeker: be in the marketplace but do not seek gold. Be involved in the community--don't avoid the crowds at the city gate--just act with integrity and pay attention to your character.

The wisdom literature in which Sophia speaks are oriented towards two themes: the significance and value of human experience and the demand to act with integrity in the world.

Whatever Sophia might have been intended to portray in a monotheistic context, one thing is clear from the above passage: Sophia was an important presence. She added an aspect of joy and play in an otherwise austere and irritable divine setting. Above all, it was her gender that made such a striking contrast to the all-male theology of the prophets and religious leaders of early Judaism. She is considered to be "the major spiritual figure of pre-Christian Judaism"--and she is female. (Cady et al. 1989, 32)

#### MODERN CONCLUSIONS ABOUT SOPHIA'S IDENTITY

Contemporary research into the identity of the Biblical Sophia can be classified into four categories of conclusions about the meaning of Sophia's identity: (1) Sophia is a divinity in her own right; (2) she is a personification of a divine attribute of Yahweh; (3) she is an archetype representing the female dimension of God; and (4) several out-of-vogue interpretations. These latter include the following: divine patroness of the ancient Israelite wisdom school; another form of revelation; the main character in an extra-Israelite wisdom myth; and a poetic device for instruction; and, from Gerhard von Rad, the "self-revelation of Creation." (The reader is referred to the author's M.A. thesis "But Where Shall Understanding Be Found?" Searching For Sophia, Personified Wisdom, chapter 3, pages 39-44.)

#### SOPHIA'S SOURCES--WISDOM BEYOND RELIGION

Where did this majestic figure come from? It is unlikely that she sprung fully clothed in exalted verse from the heads of inspired Biblical poets. She shares too many features with neighboring goddesses and divine female ancestors. Sophia's attributes and speeches are sometimes identical to the great Bronze Age goddesses of India, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Sumeria. The following two verses are speeches that show the similarity between the Sophia in Proverbs and the Hindu Vak, the personified feminine vibration of universal

creation. The Rg Veda was written at least a thousand years before Proverbs (the exact date of Rg Veda is not known; the estimate is approximately 2,000 years before the common era. Proverbs was compiled in the fourth century before the C.E. from earlier texts.)

Alone I circled the vault of the sky  
and I walked on the bottom of the deeps  
Over the waves of the sea and over the whole earth  
and over every people and every nation I have held sway  
--Ecclesiasticus 24: 8-20

In the beginning I bring forth the Father.  
My source is in the waters' ocean deep.  
From there I move out toward every creature.  
And with my stature I reach the sky above  
--R.V.X.125.7

The wisdom identified as Sophia was an international phenomenon in ancient times. The writers of the Biblical wisdom literature most likely formulated their own version of it. The glory of this powerful female leaves an exotic trail of humanity, erotic spirituality, commanding speech, and playfulness through the denser passages dedicated to her partner--the wrathful, vengeful deity who would eventually forget her in his need to be alone and one. (For a superb psychological analysis of Yahweh's amnesia of Sophia and his moral inferiority to Job, read Answer to Job (1975), by Carl Jung.)

It caused quite a stir among scholars when papyrus texts were discovered in Egypt that dated from the third millennium B.C.E. In some places the text was word for word identical to certain passages in Proverbs (Prov. 22:17-23.11). It was clear from this discovery that wisdom was not an invention of post-exilic Israel but was widespread throughout the ancient world, with a history dating back thousands of years before the birth of Judaism. (See von Rad 1972, 10.)

#### SOPHIA'S EXILE FROM RELIGION

Wisdom was not an invention of Judaism, but symbolized a shared vision of practical spirituality that was common and prevalent. It was borrowed, not created, by the ancient Israelites and incorporated into the religious texts. Alongside the wisdom passages, the texts about Yahweh, the creation of the world, and the stories of Hebrew history were preserved. While Judaism developed into a monotheistic religion based upon its covenant with God revealed through its prophets, the wisdom literature was only partly developed and sometimes left abruptly unfinished.

Not only did the wisdom material differ from the focus of orthodox Judaism, but Sophia herself was problematical. Sophia and the tradition of wisdom which she represented was difficult to place within mainstream Judaism. While it was easy to identify a literary form or tradition in the rabbinical documents, scholars could find no such common thread in the wisdom books. Much of the literature about Sophia was not fully developed or even completed. It is difficult to pin down any one unifying theme in the texts. But it was her gender that may have been the most difficult issue to reconcile in the fiercely patriarchal culture that Judaism became. The presence of this bold female being who was next to God of creation was clearly problematical. There was no way that a female, a divine one at that, could be reconciled with Yahwism, a strictly monotheistic religious conception. The creation story of Genesis puts nature and creatures and woman below man, with God above all. The wisdom teachings put creation and the natural world--and Sophia along with it--on an equal footing with God.

Sophia has been such a problem for Biblical scholars that they have either totally neglected to give an accounting of her or else they labeled her a foreign import irreconcilable with Yahwism. Here are selected comments that address her "awkward" presence:

No one in the history of scholarship has spoken to the question of the emergence of the figure of wisdom. (Burton Mack, Logos und Sophia, quoted in Cady et al 1986, 34)

Wisdom is also an enigma to scholarly research. Although there have been numerous studies of wisdom, we have no clear conception of her identity and origin. (Lang 1986, 113)

One of the 'most thoroughly debated problems in the whole of the wisdom literature is where 'wisdom' is a personified entity immanent in creation.' (von Rad 1972, 144)

. . .with the increasing number of scholarly works in this field, the concept 'wisdom' has become increasingly unclear, and there are already orientalists who have completely excluded it from their sphere of investigation. (von Rad 1972, 7)

I strongly suspect Job of being an attempt to get rid of the awkward personality of Wisdom. (Knox 1937, 234n.)

But, is it wisdom that is the problem or the theological abstractions that exclude wisdom from religion and then label it profane? The passages below put the problem back into the hands of the ones who created the problem in the first place: the intellectualizing theologians.

The role of wisdom in Old Testament theology becomes problematical when theology is limited to salvation history, and concerns about right living are judged as profane or secular. It has even been considered a foreign import, not really reconcilable with 'Yahwism,' . . . The discomfort of theologians is evident in their label of wisdom as "natural theology": . . . (Brown, Fitzmeyer and Murphy 1990, 449)

'The ostracizing of wisdom seems to be the result of the attempt by the rabbis and historians to define wisdom as a separate doctrine, cut off from the 'pure' salvation/revelation tradition. There appears to have been a scholarly reconstruction of 'Israel's pure and primitive response to 'yhwh.' The actual people, on the other hand, . . . did not consider wisdom 'profane' nor did they limit their talk about God to salvation and 'were able to canonize the wisdom literature without betraying their faith.' (Brown, Fitzmeyer and Murphy 1990, 449)

Sophia was a problem because she was the voice that spoke for attributes and teachings that might have appeared antithetical or even threatening to the religious agenda of the men who shaped the direction of Judaism. As monotheism took root in Hebrew religious consciousness, Yahwism directed itself towards revelation and salvation history. Traditional Yahwism regarded history as the sphere of divine action. God created the world and remains active in the everyday affairs of his chosen people.

He intervenes and reveals himself to his people through his prophets and later in his law, the Torah.

The wisdom teachings spoken through the figure of Sophia, on the other hand, focused on a spirituality that was different in several respects to Yahwism:

(1) The first difference is the appearance of Sophia next to Yahweh when he created the world (Proverbs 8:22-31). The monotheism of Yahwism did not allow for either a female presence or family members.

(2) The second difference is that the wisdom teachings focused on personal engagement with one's own character and taking responsibility for one's spiritual development. In religious teachings, on the other hand, the prophets and rabbis became the vehicles for transmission of Yahweh's will and desire for his people; they were necessary if the individual wished to participate in revelation and salvation.

(3) Wisdom was not to be discovered in any one book, dogma, or teacher, but everywhere, even "with slave girls over the mill-stones," the poorest of the poor (see later in this chapter, the sboyet dated 2400 B.C.E., under "Maat").

(4) wisdom requires clear perception and discernment while Yahwism demands the ascertainment of God's will and obedience to God's laws. Issues about how to live wisely were judged as profane and secular, "not really reconcilable with 'Yahwism'" (Brown, Fitzmeyer and Murphy 1990, 449).

(5) wisdom spoke at the city gate and in the marketplace, indicating that integrity was active, valued, and essential for public life-politics, kingship, and business. After the Roman invasions of Palestine during the first and second centuries of the C.E., the Hebrew rulers instituted prohibitions that further split Judaism from its connection to its wisdom inheritance. Yehudah the Prince prohibited instruction under the open sky (to avoid trouble with the Romans), meaning that wisdom could no longer be discussed in the streets, but only in the synagogue and houses of study. Although the people objected to this rule, citing Prov. 1:20, "Wisdom chants in the street," eventually wisdom was removed from the streets. In Sirach 24:1, wisdom is off the streets and in a worship service (Lang 1986, 31). Wisdom was also severed from its influence on politics and

leadership. Rabbi Akiba advised his son never to live in a town whose leaders were scholars because then they would not pay attention to practical matters. (Lang 1986, 32).

To summarize, wisdom teachings directed attention to life as both the source of knowledge as well as the means to that knowledge. People can learn discernment and clarity from experience, relationship, the events of life, not just from a text or joining the "right" group. The means to acquire this life-knowledge was through attention to character, pursuing wisdom instead of gold, and acting with integrity in business, politics, and rulership. Yahwism departed from this life-oriented spirituality due to complex factors of incessant invasions, the need to defend the tribe and protect its sacred Law, and the devotion of generations of religious leaders to articulating the god image in written texts. With these developments, a split became evident between wisdom and religion. The spiritual dimension of wisdom was usurped by religion.

Another development in the scholarly world which further sundered the spiritual identity and presence of wisdom occurred in the first century of the Christian era. According to Joan Chamberlain Englesman, Sophia went from a position of divine status to removal from the hearts and minds of the early Christians and Jews of the first century because of one man. Philo, a renowned Hellenic Jewish scholar in Alexandria identified Sophia with the divine word "Logos." In place of the alive, speaking presence of the feminine Sophia, Philo substituted the masculine "Logos." First he makes Sophia the same as Logos, then Sophia gradually is excluded and forgotten. Finally, the masculine personified Logos assumes the divine roles of Sophia, including the firstborn image of God, the principle of order, and even the intermediary between God and humanity. (Englesman 1979, 119)

The early Christians concurred with this, and so the living, active, immediate Sophia became abstract and other-worldly. With the growth of the Christian movement, the pagan religions which had kept alive the reverence and memory of the great neolithic goddesses (whose many attributes included wisdom) were supplanted by the Christian state religion.

After Sophia became identified with Christ as Logos, the Word of God, the ancient association of wisdom with the powerful goddesses of antiquity was lost and forgotten.

Now, the archetypal feminine is finally 'deleted' from the image of the divine, and the Christian image of the deity as a trinity of Father, son and Holy Spirit becomes wholly identified with the masculine archetype. Because of a sequence of theological formulations--grounded on the assumption that nature was inferior to spirit, and that whatever pertained to the female was inferior to the male--the image of the Holy Spirit lost its former association with the feminine Hokhmah, or Sophia, and was assimilated, first in Judaism, and then in Christianity, to the concept of the masculine Logos, the Divine Word. This theological development effectively erased the ancient relationship between Wisdom and the image of the goddess. (Baring and Cashford 1991, 611)

Another significant and important reason why Sophia was not developed further, is because of the Gnostic controversy. It was necessary for the New Testament writers to link Jesus to Sophia in order to ground the new sect in history. The Gnostics downplayed or questioned the humanity and death of Jesus (focusing rather on his universal divine nature which was accessible as an inward state of consciousness to each person). The Gnostics seized eagerly and joyfully upon Sophia, making her the central point of transfiguration of self and creation in their doctrine of the liberation of soul from the coils of ignorance and religious superstition. The beliefs that eventually became the doctrine of orthodox Christianity, on the other hand, insisted on Christ's humanity and his literal suffering and death. So while they needed to connect Jesus to Sophia, they stopped talking and writing about Sophia in order to disassociate themselves from their rivals, the Gnostics. (For an excellent, highly readable history and analysis of this controversy and its consequences, the reader is referred The Gnostic Gospels by Elaine Pagels.)

#### THE GNOSTICS AND SOPHIA

Sophia is a prominent figure in Gnosticism. The Gnostic movement was made up of diverse sects and movements within early Christianity. The Greek word "gnosis" is

usually translated as "insight." As a religion Gnosticism means "religion of knowledge." It was declared a heresy in the second century C.E. and was followed by a fierce campaign by the church fathers to seek out and burn every trace of Gnostic teaching.

Gnostics believed that Jesus was Sophia: i.e., the "Word" or logos that would come to birth within the person. They rejected organized religion and claimed priests were unnecessary. The individual could actualize the inner reality, independent of a leader or organized hierarchy. In "orthodox" Christianity represented by Peter, God the father passed his authority and keys to the kingdom of heaven to Jesus his son, and Jesus passed them on to Peter and his successors. To be saved, a person had to seek admission through Peter's chosen men (i.e., male bishops).

There are two Sophias in Gnosticism, the heavenly Sophia or wisdom of God, and her daughter, Sophia Achamoth. Valentinus, leader of a major Gnostic sect, described the heavenly Sophia as "Mother of the All" who is Grace, Silence, and Womb.

The original Dyad, Sophia and the Primal Father, bring forth a couple, Nous and Truth. The divine Pleroma consists of a series of male-female aeons. The last aeon, Sophia Achamoth, plays the role of Cosmic Eve.

The Gnostic system, although there are many differing versions, give Sophia a high profile role in both the creation myth and redemption motif. In Gnostic groups, women were of equal status with men. In Neoplatonism, whose interpreters were contemporaries of the Gnostics, Sophia was equated with the Intellectual-Principle (Nous) of the individual soul (which in the system of Plotinus was the point of contact between the soul and the Intellectual-Principle). This redeems itself by renouncing error. Sophia must turn away from the beliefs and assumptions which bind her to darkness, and by so doing she recovers the light, her twin, the Soter Christ. Unless the two are united, knowledge remains without guidance.

The Gnostics identified Jesus with Sophia. The Gnostic churches downplayed the humanity of Jesus and the crucifixion. Many did not believe that Jesus was human and died. They saw Jesus as the divine redeemer who therefore could not die. The churches represented by the New Testament, however, established, as one of the primary tenets of faith, that Jesus was human as well as the Son of God; and that he actually died. The

entire hierarchy of the early Church rested on these beliefs and especially the Resurrection. The historical, literal fact of the Resurrection and the witnesses to it determined the structure and organization of the Church. (Pagels 1979, 49) To the Gnostics, Sophia was the feminine aspect of the Divine who came down from God with a special message. Since "being saved" was a function of knowing Jesus' message rather than the crucifixion-resurrection event, the message-carrying Sophia was an especially appealing image of Jesus for them.

### Sophia as Ogdoad--Boundary and Gateway to the Stars

Both Gnosticism and alchemy speak of ascent through the planetary spheres. One of Sophia's designations is the "Ogdoad." The world view in antiquity placed the earth as the center of the universe which was made up of spheres arranged concentrically around the earth and named after the planets. In Gnosticism the outermost planetary sphere or archon was Saturn. Outside this is the realm of the fixed stars, corresponding to the ogdoad, domain of Sophia Achamoth (Jung 1970b, CW 13, 578).

Sophia rules the eighth clime, the archetypal world of images, "the world in which the forms of our thoughts and desires, of our presentiments and of our behavior and of all works accomplished on earth subsist." (Jung 1970c, CW14, 10)

### ALCHEMY

Alchemy was a rich, earthy esoteric system in which Sophia played a dominant role. Alchemy was articulated in the Hermetic tradition which emerged from the fertile ground of Hellenic Egypt.

### Historical Background

Sophia plays a major role in alchemy, just as she does in Gnosticism. The word for wisdom in Latin, the language of many of the alchemical texts, is "Sapientia." Sapientia is not a concept. Alchemical wisdom, like her sister in Proverbs, is a personified figure which is the goal, the secret, the inner essence, of the prima materia. Sapientia is the

mysterious salt, one of the three components of the human being besides sulphur and mercury.

Alchemy traces its lineage back to the priestly craft of ancient Egypt. Traditionally Hermes Trismegistos, the "thrice-great Hermes" is credited as its founder. He is identified with the ancient Egyptian God Thoth, the god of priestly arts and sciences. The word alchemy comes from the Arabic al-kimiya which is said to derive from the ancient Egyptian keme--meaning "black earth," another name for Egypt and perhaps the symbol of the alchemists' prima material. (Burckhardt 1967, 16)

All the texts ascribed to Hermes-Thoth are contained in the collection Corpus Hermeticum, which was written in Greek with Platonic terminology. The law of the art of alchemy is the so-called "Emerald Tablet" found in the Corpus Hermeticum, which declares itself to be a revelation from Hermes Trismegistos. It has survived only in Arabic and Latin translations. (Burckhardt 1967, 16)

Alchemy appears to have been around many centuries before Christ. Because of its sacred status, however, it was not written down but passed along orally. The oldest alchemical drawings are on Egyptian papyri. Alchemy developed in the shadow of the major monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Alchemy reached its peak in the 16th and 17th centuries, when many alchemical texts were printed.

In one of his letters, Jung describes alchemy as the link between Greek philosophy, the Christian Middle ages, and modern Europe. (Jung 1973, (letter to Neumann 22 Dec '35), 206) Jung considered alchemy as the missing link that enabled the modern person to reconnect to the past (Gnosticism) and open to the future through recovery of the Christian shadow, which is made up of images and interpretations demonized for millennia . (Jung 1965, 201)

Alchemy equates Sophia with the Holy Ghost: "In alchemy, the Holy Ghost and Sapientia are more or less identical . . ." (Jung 1970c, CW 14 (432) Although alchemy was "man's work," they regarded their art as a "charisma, a gift of the Holy Ghost or of the Sapientia Dei . . . Angelus Silesius says of Sapientia: 'As once a Virgin fashioned the whole earth, So by a Virgin it shall have rebirth.'" (Jung 1970c, CW 14, 443)

### Mercurius and Sophia

Mercurius is the personification of alchemy. The living process of alchemy expresses itself in the androgyny of Mercurius: he is both wise old man and Sophia, light and wisdom. Their interaction and relationship symbolize two facets in the evolution of one's consciousness. Mercurius is a personification of the entire transformation process, a process "that begins with evil and ends with good." (Jung 1970b, CW 13, 228)

Jung's term for this transformation process is "individuation." ". . . the individuation process . . . being a natural psychic occurrence, goes on even without the participation of consciousness. But if consciousness participates with some measure of understanding, then the process is accompanied by all the emotions of a religious experience or revelation. As a result of this, Mercurius was identified with Sapiientia and the Holy Ghost. (Jung 1970b, CW 13, 229) (emphasis mine)

In alchemy, Sophia is associated with several symbols which express qualities that deepen her meaning. Two of these are the tree and salt.

### Sophia as Tree

Describing an alchemical text with a drawing of concentric circles and figures, Jung points out that outside the seven planets and circles is an eighth circle, which contains the golden tree. This philosophic tree in the eighth circle shines "like lightning." Lightning in alchemy, as in Jacob Boehme, signifies sudden rapture and illumination." (Jung 1970b, CW 13, 417) Again we find wisdom associated with the "eighth" which signifies not only transformation, but release from the chains of the habits of personality symbolized by the seven planetary spheres.

More than any other symbol, the tree expresses the profound connection between truth and life. Wisdom, in other words, must manifest in the life or it remains abstract and untouched--masculine or spirit-only. The ordinary world, and earth, have long been maligned as sources of temptation, ignorance, darkness by theologians, prophets, and monks. Is it possible, the alchemists would ask, to fly away from this life and leave behind our human nature? No, they would answer. To discriminate the light of the soul

(Sophia) from the sludge of habit (the dragon) is a noble task and will reveal and clarify what it means to be human.

The tree connects heaven and earth, spirit and body. It is a symbol of soul, the mysterious mediator whose leaves and fruit are images reflecting the two worlds its mighty trunk spans. Deep underground its roots join the earth to nourish and support the tall trunk and branches. Reaching up to the sky, it depends as well on the sun and air for sustenance.

### Sophia as Salt

Of all the images associated with Sophia, salt is the most elusive and enigmatic. Traditional alchemy has salt as one of the three components of the human, besides sulphur and quicksilver (mercury). Not only the human body, but the world's body also is composed of these three substances. Sulphur is penetrating light, spirit and masculine; quicksilver is the receptive feminine power of soul. (Burckhardt 1967, 158). The central mystery and goal of alchemy is the marriage between sulphur and quicksilver or male and female. Salt, as the neutral, static element of the ternary, represents the psychic form of the body. "Sulphur produces combustion, quicksilver evaporation. Salt is the ash that remains over and serves to fix the 'volatile' spirit. . . . (The body) represents the . . . objective intersection between the human microcosm and the macrocosm. In a sense the body is the most clearly circumscribed, outward and simple of all reflections of the cosmos. The lowest corresponds to the highest, says the law enunciated in the 'Emerald Tablet'" (Burckhardt 1967, 147-8) The salt that "is the ash that remains over" is a reminder of the crumbs of Sophia's path--the forgotten residue of what is excluded or forgotten.

Salt as body is a critical point in alchemy. The alchemists believed that humans are created for the purpose of participating in the Divine intellect, of which they are the 'central' reflection. When they do reflect it, they are then truly the center of the earthly state. So the realization of the center of the earthly state is the real goal of alchemy and also the deepest meaning of gold, or 'incarnated light." (Burckhardt 1967, 82-3) This is

accomplished not by fleeing the body into abstract spirit or faith, but a process of transformation whereby the body must become spirit, and spirit body.

#### SOPHIA AS AN UNDERGROUND CURRENT

But the fascinating part of Sophia's story is actually just beginning. She was "deleted" from organized religion but she did not disappear. She went underground and was enthusiastically welcomed, crowned, and honored by the heretics and rejects of the newly powerful religions. For as the priesthoods took control and determined the theological direction of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the accepted doctrine became almost exclusively literal. The living, breathing human dimension of the sacred was often forgotten at the expense of obedience and conformity to man-made rules.

As Sophia disappeared from the world stage, she found a home away from home: the esoteric wisdom traditions of Gnosticism, Kabala, alchemy, and the mysticism of saints in all the religions. Each of the dogmatic, patriarchal religions of the West spawned an esoteric, mystical teaching: for Judaism, it was the Kabala; for Islam, it was Sufism; for the Christians it was Gnosticism and later alchemy.

Sophia re-emerged in the Middle Ages, not only in the underground wisdom traditions, but also as the Black Madonna, whose images across Europe drew thousands of pilgrims for centuries. Sophia appeared in philosophy in the writings of scholars, poets, and mystics: John Scotus Erigena (A.D. 810-77); Boethius (A.D. 480-524); Jakob Boehme; Dante; and many others. She was the impulse behind the troubadours, whose devotion to the feminine had such an impact on society that the status of women was actually raised for a time. She was the image of the Liberal Arts in the Middle Ages and was the inspiration for the Grail Legend and the Cathar Church of the Holy Spirit, Sophia. The Knights Templar were apparently devoted to Sophia: they were said to worship an image--"Baphomet"--which concealed in cryptographic form, its secret meaning--Sophia. (Baring and Cashford 1991, 638)

#### SOPHIA'S RELATION TO OTHER GODDESSES

Sophia is similar to the great goddesses of the ancient Near East: Maat, Themis, Isis, Demeter-Persephone, Athena. At one time, long before the priesthood inserted itself as indispensable for individual access to the sacred, the Great Goddess during the Neolithic era served the human psyche as an image of the Whole. Wisdom was one aspect of the Great Goddess. Various goddesses personified wisdom centuries before Sophia entered the religious literature of Judaism: Nammu and Inanna in Sumeria, Maat and Isis in Egypt, and Athena and Demeter in Greece. (Baring and Cashford 1991, 610-1)

### MAAT

Maat was the central figure of the Egyptian wisdom teachings. Maat is usually translated as justice, law, or primeval order. It was more important to "keep" Maat than to worship her. Like Sophia in Proverbs, she was created before the world and it was through her that creation came about. She "came down to men at 'the beginning of time' as the right order of all things . . . the divine Maat, a central concept in Egyptian wisdom teaching, embodies law, world order, justice. (von Rad 1972, 153 & n) When a person died, her soul went to the Hall of Judgment where it would plead its case before the jurors--Isis, Osiris, and Maat, goddess of justice, blindfolded. If the soul had failed to "keep Maat" it was thrown to a horrid crocodile-hog called Typhon, symbolizing rebirth into the material world. The wisdom teachings which Maat personified focused on the value, significance, and beauty of all of life--not just sacred texts and temple worship. The following passage, called a "sboyet," or instruction, is an example of a wisdom teaching from a sage to his son. It was composed by a vizier of King Issi around 2400 B.C.E.

Thou canst learn something from every one. Be not arrogant because of thy knowledge, and have no confidence in that thou art a learned man. Take counsel with the ignorant as with the wise, for the limits of art cannot be reached, and no artist fully possesseth his skill. A good discourse is more hidden than the precious green stone, and yet it is found with slave-girls over the mill-stones. (Erman's note about slave-girls: meaning the poorest of the poor). (Erman 1966, 56)

### THEMIS

Similar to Maat, the Greek Themis also represented order and conscience, but now it was social conscience, not natural order. Themis was the mother of Dike, who was natural order. But Jane Harrison, in Themis, makes the point that social structure in no way could give birth to the natural order, unless it was human conception of that natural order. She goes on to say that in totemistic and animistic societies, natural and social order are not distinguished at all. Plants and animals are a necessary part of human social structure. A person believes that by following certain rites that crops will grow or that one's totem animal or plant will cause the family group to thrive. There is an interdependence and reciprocity between the natural world and the social world. (Harrison 1966, 533-4) In Homer, Themis has two functions: she both convenes and dissolves the assembly; in this, she is above even Zeus. Harrison says of Themis: "Here the social fact is trembling on the very verge of godhead. She is the force that brings and binds men together, she is 'herd instinct,' the collective conscience, the social sanction. She is *fas*, the social imperative. . . . Themis . . . is not religion, but she is the stuff of which religion is made. It is the emphasis and representation of herd instinct, of the collective conscience, that constitutes religion." (Harrison 1966, 485) (emphasis mine) What Harrison is saying is simple, but chilling: Themis personifies whatever values the society has; she is social mores and conventions that eventually become binding as the law of the land. Harrison also notes that at Trozen, there was an altar to the Themides; out of many themistes arose one Themis. The plural refers to the fact that there are many public opinions, many judgments. The Greek word Themis and the English word Doom are one and the same. (Harrison 1966, 483) Doom is whatever is fixed and settled. "Your private doom is your private opinion, but that is weak and ineffective. It is the collective doom, public opinion, that, for man's common convenience, crystallizes into Law. Themis like Doom begins on earth and ends in heaven." (Harrison 1966, 483)

## ISIS

Isis was considered to be the greatest goddess in Egypt, worshipped from before 3000 B.C.E. to the second century of the common era. Her cult spread to Greece, Europe, and Great Britain. She is depicted with her brother-husband Osiris in hieroglyphs on very

ancient tombs. Isis is associated with the dog star Sirius. She is the eye of Re, the sun god, and rules over the deepest mysteries of life--fate and death. She took on many of the attributes of Maat after the third century B.C.E. In one of her speeches, she says of herself:

I give and ordained laws for men, which no one is able to change . . . I divided the earth from the heaven . . . I order the course of the sun and the moon . . . I made strong the right . . . I assigned to Greeks and barbarians their language . . . I established penalties for those who practice injustice. (from "Praises of Isis" in Englesman 1989, 31-33)

Isis personifies the life force and the living mystery of Nature. She is the essence of the four elements, from which all things come into being. She circulates the elements and carries with her the "sacred fire" which perfects, digests, and revitalizes bodies. She steers the bark of life, full of trouble and misery, on the stormy ocean of Time. According to Plutarch, Isis both "spins and cuts the thread of Life." (Plutarch's Isis and Osiris, quoted in Hall 1962, XLVI)

She is called "Lady of Life" and is portrayed holding the sacred ankh, symbol of life. Several of her titles refer to her powers of healing. She also holds a sistrum. According to Plutarch, the sistrum is a symbol of nature's agitation that restores vitality to life that has become stale and "coagulated:"

[The sistrum] is designed to represent to us, that every thing must be kept in continual agitation, and never cease from motion; that they ought to be roused and well-shaken, whenever they begin to grow drowsy as it were, and to droop in their motion. For say they, the sound of these sistra averts and drives away Typho; meaning hereby, that as corruption clogs and puts a stop to the regular course of nature; so generation, by the means of motion, loosens it again, and restores it to its former vigour. (Hall 1962, XLVI)

Isis' wisdom was not abstract, but had to do with magic. A legend tells about her power to gain the knowledge of the secret name of Re, the sun god and creator.

According to the myth, Re grew very old. His mouth would shake and he drooled. His spit fell on the ground. Isis gathered the spit and mixed it with some earth and formed it into a snake. Then she placed the snake on the path where Re walked. The snake bit Re and he fell ill. All the gods and goddesses came to pity him, including Isis. She offered to

cure him with her wisdom and magic art if he would reveal his secret name. He gave her a long list of phony names, but she wasn't fooled. Finally, to keep from dying, Re had to whisper his real name in her ear so only she could hear. Then she cured him, restoring his vitality.

Isis was called the "Black One" because of her association with fate and the mysteries of death. The ancient name for Egypt was "Kemi," which translates "Black Earth." The Arabs called Egypt "Al-Kemi" and the ancient art of alchemy practiced in the ancient Near East and medieval Europe was probably derived from this name. Jung describes the blackness of Isis and in this passage, relates her identity to Sophia:

The cognomen of Isis was . . .the Black One. Apuleius stresses the blackness of her robe . . . and since ancient times she was reputed to possess the elixir of life as well as being adept in sundry magical arts. She was also called the Old One, and she was rated a pupil of Hermes, or even his daughter. She appears as a teacher of alchemy . . . She signifies earth, according to Firmicus Maternus, and was equated with Sophia . . . She is . . . the vessel and the matter of good and evil. She is the moon . . ."the One, who art All." (Jung 1970c, CW 14 (14-15))

The wisdom of Isis contains the creator god in the sense that the gods come into power, wane, and die. Isis is the knowledge that the god doesn't know: that his source is his own people and ancestors that projected him into existence as the symbol of the creative power of life. Without the life of nature that flows as the life force within the individuals of his kingdom, he would not be. When he loses power, the Queen of life has to remind him whom he serves and from whence he derives his power: the human, natural world. Isis' wisdom is natural magic. She performs her tricks much like a shaman or witch doctor, who heal but also concoct poisons. Isis makes the poison and she holds the cure.

#### THE EXILE OF THE GODDESSES

Whatever the reasons for Sophia's deletion from religion and history, her exile coincided with a darkening of human consciousness and a diminished sense of responsibility for caring for the earth and humanity. As the stories of the soul become literalized into rigid

dogma, the soul's presence in the world seems to have evaporated. Our institutions, marketplaces, and political arenas have become material expressions of a kind of rigor mortis.

There may be another reason for Sophia's disappearance which does not project blame and responsibility onto misogynist males. The patriarchy and misogyny is real and must not be dismissed or excused given the disastrous consequences for woman, earth, and the future of humanity. I think, however, that the feminine archetype obeys her own law of birth, flowering, decline, death, and regeneration. Just as the moon waxes, wanes, disappears, and then returns to become full again, so too, the archetypal feminine has obeyed her own laws of death and resurrection. For thousands of years, she went underground. Now she is beginning to stir and re-emerge as the creative power and intelligence of the life force, which will awaken and rise again, not as another divine image, but as the potency of the human conscience and vision of community not based upon scapegoating and exclusion. In other words, it is by her own consent that she, like Inanna, descended to the underworld, leaving her kingdom in the hands of men. Classical scholar Jane Harrison revised her earlier view that patriarchal arrogance overthrew the reign of the great goddesses of an earlier era, saying, "It is not so much that Olympian, patriarchal malice, condemns these elder potencies of mother-Earth to eternal Hell, as that they are forced by their own cyclic nature to die, to go below the bosom of earth, that they may rise again. Each and all of them must say with the initiated Orphic: 'I have sunk beneath the bosom of Despoina, Queen of the Underworld.'" (Harrison 1966, 528-9)

\* \* \*

Sophia symbolizes the very antithesis of rigor mortis. She is the missing juice that is required for the revitalization of our learning and yearning for order and meaning. She calls out from her place of exile to remind us that exile is really home. Exile is outside the boxes, outside the world of abstractions, where the heart is alive with vital warmth.

From the point of view of rigor mortis, exile is frightening. From the perspective of rigor mortis, the person who is in exile wears the face of the hag, Hecate. What lies outside the rigidity of our self-constructed prisons is misconstrued and demonized. Sophia lies outside the land of boxes. She is not seen for what she is. She wears the mask of the fearful Lilith, the first wife of Adam who refused to submit to him. The following chapter tells the strange tale of Sophia's shadow side.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **SOPHIA'S OTHER FACE: HECATE AND LILITH**

There is a tendency to portray Sophia as only radiant, light, full of the glory and beauty that is suggested by the figure of heavenly Beatrice when she appears to Dante. The ancient sources reveal a more accurate portrayal of wisdom in the neolithic goddesses, where light and dark, magic and knowledge are united in one image. When the Sophia image is allowed to own its shadow, the earthy sensual aspects do not get split off and demonized. Sophia's other faces--Hecate and Lilith--only look demonic within a denatured, disembodied spirituality.

It is understandable that people do not want their image of spirituality or wisdom to be witch-like or terrifying. Should not wisdom be the very antithesis of demons and evil? If we set up such an opposition, however, and make our good, our gods, and our wisdom be split off from darkness, we repeat the same tragic mistake as Christianity which, by splitting off the dark side, created not only its own devils but an intolerable situation for the psyche. The result is slavery to cultural conditioning under the tyranny of shadow denial and projection. Projection allows me to deny that I have any bad qualities by creating a mask of demonic ugliness that I automatically, with no awareness, force other people to wear. Projection and denial of the shadow lead to neurosis. If unchecked and untreated, these reactions lead to the deadly, destructive collective habits of racism and ethnic hatreds, genocide, and most of the phobias that plague us: fear of homosexuals, misogyny, hatred of the aging and infirm, etc.

Ugliness, darkness, and magic have been demonized by Christian theology and associated with hell, the devil, and damnation. Demonization was a drastic and unfortunate consequence of the Christian political agenda. Wisdom and magic were paired in antiquity. Wisdom was symbolized by the serpent and associated with the goddess and woman. With the Church's control came a repression of the feminine by misogynist theologians; the archetypal feminine was split into a holy white side opposed

to a witch/whore aspect which was linked to heresy and damnation, black magic and sexuality.

Sophia can be thought of as an archetype, a dynamic ordering pattern of the psyche. Archetypes are dual in nature; there is a positive and negative aspect. It might be easier to think of Sophia's negative side if we remember that what appears to be dark is not intrinsically evil, but rather, in shadow. What is outside the ego's agenda is in touch with the rich treasurehouse of the unconscious.

## IMPORTANCE OF THE DARK SOPHIA

Why is it important to look at Sophia's dark faces? Why not "seal forever the door where evil dwells"? For two main reasons: 1) denial of the dark is the cause of much evil; and 2) the dark side is where the power lies.

The decision to identify one characteristic as bad and another good has been the source of much evil. What happens in such a decision is that a split occurs within the person. She decides, for instance, that selfishness is bad and unconditional love is good. So she says, "I will love unconditionally and will no longer be selfish." Selfishness and unselfishness have meaning only in relation to each other. There would be no concept of unselfishness if we were not selfish. The attempt to be only loving results in a denial of our selfish tendencies; then those tendencies can control our behavior from behind without our knowledge. We close off the possibility of authenticity because we cannot then tolerate another person noticing our egotism or asking us about our motives. We participate in a conspiracy of silence that maintains our denial. We then choose as companions those people who are also in denial. And thus we continue to sleep.

We use up valuable energy in creating a barrier to keep out these unwanted elements, to keep them out of our sight and away from the view of others. It becomes easy to get rid of it altogether, and so the mechanism of projection supplies us with a cast of human characters to play the role of bad guy for us: meat-eaters (or vegetarians),

hunters, gays, liberals (or Republicans), pro-Choice, or whatever is currently "out" and "other" to our lifestyle and beliefs.

We have to be selfish or we would not survive. The baby that screams for its milk will die if it is not in tune with its own needs. If baby stops crying because it put Mother's desire for sleep ahead of its own demands, then it would soon waste away. As we grow older and become aware of others' wishes, we learn to temper our selfishness and find that there is happiness in giving to others.

Sometimes it is appropriate to be selfish, maybe in the choice of a career or spouse. If Dad says you are being selfish not to choose to work in the family business, it may be necessary to be "selfish"--it is your life and you have to live with the consequences of your choices. Is it better to conform to someone else's definition of "unselfish" and end up miserable and unproductive or to follow your own path?

If we position ourselves in the space "in between the two," then we are in the place of freedom from compulsion to identify with either. I interpret Sophia's "place" to be here, in this in-between transitional space, where we need to locate ourselves to be authentically human.

The second reason why it is important to acknowledge and investigate the dark side of Sophia is because that is where the power lies. Wisdom is associated with magic. Magic is individual and religion is collective. There is power in religion; but there is also power to act from the source of inspiration and integrity as individuals. What lies outside the collective agenda, whether it be religious or political is the space of suspension, the sphere of magic and daemons, the place of wisdom. Before we examine this claim, let's take a look at what the ancients said about Hecate and Lilith. Much of what we call evil is produced by a one-sided picture of reality. The order we make is our interpretation of reality. It is this interpretation that creates our demons and devils. Interpretation says "this is so" and "that is not so." If only this is true, then "that" becomes a problem. The "that" gets cut loose. Although it may appear to be safer and more efficient to deny, repress, and hide what is contrary to the prevailing order, in the long run it is dangerous, antithetical to relationship, and leads to dysfunction, dis-ease, and ignorance. Becoming

acquainted with the "that" leads to the capacity to relate to the shadow, to assimilate what has become dehumanized.

The status quo rests upon the ashes of fallen gods and devalued cultures. The status quo alone does not give a complete picture. The person who seeks the whole truth will find it in the ashes. What is cast out has power. Light shines beneath the crumbs on wisdom's path.

## HECATE

Hecate is a Triple Moon Goddess, most affiliated with the dark half of the Moon (the 'real' moon because it is all dark, not shining with the reflected light of the sun). She is not associated with the full moon, since the light comes from the sun. (Artemis represents the Full Moon; Selene, the Moon in various phases; and Hecate, the dark face of the New Moon.) The name Hecate means "'the distant or remote one,' and she was seen as the protectress of remote places, a guardian of roads and byways." (McLean 1989, 66-7) She appears fierce like Kali, and is often depicted with three heads and six arms bearing three torches. Her sacred symbols are the Key symbolizing her guardianship of the Underworld; the Scourge, revealing her punishing aspect and her role of herding the ghosts in the Underworld; and the Dagger, symbol of her ritual power, which later became the Athame of the 'witches.' (McLean 1989, 67-8) She, like Hermes, conveys souls to the Underworld.

Hecate has been called Queen of the Night and Lady of the Underworld. She is a fearful figure associated with the moon, garbage, and the dog. She snarls and howls and is associated with fate. She is mother of witches and the death aspect of the Triple Moon-goddess.

Hecate is worshipped at the crossroads. Her faces turned in three directions. Hermes was also worshipped at the crossroads. Hermes is the messenger between worlds. Both Hecate and Hermes point to boundaries and their successful crossing. Figures of

Hecateia were set up where three roads met, the intersection of which was particularly sacred to Hecate. Travelers sacrificed to her for protection.

According to Robert Graves, Hecate is a Lilith figure. She had children, daughters who were "filthy demons" called Empusae. They had the haunches of an ass and they wore brazen slippers. Some said they had one ass leg and one brazen leg. Their job was to frighten travelers, but if the traveler insulted them they would shriek and fly away. Empusae disguise themselves as bitches, cows, or beautiful maidens who lie with men by night or during their midday nap, sucking their vital forces until they die. Hecate also wore the brazen sandal. This was a golden sandal belonging to Aphrodite. Graves notes that the transformation of her demon daughters into beautiful maidens or cows refers to Hecate's identity with Aphrodite and Hera. Hecate was the "real ruler of Tartarus." (Graves 1960, 189-90) According to New World Dictionary, Tartarus refers to either Hades or the infernal abyss below Hades where Zeus hurled the rebel Titans. If Tartarus is the abyss that received the fallen gods of the previous era, and Hecate is "real ruler," then it is not so hard to see that Hecate represents what has been rejected and demonized.

Figures of Hecate are usually triune, such as a column with three maidens dancing around it, who represent the three phases of the moon. In a Hekateion relief at Budapest, a great crescent rests on the head. These maidens belong to earth; one holds a coiled snake. They are related to the Horae, the seasons of the moon. These in turn are related to earlier figures, also called Horae, that dance around the old fertility-pillar and are the seasons of Earth's fertility. (Harrison, Themis, 408)

Figures such as these show that Hecate was not always considered demonic. In fact, she was the central figure in celebrations held by women to honor the Mother, Rearer of Children. It celebrated those children born of the same mothers. These festivals were held at the crossroads. No men were allowed to be present. Legend says that Homer was sailing to Greece and stopped at Samos. He chanced upon a celebration of the Apatouria. He "lighted on the women who were sacrificing at the crossways to Kourotophos {"rearer of sons"}. And the priestess looked at him in anger, and said to him, 'Man, begone from the sanctities.'" (Harrison 1966, 498-9) After patriarchy took

over the rites and festivals belonging to the matrilinear order of society, the Apatouria became the festival of those who had the same fathers. (Harrison 1966, 498)

A clue as to why Hecate was demonized is found in The Myth of the Goddess, by Anne Baring and Jules Cashford:

It seems as though the original goddess of the moon contained both the light and dark aspects in one whole, and this sense of a totality underlies these images of Artemis but is no longer fully present. It is as if the dark moon has now split off from its original unity and has taken on a separate personality as Hecate, in common with the Iron Age tendency for the dark aspect to separate from the cyclical pattern and come to stand against the light. By Christian times Hecate was looked on as very menacing, though in the Homeric 'Hymn to Demeter' she is helpful to Demeter--'tender hearted'--and the only one who heard Persephone raped into the underworld. (Baring and Cashford 1991, 328-9)

Kerenyi sees Hecate as a "second Demeter" because of her intimate association with Demeter and Persephone in the drama of Persephone's abduction by Hades into the underworld. Hecate is in her cave when the sun sees the seduction. All she hears are the cries of the seduced. She meets Demeter "with a light in her hand" and they both go to seek the sun, the eye-witness. After the reunion between mother and daughter, Hecate and Persephone are as inseparable as Persephone and Demeter. Gaia, the Earth-Mother not only has no connection with Demeter, she is the accomplice of the rapist Hades. (Jung and Kerenyi 1949, 153-4)

Hecate's close association with Demeter and Persephone creates a triad: Mother, Daughter, and moon-goddess Hecate. They are often confused because the torch is an attribute of each of them. Phosphoros is an epithet applied many times to Hecate. She is also explicitly called "bringer of light:" "One torch, two torches carried aloft by Hecate, three torches in a row, or the 'crossed torch' with four lights, all these occur as attributes of both Demeter and Persephone." (Jung and Kerenyi 1949, 154)

Kerenyi concludes that the Greeks experienced Hecate as a goddess "who united in herself affinities with the moon, a Demetrian nature, and Kore-like characteristics--not only of Persephone but of Artemis as well. She was invoked as the daughter of Demeter and the daughter of Leto. Hecate and Artemis, Trivia {this means three-fold} and Diana

are used so often as equivalent names that we cannot regard this as wholly groundless. .  
." (Jung and Kerenyi 1949, 155-6)

Kerenyi interprets Hecate's triplicity as a reminder that every agenda leaves a whole lot of life outside of it, in the underworld: ". . . Hecate, as Mistress of the Spirits, warned the Greeks that a threefold division would necessarily leave, side by side with the ordered world of Zeus, a chaotic region in which the amorphousness of the primitive world could live on as the underworld." (Jung and Kerenyi 1949, 157)

From a Jungian perspective, in other words, the orderly Apollinian interpretation of life--the Greek patriarchal world view--was based on the rejection of something left behind. Hecate is the image of our emotional reaction at crossing the boundaries of our world view. Kerenyi reminds us that every world view is connected to what it leaves out, what it discards, what it forgets, what it trashes. This connection is personified as Hecate. It is negative because what is trashed or forgotten does not belong to the current world view, a perspective limited to the status quo.

To sum up: every world view, such as the patriarchal Greek interpretation of man and reality symbolized by the male-dominated, Zeus-run pantheon, is a limitation. The world view is simply one interpretation out of many possible ones. It is a way of making sense or ordering the vast complex mystery of the givenness of the world and the infinity of cosmos. The world view says "This is god. This is right. That is wrong. This is how the world came to be. This is who man is and this is who woman is." And--last but most important--"These are the enemies." The enemies are what does not fit into the prevailing paradigm. During the switch from matrilinear to patriarchal social ordering, the female deities and Mother goddesses became the enemy of the new order which was male-dominated. Literature and art are filled with images and texts that describe the defeat of the female-centered world view by the new, aggressive male gods. One gets the feeling that the take-over thrived in the context of battles and enemy-making. The old goddess religions often became the target of hostile take-over.

If we blame the patriarchy, the tyranny of male dominance, for suppressing the power of the feminine, then we give it too much power over life, over the order that appears to rule the cosmos and natural cycles of death and rebirth. The feminine--by

virtue of its proximity to this natural order--willingly submits to its own departure. The feminine chooses to align itself with cyclic fate, descending to the Underworld on its own volition. (In the Inanna myth, however, the Queen orders her servant, who remains above, to come and get her if she stays too long.)

Harrison reminds us that in the age of Olympians, there was a misunderstanding--a failure to remember--that life is cyclic, that rebirth follows death. She says that to the orthodox (those who interpret life and literature literally), life is either-or, either good or bad, right or wrong, useless or fulfilling. Pluto, the Erinyes, Hecate were all "bad" because of their association with the underworld.

Each and all must be born anew with the New Birth of the world. Such is the Way. . . . beneath the palace of Plouton, are the Erinyes with snakes in their hair. But they are not ministers of Vengeance. [They are called] (Eu)menides, and near them, the goddesses of new life, is a little upspringing tree. Plouton himself is not the sullen terror of the underworld, he is the Wealth that rises up from the Earth in spring. Hecate, with her torches, is not the spectre of the night, she is the life-giving moon that waxes and wanes, the very spirit of palingenesia. {palingenesia means rebirth, regeneration, metempsychosis} (Harrison 1966, 528-9)

The earlier interpretation of reality that was preserved in the Mysteries of Eleusis and personified as the great moon goddesses was that life is cyclical. Humanity, like the world of vegetation, starts as a seed, grows to fruition, and dies, only to be reborn in the Spring. Winter is temporary; so is death. Rebirth follows death as certainly as Spring follows winter. Birth and death are temporary phases within the ceaseless flow of change that is life.

To sum up Hecate's meaning in terms of wisdom, I would say that a person needs to be able to honor the Hecate within. Hecate is the power of the boundary. Hecate is the gold inside the trash. Whatever the prevailing agenda does not include is trashed and that is where the power lies, the treasure that is soul. To honor Hecate means the capacity to hear the cries of Persephone, the part of the soul that has been abducted by Hades. Hecate is what is remote or distant from the present social conditioning, so wisdom is the ability to connect with what is outside the current world view. Wisdom is the antithesis of one-sidedness. But to recover what is missing is a journey which requires leaving the safety

of the prevailing world view. When an Athenian left Athens he had to pray to Hecate for safe passage. In Greece, your identity was your citizenship in a city state. When you left your native city, you no longer had an identity; you had no rights and no protection. You were in exile.

To leave Athens is to leave behind our socially conditioned identity. We leave this collective identity when we seek understanding, when we are on the path of Sophia, the inquiry into the meaning of life and the purpose of existence. Sophia is the one whose face is dark as well as light. The dark face does not become light in the sense that its real nature is light, any more than the real moon is light and not dark. This misunderstanding is responsible for the demonization of the dark side of life. The dark side is real--but temporary. It must be faced. There are real transitions; real changes, and real killings and deaths. But these deaths do not have to be interpreted with single vision, as literal. What we need to kill is the prevailing world view--which itself is not human when it no longer serves life. When we fail to understand that there is a difference between what is alive and what is a thought construct, then the consequences are literally killing and mayhem and collective madness.

When we leave Athens behind, we acknowledge Hecate in order to be able to handle the collective pressure on us to stay behind. Embracing the energy of Hecate helps us handle our fear of leaving. We do not conquer fear, we put it in its place so that it does not control us. Crossroads were magical places because they always symbolized choices. (Walker 1988) We are not free until we leave the prison of social conditioning. This does not mean that we cannot return; but we are not free to become ourselves, to develop our potential as human beings if we remain only within the boundaries of collectively-determined identity.

It is interesting that the word "heretic" comes from the Greek word hairetikos, meaning "able to choose." (Deikman 1994, 141). From the point of view of the prevailing world view, the one who leaves is a heretic. Heretics came into being with the one-sided dominion of Christianity. There is no such concept in Judaism or in the pagan or Greek world. With Paul's interpretation of Christ gaining control of the minds of the Christian world, there came to be a rigid world view that polarized good and evil, male and female,

body and soul, man and nature, god and Satan, with a demonization of one side of the polarity. A person who refuses to participate in this polarization is often seen as a threat. She is associated with the evil side of the split and gets labeled a heretic with all the unfortunate consequences.

To remember what is left out is the path of Sophia, but it is a dangerous route. To acquire the vision that is wisdom is to follow the torch of Hecate, to follow the phosphorous into the underbelly of our one-sided world view.

## LILITH

Lilith is Sophia's Hebrew shadow, the Semitic version of Hecate. Primal Lilith, feral first wife of Adam, refused to be subordinate to Adam. "Why should I lie beneath you," she asked, "when I am your equal since both of us were created from dust?" Adam insisted that he be on top when they had sex; Lilith considered this position demeaning and she refused. When Adam tried to force her, Lilith flew away to the Red Sea, uttering the secret name of God. The Red Sea was the home of lascivious demons. Here she indulged her need for endless sex and bore more than 100 demons per day.

God did not like this situation, so he sent three angels to bring her back: Senoy, Sansenoy and Semangelof. They found her in the same waters that later drowned the Egyptians. She refused to return and they threatened to drown her. She argued that she was made "in order to weaken the babes." She had power over male babies until they were circumcised and over the girls until the twentieth day.

She swore to them to let her stay, and promised to allow 100 of her children to die each day. She also promised to do no harm to any babies that carried the name or image of the three angels. That is why the names Senoy, Sansenoy, and Semangelof are found on amulets hung around the necks of newborns. When Lilith sees the names, she remembers her oath and leaves the baby alone. (Patai 1967, 210)

God had to create a new wife for Adam, one who would be subordinate to him.

Lilith went on bothering Adam for the next 130 years and male spirits went after Eve. The succubae coupled with Adam and Eve while they slept and bore hosts of demons that became the plagues of mankind. She became the bride of Samael the demon King, Queen of Zemargad and Sheba, and finally ended up as God's consort during the Kabalistic age. As Satan's companion, her realm was seductive and deadly and beyond the reach of God. (Patai 1967, 271)

Lilith did not die because she was not present in the Garden of Eden for the Fall and its penalties. She lives forever as the demonic erotic night spirit who drains men of their vital fluids. Her story became confused with the story of Eve. There seems to be a recognition of the original wholeness of the Eve-Lilith figure that was split by a terrified, woman-hating succession of theologians, rabbis, clerics, and monks. "The story of Lilith thus seems to embody the deepest male fears of impotence, weakness, and isolation in the face of unfettered female sexuality, assertiveness, and independence." (Phillips 1984, 39)

Where did she come from, this wild woman who cannot be tolerated in the male world? Her name might be derived from Lillitu, the Canaanite wind spirit. (Phillips 1984, 39-40) Lil was a Sumero-Akkadian word that meant "dust-storm" or "dust-cloud", a term applied to ghosts. They looked like a dust-cloud and their food was the dust of the earth. In the Semitic language lilatu was the "handmaid of a ghost", but this soon became confounded with the word for "night", layil, and became a word of terror, meaning a night-demon. So Lilith drew all the associations of death and fear. (Baring and Cashford 1991, 510)

In the Middle East, the goddess Astarte was called Lilith, meaning the lily. The lily was sacred to Astarte. Lilith may come from the Sumero-Babylonian lilu, a lotus. The lily symbolized the miraculous impregnation of the virgin Goddess. (Walker 1988, 428, entry "lily") The lotus has been the symbol of the female generative power. The lotus is the creative matrix of Nature, the symbol of the archetypal feminine that gave birth to the sun god as Lotus Goddess and swallowed him again in a cycle of death and rebirth. The name Lilith is derived from the lilu, or lotus. She was most likely the same as India's Mother Kali, to whom the lotus was also sacred. In fact, Kali was one of Lilith's other names. (Walker 1988, 429, entry "lotus")

Lilith appears in the third millennium B.C.E. in a Sumerian text that says that the father of the hero Gilgamesh was a Lillu-demon, a vampire. She is mentioned only once in the entire Bible in a prophecy that states that when the land is turned into a wilderness on the day of Yahweh's vengeance, 'the satyr shall cry to his fellow; the screech owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest.' (Isaiah 34:14). "Inanna and Ishtar were both called 'Divine Lady Owl' (Nin-ninna and Kilili) which may account for being called a screech owl." (Baring and Cashford 1991, 510)

Although only mentioned once in the Bible, Lilith was so well-known in 8th century B.C.E. Israel that everyone was afraid of her. Sages wrote about her dangerous doings in the Talmud and the people drew sketches of her on bowls. One such drawing depicted her "naked, with long, loose hair, pointed breasts, no wings, strongly-marked genitals, and chained ankles." (Patai 1967, 212) Men were warned not to sleep alone in a house at night because the Liliths (there were more than one) would conceive demons from their nocturnal emissions. There were also male Lili-s who mated with the women while they slept. The Liliths were jealous of married couples and hated the children conceived in ordinary human wedlock. They would attack the little children, suck their blood, and strangle them. It was the Lilith that caused barrenness, miscarriages, or complications during pregnancy and delivery. (Patai 1967, 212)

Who was this over-sexed independent demon-mother who knew the magic secret name of the one male God (and therefore his undoing)? Raphael Patai made a startling discovery: she looked exactly like the Cherubim, a pair of winged protective female figures which shielded the Ark in the Holy of Holies in the Solomonic Temple. Although the Cherubim were "graven images" and such images were condemned by Hebrew law, the figures were a prominent part of Temple ritual until the end of the Second Jewish Commonwealth (70 C.E.). The last version of the Cherubim depicted a man and a woman in sexual embrace. This even shocked the pagans when they finally had a chance to see it; yet there is not one mention in the entire Hebrew-Jewish literature which could be construed as a condemnation of the cherubim. (Patai 1967, 212)

Why the demonization of Lilith? Why the terrible split of what ought to be whole and complete, Eve and her shadow? With the take-over by patriarchy of the old

matrilinear patterns, the experience of life as cyclical gave way to a one-sided view of life which only accepted the light and rejected darkness and death. What appears to be dark--the end of life, death, decay--in a culture which honors the natural cycles of death and rebirth, is not dark at all, but one step in a series of phases of life. There can be no return of the light of the moon unless it wanes into darkness. The refusal to accept the dark side has led to a ferocious psychosis in the Western psyche, brought about by the misinterpretation of the Eden myth, its literalization and misuse by misogynist patriarchs in Judaism and Christianity.

This Genesis picture has provided Western Christianity with an awful dualism; it gives us a picture of a state of Edenic spiritual perfection, from the joys of which we have fallen through our sexual nature, via the temptation of Eve. The patriarchs of Judaism so greatly feared the power of the feminine that they wove this myth which has brought so much misery to humankind. By tainting the relationship of the sexes as unspiritual and 'earthly' in opposition to a supposed 'heavenly' spirituality, and by particularly picturing this as having occurred through the wiles of the woman facet, they blamed the figure of Eve for the 'Fall.' The consequence of this has been the casting out of women from any significant participation in the spiritual life of Western humanity. Indeed, many women have, over the millennia, been ruthlessly persecuted for intruding upon this cherished male preserve. (McLean 1989, 95-96) (emphasis mine)

Robert Graves reminds us that the creation of demons and bogeys are "invariably the reduced gods or priests of a superseded religion." (Graves 1966, 219) Male fear of female power, portrayed as the great wisdom goddesses, was supported not only by religious fables that took hold of the public imagination but also in the myths and legends of non-Semitic civilizations in the Near East. Not just in Judaism but in the early Greek religion, the old Mother goddess cults of Crete and Mycenea were taken over by the Olympian deities. The very basis of Western civilization came from Greece and the Homeric epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey. The ten years' war between Greece and Trojans was the outcome of a beauty contest between the three aspects of the Goddess represented by Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite. Each bribed Paris but Aphrodite won, because she promised the judge, Paris, the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen, who happened to already be married. Adam McLean points out that the three belong

together, as each aspect is a phase of the other; instead, Western culture originated in this terrible split, with only the Aphrodite aspect surviving, with all its concomitant jealousy, strife, and bitterness:

Thus we see that a reduction of the archetypal femininity to a single dimension of sexual attraction leads to polarization in the masculine sphere; eventually two rival polarized groups battle against each other for possession of the feminine. We can recognize how the Judgement of Paris marked the beginning impulse of patriarchy and the strife and polarization it brought into social relationships. . . . Through the Judgement of Paris, which still occurs in our souls today, one facet of the feminine is elevated to a superior position and the other two facets are downgraded. In this way men often deny themselves a true and complete experience of the feminine, and women are forced to work with this one current in the human soul. (McLean 1989, 76-77)

## Part II: Individual Exile and the Vital Soul

### CHAPTER 4

#### **THE COUNTERFEIT VITAL: A BOX OF OUR OWN MAKING**

. . . despite all its beauty and moderation, (the early Greek's) entire existence rested on a hidden substratum of suffering and of knowledge, revealed to him by the Dionysian. And behold: Apollo could not live without Dionysus! the 'titanic' and the 'barbaric' were in the last analysis as necessary as the Apollinian. (Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," in Nietzsche 1968, 46)

There are fundamentally two currents in human existence, the philosophers tell us. One current is the tendency to fix reality into order and meaning, to interpret reality. The capacity of human awareness to notice the world--to register it, reflect upon it and remember it--is the revelation of both the cosmic and essentially human nature of consciousness. It is that which makes us human.

When an interpretation of reality is accepted by a culture, it tends to stay and be passed on to future generations. This preservation gives birth to civilization and is the source of the integrity of the tribe or community: providing meaning and order; a sense of purpose; connection to the world; and protection in the encounter of the individual with the mysterious and dangerous passages of human life--birth, puberty, marriage, and death. Preservation of interpretation insures the survival and continuity of the tribe and its future generations.

The second current is not an opposite to the first in the way we think of opposites such as male and female, night and day. The second current stands not apart from the first, but is more like the vital context out of which the order is carved. This current may

be the direct experience of nature's raw power of the life force, of dissolution, destruction, as well as mystical states of identity with nature, gods, or others.

Nietzsche called these two currents the Apollinian and Dionysian. Plato called them the Same and the Other. Before Plato, philosophers named them One and Many, Limit and Limitless, Bound and Infinite, Sameness and Difference. In religion and mythology, they are encountered and personified in myth. In psychology, the first current would be called the conscious side of the personality; the second, the unconscious.

These two streams cannot be juxtaposed like two equal opposites. The Apollonic order-making tendency is the one that makes boundaries, and the other stream either takes them away or is their source, or else is that fringe area of movement, growth and change which recedes from and travels beyond the edges of ordinary consciousness, drifting out, beyond and away, unraveling and dismantling the structures of interpretation. Were we to make the second current an equally defined opposite to the first, we would be making it just another (defined) category, a product of the first, therefore the same as the first or its image.

The cultural interpretation of reality in Western civilization (particularly in America) is no longer nourishing to life. It has been preserved long past its capacity to promote the health and well-being of its members. Biologists and experts in various fields have warned us repeatedly that humanity is on a collision course with nature. We are racing "ahead" to our own destruction, oblivious to the irreparable damage done to the Earth, to the very source of our survival. Consumerism, greed, exploitation, overpopulation, proliferation of nuclear weapons--all the instruments of our own annihilation--are to a certain extent consequences of beliefs about humanity, nature, and reality. These beliefs are interpretations that have somehow remained entrenched for thousands of years, protected by religious or cultural dogma: that nature is dead matter, that nature is to be ruled and exploited for man's benefit, that woman's purpose is to bear children, etc. Our noblest efforts to counteract the habits of destruction get devoured by the vast machine or beast of past habit that mows down everything in its path. These habits are basically thought or belief coagulated and stuck, and are so much a part of our

identity as to be virtually unquestioned. Our survival depends upon our capacity to wake up and begin questioning these habits of mind.

I observed firsthand how this process happens: I was a member of a group that studied philosophy and comparative religion for over 15 years. I watched how order-making, interpretation, starts out fresh--truly Apollinian in its beauty and harmony--and then becomes coagulated as time passes. I witnessed how people make an entity out of a set of claims, turn them into beliefs, and then attach themselves to this entity. Because no one valued or encouraged inquiry into the assumptions that bound the group together in shared belief, the entity became stronger and more important than the individuals. People did not make a continuous effort to re-examine and question these beliefs; consequently, the initial claims preserved themselves and grew stronger, forming a rather well-defined image or entity. This entity, what psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls a "meme" (Richard Dawkins' term), grew stronger and preserved itself--protected by silence and the repression of inquiry, questioning, and genuine dialogue. The meme is a thought structure; it became like an object of worship, what would be called an idol in religious terminology. It became more important than our shared humanity. Others have called these thought-structures entities or elementals; Paul and I called this collective entity the "dragon."

There are several issues related to these currents. The first is understanding the nature of these two currents in so far as they are rooted in thinking. Reality, our experience of nature and the world, is grasped by thought. Reality is an interpretation--in so far as we talk about it, reflect upon it, remember it. It is collective--shared by our civilization, passed down generation to generation. It is the order or sense we make of the world--as it is taught to us by adults and teachers as we grow up.

The second issue is understanding that underneath every socially constructed interpretation, every institutionalized norm, lies an underbelly, a realm of "suffering and knowledge," the Dionysian. Jung would call this realm the shadow, the unconscious. It contains the past, what has been left behind, forgotten, repressed, denied, or excluded in the march of "progress" of a culture: progress meaning its preservation of itself. According to Jung, the shadow holds our future.

The third topic is understanding how the collective interpretation is preserved: what does this cultural continuity look like, how might we analyze it and the consequences for the individual? What is the way in which the individual relates to this interpretation in terms of identity, creativity, knowledge, and self-reflection? The preservation of the status quo is symbolized in many cultures by the dragon.

A related issue is the jewel held by the dragon. This jewel represents that aspect of ourselves that is outside of the cultural interpretation, yet paradoxically held tight by it. This is our vital soul, named and described in every major culture, East and West. It is called the mother-given soul, or embodied soul, it is named in Egyptian, the ka; in Chinese, the p'o soul; in Greek, the daemon (the highest aspect of psyche); in Rome, the genius. It is associated with the life force within the body: sexuality, genius, creativity, great heat and ardor, poetic inspiration, fury. It is associated with, and pictured as, the serpent. (The vital will be discussed in chapter 6.)

The Western interpretation of reality has been preserved past its usefulness; it has become a threat to human existence. The order which once gave meaning has become a box, a coffin.

What is the nature of this threat and how is it perpetuating itself at the expense of human well-being? The cultural interpretation of reality consists of statements that become accepted and remain virtually unquestioned: "In order to succeed, one must go to college"; "The purpose of education is to compete in the global market"; "Science (or technology) will solve humankind's problems"; "Nature is dead matter." I call these the "boxes." The box phenomenon has also been called the "machine" and the "system" by other writers. The box is something like and unlike the Apollinic. The initial order-making that we do as individuals, that become our cultural institutions, is originally vital and meaningful, infused with human consciousness and vitality. It serves and enhances human well-being. The original Apollonic tendency is at the basis of harmony, music, proportion. It is kosmos in its meaning as ornament, a construction which is at once

proper placement, a thing of beauty where parts are related to the whole, and the sense of everything being in its own spot, exhibiting relatedness.

If enough time passes, however, without creative transformation from questioning individuals, our cultural interpretations--reality as we know it--can begin to get stale and not provide the nourishment that they once did. In fact, they degenerate into an entity that seeks to preserve itself at the cost of human well-being. That is the state of affairs today in American society.

Much--if not all--of social interaction occurs within the confines of the boxes. Examples of such social boxes are some fanatical Christian cults, which have very sharply defined boundaries in which truth is equated with a literal interpretation of the preferred translation of the Bible. Another less extreme example is the education system, which also has a rather clearly defined territory in which intelligence is equated with a score on a test and a child is interpreted almost exclusively as a student, her success determined by her ability to compete, obey, conform to expectations, and score well on tests. A limited number of aptitudes are encouraged: academic success, athletic ability, and involvement in extracurricular activities sanctioned by the prevailing extroverted values: school governance committees, athletics, and clubs. The very activities that would open air vents on the box by allowing children freedom of expression and movement--art, dance, singing, nature hikes, field trips, drama--are being deleted from the curriculum, considered unimportant, "fringe." As a result, those children who do not fit the academic mold, who are introverted, artistic, who are the healers and nature lovers, often are marginalized. They become the "misfits" and "losers": labels created by a system that cannot tolerate complexity, creativity, and self-expression.

Boxes eventually stiffen into cages or coffins, becoming destructive or parasitical to the very people they were designed to help. Boxes get more closed, increasingly self-referential. To be closed means that nothing of the outside can get in. Outside is where friendship and concern live. Nature is outside, where organic processes fertilize and decompose and return to the earth that which is rotting. Self-referential means that there is no relationship. Relationship requires difference, twoness, variety. Self-referential is singular and non-relational, like a dysfunctional family in which all the members

conspire to keep out the world through denial and repression. The danger of living in a box is that the foundational assumptions of the world view it circumscribes are rarely questioned. When the system is structured by economic concerns or the needs of the system itself for obedience and conformity so it can function smoothly, then a monstrous situation is born: individual human beings are forming identities based upon an inhuman structure!

Not only do various cultural institutions such as education, law, and medicine become self-enclosed and dangerous to our health, but some thinkers have spotted a giant-size box whose proportions have grown so great as to contain all the smaller boxes within itself. Charles A. Reich, in his book, Opposing the System, gives a chilling account of how both public and economic government have combined into a vast machine that controls our lives in America: "The invisible system that governs us has no name. It . . . has escaped all traditional limits and controls. It has circumvented the Constitution, nullified democracy, and overridden the free market. It usurps our powers and dominates our lives. Yet we cannot see it or describe it. It is new to human history. It is immensely powerful but without brakes, indifferent to the effect of its actions on human beings. . . . The System is a merger of governmental, corporate, and media power into a managerial entity more powerful by reason of technology, organization, and control of livelihood than any previously known form of rule. . . . we feel like terrified passengers on a careening, off-course airliner or train." (Reich 1995, 16-17)

Tom Frank, editor of The Baffler Magazine, stated during a Brecht Forum in New York City recently that the entire advertising industry, along with corporate America and the media, form a self-enclosed balloon or circle, one in which there is only the appearance of dissent, but where self-critique is not only not permitted but actively repressed.

This machine-like system--that devours all attempts to question it, to probe it, to get it to change to accommodate human well-being--has been noticed and written about throughout the ages by poets, thinkers, and visionaries. One of the most urgent responsibilities of persons who claim to be on a spiritual path, is to wake up and recognize the insidious, pervasive mechanism that keeps this machine in place, intact,

powerful, usurping authentic human relationship. All Americans need to awaken to the fact that each of us, by merely living here, are contributing to this machine to the extent that we remain unconscious of it, allowing it to go on unchecked, unexamined, unpenetrated by human integrity and questioning.

The "system" or machine has been identified as the beast it is; however, that which causes it has not. Some blame economics, apathy, breakdown of family, growing poverty, crime, greed, etc. A few have come close to what I think is the root cause: thinking that has come but not gone; thinking that has turned into coagulated thought, gone unconscious into our very identity, becoming part of who we take ourselves to be. The machine takes over whenever power is in the grip of non-human thought structures, yet supported blindly by greed, ambition, and the need for control, dominance, status, security.

The beast-like, inhuman quality of the machine is also associated with the symbol of the dragon. Every civilization East and West has dragons roaming about its mythology. The jewel that the dragon holds is our humanity, that part of ourself which the culture enslaves in order to perpetuate itself. When a culture is life-enhancing, the dragon is friendly and we do not fight it, as is the case with the dragons of the East. The task of the West, however, seems to involve a battle with the dragon, a quest to wrest the jewel from its clutches, or to slay it.

Our job is to recover our humanity from the grip of its executioner. If we simply sleep, letting the corporate-media machine determine our desires and needs, then our hard-won consciousness will be snuffed out in the belly of the whale. Our most perceptive thinkers and poets have warned us repeatedly now and in past ages that if the machine is allowed to lurch forward, unguided by human integrity, that the human race will not only go down, but go down in a miserable, bloody, cruel self-destruction, taking down with it the beauty around us and rending the fragile complex web of organisms that is the body of our exquisite earth.

The system is indeed a beast, and the beast is large and extensive. Its breathing is the very atmosphere we live in. To stop this beast from destroying humanity and the earth

requires the ability to recognize its life, its breathing, in its small everyday dimensions. But this requires much courage.

The dragon sleeps--until you make a move to regain the treasure of your humanity through exposing it. How? By standing in your truth, by speaking or acting with honesty, integrity, by questioning or whistle-blowing. The boxes, balloons, self-referential enclosures that constitute daily life in America do not want to be disturbed. The dragon lives off millions of people's vital energy (their desires, needs, and fears). Not only does it want to continue its vast sleep, but if it is roused, it gets angry because you are leaving, and that deprives it of some of the vital energy that it requires in order to perpetuate it. Everything--media, interpersonal conversations, advertising, schooling, medicine, law, businesses, universities--conspires to keep us from looking at the beast. Why? To preserve the status quo intact, unmoving--and inhuman.

Arthur Deikman describes this pervasive conspiracy in his book, The Wrong Way Home. He gives a frightening account of the contradictions between stated ideals and practice in spiritual groups, corporations, and government. He demonstrates the insidious way in which authoritarian, cult-like behavior is the norm in the highest echelons of world power. He writes about journalist Craig Karpel, who gained access to the 1980 Bilderberg Meeting, a summit conference of the West's power elite who gather once a year to deal with urgent problems facing the U.S. and Europe. Karpel felt that this group is probably the most powerful in the world, yet what he saw shocked him to his core. He observed that these men (there were apparently no women present)--David Rockefeller, Henry Kissinger, McGeorge Bundy, Helmut Kohl, Helmut Schmidt, Lord Home, along with a hundred other leaders in government, banking, media and industry--were not leaders at all, but managers devoted to the status quo and their own self-preservation. Comparing the experience to Dorothy discovering the little man behind the big microphone in Oz, he said he felt just like he was on a jetliner. Going into the cockpit, he discovers there is no one there:

The night is dark. A howling storm lies ahead. You descend to the main cabin.  
The dinner service has been concluded. . . . The movie is about to begin . . .

And so the secret, the hideous grisly secret . . . is revealed. There's nobody at the controls, folks. We're flying blind. Let's hope there's foam on the runway,

friends and neighbors, 'cause we're coming in on a wing and a prayer. (Deikman 1994, 74)

Indeed, there is no one at the helm. No god, no scientific theory or technological wonder, no karmic exit, no Pleiedian rescue, no second coming, no celestial guarantees. Look around and what do we see? Any saviors? Of course not. We have each other. Period. According to Deikman, it is belief in such saviors that reveals the extent to which we remain infantile, identified with a childish faith in the big parent who will rescue us and save us from disaster. The issue is not whether God exists, but to recognize that our survival depends not upon our belief systems but upon our capacity to regain order and significance based on our shared humanity.

The point is to wake ourselves up, one by one, and realize that instead of turning our attention to gods, gurus, chanting, and belief systems, that it is essential that we turn to each other. Turn--but not to unconditionally love, but rather to start asking the question no one is asking: "What ails us?" We turn to each other "in shared helplessness" because we have sucked the milk out of our cherished beliefs and the breast is dried up. It is time to be weaned of that which has kept us dozing.

We have created a vicious circle: we live in a collective cesspool created by human ignorance; we turn away from it, desperately seeking to free ourselves from the danger and stupidity around us. We relate to our gods because to encounter the beast of our own creation is too horrible. The beast we created is our interpretations of reality that now own us, that now dictate to us what to do and whom to serve. The beast is what remains after we have created something worthwhile, like mandatory public education at the turn of this century. We create a system to serve human well-being and then it takes on a life of its own and seeks to preserve itself at the expense of those whom it should be serving.

In his book The Evolving Self, Csikszentmihalyi describes how these beast-like entities, the memes, require our attention, our vital, for their continued survival:

Memes come into being when the human nervous system reacts to an experience, and codes it in a form that can be communicated to others. At the moment of its

creation, the meme is part of a conscious process directed by human intentionality. But immediately after a meme has come into existence, it begins to react with and transform the consciousness of its creator, and that of other human beings who come into contact with it. . . .What if the survival of our genes is most threatened not so much by other biological organisms but by information contained in memes? . . . It is possible that one of the most dangerous illusions we must learn to see through is the belief that the thoughts we think of and the things we make are under our control, that we can manipulate them at will. The evidence seems to suggest the contrary. The information we generate has a life of its own, and its existence is sometimes symbiotic, sometimes parasitic, relative to ours. . . . Memes require only our minds to feed on, and they will replicate images of themselves in consciousness. (Csikszentmihalyi 1993, 120-22) (emphasis mine)

Mary Shelley, in her classic Frankenstein, wrote about what happens when the brilliant scientific enterprise, which begins with a desire to help mankind, instead unleashes upon the world a monster which seeks to devour its creator. The monster in fact only wanted attention and love--wanted to be part of the human world--but the scientist who created it was too revolted and afraid of what he had done, so they chased each other to the ends of the world in a never ending, self-referential circle of murder and madness.

We have to humanize the boxes: we have to mingle human concern, unite our vital with our intellectual constructions. We need to penetrate the thick crusts of our world views, because they are killing us--and through us, the earth's fragile ecosystem.

Our survival may very well depend upon our ability to take control of the helm: to begin to identify the extent to which the cockpit is indeed empty. There is no one home: the machine is non-human, but has a life of its own which feeds the power elite of the world. The machine is nothing but a dehumanized agenda. The agenda is a defined intention; intention is constructed of thought, belief, interpretation. When belief or agenda is held to be more important than human well-being, a monster is being bred and nourished and humanity is being sacrificed to it. What took place in earliest antiquity--the sacrifice of blood to gods--takes place just as extensively today, only at the subtle level. People give over their vitality, will, ambition, desire to the boxes. It's like a financial transaction: you invest your mind in this belief system--you feed it and give it life. In

exchange, you get all these perks: an identity, a big group of people to socialize with, a laundry list of "truths"--and last but not least--an enemy.

The path of Sophia shows that there is a path of gnosis that begins by awareness of the underbelly of our institutional boxes, the substratum of Dionysus. No matter how pure and noble their original purpose might have been, that purpose must be continually questioned and reexamined in the light of the passage of time by the individuals who participate in its ongoing life. Sophia's circuit spirals in and out of knowledge of these boxes, shaking us awake like Isis' sistrum disturbing the coagulated thought personified as Typhon. The most exciting spiritual adventure that a person can undertake is to learn how to quietly take a hike outside the box, look back, taking stock of the new place you have entered, because this is the place of tabu, of holiness, this is the place of other dimensions where you run the risk of being scapegoated and sacrificed to the beast. This gap, this place outside the box, is the place of genuine seeing, the clear perception of Sophia. It may not be the exalted visionary status of the mystic--yet its gnosis and perceptions share the same cosmic import. What is different about this state of perception is that while mystical experiences are temporary these remain with you. They become the boat to travel in this gap outside the boxes. These perceptions are rooted in the here and now; they become the vehicle to transport you to other dimensions that are here in this world.

If we do not learn to separate our thought constructions from reality, from our humanity; if we do not struggle to understand and perceive clearly, then how in the world would we be able to comprehend and perceive a god should she appear to us? We have to become our own guides because no one is at the helm.

# **CHAPTER 5**

## **SOPHIA'S EXILE:**

### **HISTORICAL, INDIVIDUAL, COLLECTIVE**

Our own lives mirror Sophia's exile. Sophia was gradually expelled from theology, expelled from the marketplace, expelled from the royal court, expelled from the city gate where she addressed men and invited them to pursue her instead of gold. Sophia--the symbol of the power of psyche to reach for integrity, understanding, and humane action and to bring it to bear in the affairs of state, in business dealings, in local politics, in our personal lives--left the world. Whether you prefer to interpret her as an aspect of divinity or the world soul, or only as a beautiful symbol of wisdom, the impact of her absence over the centuries has coincided with an ever-expanding materialism, a collective absence of interest in gaining knowledge about how to live wisely.

We have abundant knowledge as content: lots and lots of facts. We have a glut of information pouring through our modems and overflowing our libraries. But there is something wrong. We do not know how to live. Our technology and science proceeds to expand unguided by wisdom, fueled not by the desire for truth but profit. At universities and schools throughout the country, more and more students are depressed, abuse drugs and alcohol, and commit suicide. Corporate greed--with support and illicit collusion with government--along with management's refusal to take responsibility for crimes against the environment and citizens, are protected by an unspoken code of "see no evil; hear no evil; speak no evil." Violence is rampant; who is alive today who does not know someone whose life has been touched by murder, assault, or robbery?

Even the word wisdom is used in a promiscuous way that is anything but the passionate search for clear perception found in the wisdom literature. A popular technique of journalists today, from best-sellers to newspaper columns is to use the term "conventional wisdom" to mean fiction as opposed to fact: "conventional wisdom says . . ." stands opposed to what really is true: the facts. What we unwittingly take in is the

association of the word wisdom with what is really nonsense or false. Wisdom is equated with consensus reality, which in fact is a complete inversion of wisdom. The making common of what is exceedingly rare by a misuse of this word is one more instance of eliminating the very existence of what could save our life. Investigating the history and meaning of the word wisdom is to enter a portal into another world that nourishes and revitalizes conventional reality. Our culture does not have many words that focus attention on intelligence that is associated with life. This misuse of the word further cages the interpretation of intelligence as equivalent to facts and information, utterly divorced from integrity.

The same thing has been done to the word "myth" which does not only mean fictitious but is also defined as a legitimate account of what is preverbal, spiritual, or psychological--all realities in their own right. "Myth" is used so frequently to mean falsehood that most people do not question this misleading definition, used so frequently by the media, textbooks, and science writers who write for the public. The effect of this kind of "forgetting" is to banish the very attitudes, the very responses to life, that could vitally transform our personal and social dis-eases. One of the reasons why the humanities and a liberal arts education were so vital for the proper nourishment of intelligence was to "remember"--what Plato calls amnesis--to not forget. To dig up the roots, to go beyond what the conventional mind has forgotten, is the path of Sophia. Sophia, in fact, is the Queen of the Liberal Arts. A twelfth century manuscript shows Sophia with breasts flowing their nourishing wisdom into seven streams. The seven liberal arts corresponded to the seven planets and were divided into the trivium: Grammar (Moon), Dialectic (Mercury), Rhetoric (Venus); and the quadrivium: Music (Sun), Arithmetic (Mars), Geometry (Jupiter) and Astronomy (Saturn). The basis of Western academic education was based upon this organization until the sixteenth century. (Matthews 1991, 235-6)

Philosophy for Plato meant the liberation of intelligence from "consumer consciousness"--the total absorption into the world of making money, trading, figuring and consuming. The process of liberation releases a person, whether early Greek male citizen or modern woman, from consumer consciousness and leads her into the

hinterlands, the roads leading outside one's identity with the collective mind. The early philosophers would see ordinary existence as so much cud-chewing, eating and buying, regurgitating mindless statements passed on among the crowds. Have times really changed since then? Don't we still have intense pressure to give up every impulse except that of making money? "Higher education"--is it really "high" when college presidents around the country repeat like a chorus of well-trained parrots that "the purpose of education is to compete in the global market"? (This was the conclusion of the education summit in Charlottesville, Virginia, organized by former President Bush in the first year of his presidency.)

Sophia beckons us to seek her instead of gold. Not to isolate ourselves in a cave where we can suck on a thumb of endless enlightenment, but so that we can reach out and up to the cosmos, the sacred--and then back down again to that same marketplace we left behind--not to brag, to convert, or belittle but to restore integrity and justice through the capacity to speak from the voice of an awakened refined vital, educated in the school of life and relationship.

What does exile mean then, historically, individually, and collectively? Sophia was exiled; each of us is exiled in private and from groups. What did Sophia "look like" in exile? Did we hear her voice from the darkness? What is our own experience of exile and how does it mirror Sophia's banishment? What is the nature of the "inside" from which we are exiled? What is the strange land "outside" that we find ourselves lost in? Finally, what does it mean to "return"?

Sophia's trail is in our own lives, personally and collectively. What happened historically to the "person" or image of Sophia happens to each of us, sooner or later. The fact that she was a problem for theologians and misogynist interpreters and consequently excluded from mainstream religion happens to us when we clearly perceive what is going on. Each of us is "a problem"--to ourselves or to others, when we exhibit our individuality and creativity in situations locked in preserving the status quo. Yet, it is the very "problem" that creates difference, two-ness, exile--and the return. When embraced, honored, and expressed, the "problem" of our vital individuality becomes the solution to our personal and cultural dis-ease.

## THE HISTORICAL EXILE OF SOPHIA AND MODERN ONE-SIDEDNESS

We saw in Part I that Sophia was gradually removed from the world stage in the ancient Near East. She left in the company of the giants of spiritual genius: the Mysteries and the heritage of the philosophic school which, since the time of Pythagoras, developed a rich tradition of exploration of soul through philosophy and the purification of character. Over 1,000 years it formed and reformed first under Pythagoras, then as Plato's Academy, finally as the Alexandrian School. Mankind was left with the frightful image of the angry male God and his scapegoated son, the model for all of humanity in the West: a broken, bleeding, tortured man nailed to the cross. This savage image of the scapegoat has infected the minds of little children for the last 2,000 years. And what of the power of the feminine, the great divinities of love, fertility, independence, and wisdom? All gone. With the brutal torture and murder of Hypatia by the perverted Christian monks in the 6th century C.E., the Alexandrian School closed and with it, the world of learning infused with soul and the cultivation of beauty, the world of knowledge tied to wisdom and the development of character.

What gets banished above ground, however, goes to Hades, there to be fertilized by the treasures of the past. Life and death are but cycles of change. The mysteries taught that nothing really disappears. What dies is reborn in the spring and all things have their spring--after the winter. So, too, with the Mysteries, with Sophia, with the great schools of antiquity, with the search for wisdom, with the urgent invitation of soul to discover her secrets: they did not die, but call us from beyond. Where is beyond? Right here: in the body, in the genetic memory, in every whisper of the trees and glimmer of the stars. The mystery of life pulses as our very blood. Soul is evident at the birth of every child, in the mystery and majesty of sex and the reproductive cycle, in the awesome inevitability of dying and the hope of resurrection in another world or reunion with loved ones. Soul is apparent in love. How could anyone deny soul who has ever been loved, who loves, or who aches from never having been loved?

With the removal of Sophia and the powerful figures of the feminine over the last 2000 years, our science and religion and education have become fractured, one-sided,

and cut off from the power and juice of soul. However, Sophia remained as the image and goal of transformation in Gnosticism, alchemy, and Kabala. In Gnosticism, which flourished during the first centuries of the Common Era, Sophia was portrayed as dual: a heavenly aspect and one associated with the terrestrial, human. In alchemy, Sophia was the goal of the transformation process. In the esoteric dimensions of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, Sophia remained as a symbol of inner realization, a symbol of union between the personal and cosmic, a symbol shared by the religions whose exoteric doctrines of exclusion caused endless wars and generational hatreds.

What is the meaning of Sophia's presence in these esoteric studies? First, esoteric does not mean that anyone is intentionally hiding anything, although secrecy about the Mysteries was strictly enforced in antiquity. Esoteric simply means that one's vision has to be altered or shifted away from its ordinary focus, its consumer mode. This shift can happen anytime that one is open to the profound abyss of Mystery that permeates daily life. One day, you could stop suddenly, gripped by an extraordinary vision of the sunset, or of mountains, clouds, ocean or forests. You could suddenly be stopped in your tracks and be overtaken by the beauty of a simple, exquisite small flower, or a hummingbird. Birth, puberty, marriage, and death are events in human life that since the earliest times have been associated with danger and the presence of unseen forces, necessitating special rites of passage. Transitions bring into human awareness another world. The other world might be death, it might be adulthood, old age, the married state, or it might be a condition of depression or grief brought about by an event such as death or illness.

The arising of this other world necessitates mediation. What is mediation? It is simply attention directed to the transition by the tribe or community. This attention is a kind of public acknowledgment that recognizes and protects the members of the community as they embark from one stage to another. Public attention was repeated, ritualized into specific prayers and actions. Since our modern world no longer provides this protection during transition phases, it falls upon the individual to wise-up, to teach herself how to survive the crossing, how to mediate two worlds. Sophia mediates. Through identifying Sophia's path, we can learn how to mediate two worlds without

going crazy, going into depression or taking drugs or turning over the job of mediating to a preacher, therapist, or guru.

## INDIVIDUAL EXILE

Whether you are introduced to another world through pain, through love, through beauty, or simply by the natural transitions experienced by every human, it is helpful to be acquainted with that other world. What is that other world? Generally, it is referred to as soul. I use the word soul not just in the religious sense, as that which connects us in some way to divinity. Soul used here is the recognition that something else exists besides ordinary consciousness, which I'll call consumer and resumé consciousness. Consumer consciousness is the condition of a person who limits their experience to watching TV, earning and spending money, and whose attention is circumscribed by what the media presents as reality. This kind of person lives in a world determined by the events presented on the evening News or talk shows. Their conversation is filled with things they heard on TV. Even their good deeds are determined by what the media presents. I know someone who is sending money to help the family with the prosecution in a widely-televised death trial. No one would discredit this person's good intentions or generosity. What is evident, however, from the point of view of soul, is that the action has been inspired by the media. When the horizon of our attention is determined by the corporate machine that determines for us what news and entertainment we will see, then we are no longer in touch with our immediate experience. The issue here is not whether this person ought to help or not help; the point is that the action itself is skewed: it was born and "lives" in an artificial world created by TV. Although the murder really happened, the fact that TV brings it into our living room draws our attention away from our immediate environment. Our experience becomes framed and conditioned by what the media delivers. This way of being is another example of consumer consciousness. When we begin to notice individuals in our immediate environment who are suffering

and are stopped by them, moved by them to do something to alleviate their suffering, then the person has entered the domain of soul.

Resumé consciousness, like consumer consciousness, is also determined by society. A grocery list of skills, experiences, attitudes, talents, and roles are built up by the person solely around what the family or culture demands of me: to succeed in school, to be athletic, to get a career, to get along with important and powerful people, to make a lot of money. What I end up doing with my life coincides exactly with society's expectations. It is not that either of these modes of consciousness is wrong, evil, stupid, or bad. It is where every person finds herself: embedded in a nest of expectations and demands foisted on us more or less eagerly since childhood from the very people upon whom we depend for safety and survival: our family and the institutions of society. This consciousness only becomes a problem, even life-threatening, when the experience of what lies outside these expectations is denied or feared. Why? Because what lies outside carries renewal and creativity and the well-spring of spiritual health and vitality.

The esoteric dimensions of the three major Western religions expressed a path that acknowledged what lies outside consumer consciousness. What lies outside, according to Sophia's circuit, is not opposed, not a threat, not even an alternative. What lies outside is the mystery that life is, which needs to circulate for the well-being and creative renewal of society. Alchemy, for instance, describes the process whereby the soul interacts with the lead or dead weight of the ordinary habits of mind to create gold, a transformed, re-vitalized life. Sophia's circuit describes a movement of attention whereby we can effect change in our consciousness, our life, our relationships, and our society.

In order to see how Sophia moves, it is important to get a feel for this idea of another world. This other world is NOT abstract, nor is it a New Age other dimension. Soul, as used here, simply refers to a condition each of us experiences, when we notice that a part of us does not fit anymore in the boxes that Society or family has prepared for us. An example of a box is that a student should be athletic and get good grades. This defines success for many American students. Some children, many, might comfortably accept this box and thrive in it. The problem becomes major for society, school, and of course the children, when this is set up to be the only box, the only measure of success.

How, then, do we come into awareness of this box and how does that awareness place us outside it? This "outside" is the creation of soul. Sophia's circuit is just another way to create soul in the everyday world where we suffer from the inability to fit in the boxes made for us. Sophia's alchemy of relationship transforms the box from a coffin to a joyride for the soul.

In the same way that Sophia survived historically in the esoteric interpretations of the Western religions, each of us can survive "esoterically" in the everyday world. Not only can we survive, but we can perform amazing alchemical feats of personal and social transformation in our relationships, our business dealings, and in the society by a process of learning about life through the immediate experiences that happen to us in the context of groups. Sophia's path is one of knowledge; we can gain understanding and open a new pair of eyes even in situations of anguish, fear, grief and exclusion. What does it mean to live in "personal exile" and how can we redeem it?

There is part of ourselves that does not fit in the everyday world. This part has become split off from ordinary life. We are cut in two, an outer persona and an inner grief or maybe it's just a lonely part that doesn't fit anywhere. When we become aware of this split, when we do not deny or run from its pain on the one hand, nor retreat into bitterness and victimhood because of the indifference of the outer world, then we suffer a kind of crucifixion that leads to the gnosis of Sophia. This gnosis leads to Sophia's clear perception, but it is difficult, dangerous, exciting, and won through honesty, authentic relationship, and the struggle to understand.

What are the steps leading to this gnosis? The first is to become aware of something else than the blare of TV and the world's news, opinions, and other people's reactions to these. Follow the pain. When we hold onto awareness of this inner pain, while trying to keep afloat in the ordinary world, a sense of there being a middle area that separates these two states, grows more intense and sometimes becomes intolerable.

The experience of this in-between state means there is a separation or split between our everyday personality--what psychologists call the persona and an inner feeling, a private anguish or unanswered question about life. In-between states that separate us from the world occur in the context of community as well as in our private

lives. Here is an example of an event that happens to many people. A woman I know (whom I will call Diana) told me this story. When she was very young, she got a little kitten whom she adored. She came home from school one day and the kitten followed her outside when she went to get the mail. Kitty ran into the road and got hit by a car. He died. She took his bloody, mangled body and held it, sobbing, waiting on the porch until her mother came home. What she remembers is her mother's concern for the stained dress and her efficient disposal of the little body. Diana was left holding a gaping, horrifying hole in her heart--which nobody noticed and no one reached out to care for.

Something becomes split off inside: for Diana, there was her going-to-school self (persona) and there was another self in agony, inside. This pain, this lonely question mark, needs help that only other people can provide. This is the anguish that accompanies the need to understand life, its cruelty and suffering. This kind of deep need to question, when it is not heard by others, can fester and cause a kind of fault line in the psyche. Two worlds are created: an external world where I am the person other people want me to be and a private world where I hurt deeply. The coming into awareness of two worlds is the introduction to Sophia's path.

Such an event splits us into two. What before was single and whole--a happy little girl content with her life--now is crucified on a cross that stretches her between the external world of school which only recognizes her intellect and the painful wound with its unanswered questions deep inside. A new, larger, more conscious and compassionate wholeness is woven between two worlds when we have the courage to include both.

Gerd Achenbach, founder of the Philosophical Counseling movement in Germany, has observed the tragic consequences that result when this private feeling is not recognized by others or invited to voice itself, when not nourished by human concern and respect: "The merely subjective and lonely thought that is being abandoned by others, the completely subjective personal feeling that is being excluded from all interactions with, or acknowledgment by others, either kills or drives us into madness." (Achenbach 1995, 71)

Recently, here in Ithaca, a student committed suicide. Cornell University's environs includes numerous steep, wild and treacherous gorges. Students sometimes

jump off a gorge bridge to the sharp rocks 150 feet below. Such was the fate of a brilliant graduate student in applied mathematics who had achieved international recognition for her work on engineering designs. Early Thanksgiving Day morning, her backpack was spotted by a motorist who stopped and discovered her body far below. What is particularly tragic about the death of this "enormously talented and good-hearted, if troubled" young woman, can be gleaned from an entry in her diary, sent by her mother and read aloud at her memorial service: "I wish I were a traveler with only the weight of a backpack behind me. Then I would be free." (*Ithaca Journal*, Dec. 6, 1996).

Whatever emerges as the specific context of the suicide--stress, exams, pressure to perform at exceedingly demanding levels, relationship woes, whatever--the diary entry indicates that there is something deep deep inside, this longing to be free. The horror of this story is not that it happened to this one person, but that the deepest causes, the root context of this tragedy, will not be touched, examined or talked about by anyone. This conspiracy of silence, this code of "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil" is the method of defense against all evolution towards understanding. The fear, inertia, indifference, or ignorance that prevents people from joining together to cross the no-man's land of silence is the resistance to wisdom. The barriers that prevent us from connecting to our unanswered questions are erected and re-erected every single day around the country with events like this. Our refusal to take on the task of questioning, the fear of our own helplessness at the realization of pain, mystery, and the human condition serves to isolate us from each other. Silence postpones the possibility of a shared humanity in the face of crisis. We need to account for her death, give an account . . . for her sake is our sake. We ought to look at it, dialogue it, bring that longing for freedom into existence. It is too late for this student, but what of the millions of other human beings whose trapped inner voice cannot find ears to hear its voice? At her memorial service, a few comments were made about depression, isolation, and the need to "remember that there are even more important things to life than intellectual achievement" (*Ithaca Journal*, Dec. 6, 1996). Life resumes. Her death caused a rupture which our silence seals shut, allowing ordinary life to resume. But is it really life that resumes, or another kind of death--the machine of unconsciousness that perpetuates the causes of such tragedies?

The point is this. It is not that graduate school is bad and being a footloose traveler is good. From the perspective of Sophia's circuit, what failed to happen was relationship. It is not relating with a friend or boyfriend, therapist or advisor, priest or guru that was critical--although any of these might have prevented her suicide. What was necessary was a relationship to that private longing for freedom. That is the primary relationship. Any person could have served to mediate to connect her to that longing, but it is not the therapist or spiritual advisor in themselves that are the saviors. We save ourselves through authentic relationship--friendship--with these inner longings. It is the quality of the bridge we create to connect with the longing that is the quality of Sophianic perception.

Sophia personifies a specific quality or focus of attention that we ourselves direct onto these private and lonely parts of ourselves. Most of us have been conditioned to think in "either-or" terms: either I have to literally drop everything and go "be free" or else "I have to deny and reject my inner longing because it does not fit with the expectations of my academic persona." Sophia's path says "No no. Life was never meant to be 'either-or'--it is exquisitely complex and infinitely more subtle than an either-or rejection allows." Maybe life is meant to be an "and," not an "or." Once recognition and value is given to this voice, it is easier to demand or create circumstances for it to be nourished. To even recognize this inner feeling, however, precipitates a crisis in which we are catapulted into the underworld. There are now two dimensions, two worlds, necessitating mediation.

Another story of a personal exile was told to me by a forty-year-old man named David. When he was five years old, his father died. No one, because of their grief and emotional state, came to him to talk about it, to draw out his anguish, his questions, his loneliness, his fear. He was expected to "get on with his life," go back to school, and not talk about it. Consequently, this unacknowledged private collection of anguish and questions, festered inside. David grew up but was unable to sustain relationships and subsequently went into therapy. Therapy, of course, is the socially sanctioned method of mediation between the two worlds. The ideal situation in most cases is finding a suitable and compatible therapist who will assist the person in making the bridge. The path of

Sophia can be followed, perhaps, in cases that are not so severe, that do not require professional help.

Both Diana and David related to the dying and resolved their grief by choosing careers intrinsically associated with death. Diana just earned her Ph.D. in Thanatology (death studies) and works with grieving people and David became an undertaker for 18 years. What he observed in the mortuary led him to significant discoveries about the survival of the soul, and he developed a ritual of washing corpses which transformed an odious task into a sacred one. Both Diana and David, rather than accepting society's terms requiring the denial of death, instead embraced death and transformed life in the process: their own and society's.

Another person, whom I will call Sam, worked with me in an office many years ago. People avoided him because he was mean and petty--backbiting, sarcastic, and competitive. He was also a Vietnam veteran. To me, that made him potentially a deeper person because he went through an experience that tore him body and soul away from the collective box. I knew him 10 years after the war ended. I was honestly interested in how such an experience ejects a person from that box, how it can forge a channel of connection to the world, one of greater depth and sensitivity than the average person who has known no suffering. So, one afternoon I gently inquired about it, saying that his experience must have really made him more conscious than the average person. He got suddenly quiet and choked up. He told me I was the only person in the last 10 years to even mention the war and its effect on him. From that moment on, I changed my bad feelings toward him, wondering how much of his nasty exterior was a result of having no human bridge to connect with that experience.

Not all people who have suffered, however, desire to speak about it. It is a very touchy business. (One has to be there, maybe, if asked but not intrude upon a person.) Too much attention, like too much denial, can kill the very tentative life inside. Language and interaction with others is not for everybody. I was at a nightclub a few years ago with a group of friends and met another Vietnam vet I'll call Joe, a large, bulky, intense man. We were dancing to a slow song and talking. Somehow we got on the subject of Vietnam and he stopped suddenly in the middle of the dance floor, remembering the bombing: "I

saw my friends die--some moved to the left, some moved to the right. The grenades went off." He pulled his entire body away, jerking his head to the right then the left. He did it again, furiously, jerking his head first left and then right. "One guy got it, the other one didn't. Move to the right, you get it. Move to the left, you don't." He shook his head in fury and pain at the senseless stupidity of chance in the hopeless insanity of war. His hand touched his head in a gesture of helplessness at the rack of torture his memory inflicted on him.

Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, authors of The Dawn of Magic, recalled the savagery during the Nazi invasion of France:

When I came out of the cellar, Juvisy, my home town, had disappeared. A thick, yellow fog covered a mass of rubble out of which came cries for help and groans. The world of my games and friendships and loves and nearly everything that I had known all my life lay there buried under all this desolation . . . among the old cars and barrels of oil, lay the bodies of some young men, riddled with bullets and finished off with grenades: this was the group of Resistance workers who had been tortured by the Germans . . . We had to wash these corpses, wipe up the blood, button up again their jackets and trousers split open by the grenades, and put white paper in their coffins to cover up these murdered boys whose eyes and mouths and wounds seemed to cry out in terror. . . . The fantastic had ceased to be the prerogative of artists to become, to the accompaniment of blood and fire, part of everyday life in the civilized world. . . . Several violently contrasted Universes were superposed; the merest chance could send you from one to another. (Pauwels and Bergier 1967, 211-212) (emphasis mine)

This path of gnosis, the horrible seeing that underlies our crucifixion between "violently contrasted Universes" strikes terror into most souls. Most of us just want a life, we want relief from the agony of seeing, and so we anesthetize ourselves with drinking, drugs, TV, or whatever. I never saw Joe again; he reacted in such horror when I told him I was teaching philosophy. It seemed as though the very devil that was chasing him was the urgency of the question "why" brought on by his war experience. He could not bear to follow the question into the worlds beyond the conventional one. He had come to this club, as far away as possible from the question, and then by some horrid trick, the devil

had brought him face to face with a woman who was compelled in the opposite direction--to follow such questions to the ends of the earth.

Artists are fortunate because they can encounter their rage, grief, or bitterness and communicate it. They are able to compose, paint, weave, sculpt, or write verses to express their inner states, to respond to the terror of life, honor the pain, and end up beautifying society and re-creating culture. For those of us whose interest is the problem of spirituality and knowledge, Sophia's circuit is a direct route to the same end--vision of an underlying pattern, connecting the personal to the cosmic, and the restoration of the power to express that vision wherever it is needed.

### COLLECTIVE EXILE

Grasshopper is happily going down the road. He meets a group of beetles all carrying signs that say "we love the sun in the morning." Grasshopper greets them and they greet him, asking "Do you love the sun in the morning?" Grasshopper replies: "Oh my yes. How I do love the sun in the morning!" With that, the beetles give him a sign and pin a button on his chest and make him a member of their club. They dance and sing and tell Grasshopper how wonderful he is all day until the sun goes down. Grasshopper says, "I love the afternoon too. And night is very nice." "Stupid! Dummy! shouted the Beetles. "Anyone who loves the afternoon and night can never, never be in our club! We only love the sun in the morning!! How dare you love the sun at sunset!" With that, they rip off his button and grab his sign and beat Grasshopper over the head with it. They waved their signs and marched away. Grasshopper was alone. And he went on down the road. (adapted from Arnold Lobel, Grasshopper on the Road, 1978)

The third exile we suffer is collective. At some point, unless our lives are lived in denial, we will experience a sense of strong alienation from our group(s), maybe the family or the religion of origin. Perhaps in our profession or on the job we feel that our commitment, integrity, and talents not only go unappreciated but actually make people uncomfortable. People who are members of spiritual groups often begin to feel conflict when there is pressure to conform more and more to a way of living and thinking that cuts them off from family and outside community. When we begin to feel different, alienated from the group(s) we have come to depend on, the group(s) from which we

have derived support and identity, that is when we become aware of two worlds: (1) something inside that is growing increasingly uncomfortable and (2) a sense of the contours or rigidity of this group--a feeling of its edges or parameters.

"Grasshopper on the Road" illustrates very clearly the parameters of the beetles' acceptance of others. The outlines of their "box" are very clear: either you love the sun ONLY in the morning or you are not one of us and we do not want you. Perhaps you are a member of a spiritual group and begin to question the limitations of truth defined by the group as being equivalent to the teachings of a certain few masters. It is not necessary for the group to come right out and say that all other beliefs are false (which some religions in fact, do). These other beliefs are simply dismissed. It becomes very clear--when you notice the group reaction--what the boundaries are. Certain behaviors, authors, lifestyle, diet, dress, whatever--are acceptable and others are not. There is, in other words, an agenda with fixed, identifiable boundaries. Just like the Grasshopper, we find out very quickly what the boundaries of the agenda are, as soon as we show interest in or love for what lies outside it. The agenda, unarticulated, unexamined, forms a box inside which the members of a group live and feed.

Sophia positions us outside every box, not in defiance to it, but so that we can reclaim our own vital power that the boxes use to sustain themselves. The control over the lower nature spoken about in spiritual practice is really about the surgery required to extract our jewel from collective possession so that we may relate freely to it--or not, as we choose. Sophia's dark face is the image cast by the edges of the box. What is the edge of the box? Simply limits of acceptance of difference that have been adopted by the group: we are a group and we only love the sun in the morning. If you love the sun in the afternoon, then you are not one of us. If you are not one of us, then you are nothing and we will beat you until you leave.

The group agenda is usually unconscious. The agenda may be very noble and life enhancing: the group perhaps has gathered for years to pray and learn. The group over time has learned that a certain lifestyle is best for meditation. The ideals of the group are tolerance, love, acceptance, and love of truth. If you asked a member if she practiced compassion she would reply, "Of course! Just look at what we study and how often we

meditate. We are virtuous. We do not eat meat. Just see for yourself how we care about each other. We make dinners on Saturday nights and invite each other over. We all love one another."

Soon, however, it becomes apparent that these virtues are only extended to those who live the identical lifestyle and who have embraced the same teacher, the same vocabulary, the same attitudes, the same denial mechanism. So if someone gets mad, that is a no-no. If someone has a beer or eats meat, that is an even bigger no-no. Soon, what is tolerated is a rigid cage or box that gives the appearance of these virtues so that the group can function without a ripple of disturbance. What is happening in fact is the creation of an idol which is then worshipped as though it were the deity: the idol is the group conception of truth. This thought construct is the idol that everyone follows. Sophia is the path to the real god, the creative power of the psyche within.

A person suffers collective exile when they belong to a group and it becomes stifling. Collective exile is felt when there is a growing separation between the inside-you and the group which has been like a family for years. What is noticed first is a very quiet protest, a "no" that stands apart from the collective voice. This "no" is the voice of the inner guru, the daemon. Sometimes the protest is not quiet, but overwhelmingly loud. When a beloved teacher, preacher, or guru, for instance, violates the trust of the disciples through financial mismanagement, greed, sexual exploitation, then the collision of worlds necessitates the healing gnosis of seeing all the way through the artificial boundaries of the we-love-the-sun-in-the-morning crowd. The disillusion especially from spiritual groups can leave a person in a state of shock and bitterness that lasts years.

One of the problems with spiritual groups is the delusion that life can be lived in unconditional love, without pettiness, jealousy, and self-interest. Our language shows us that selfish and unselfish are meaningful only in relation to each other. Our humanity depends upon our ability to stand back from both, to relate freely to both so that what we despise about ourselves--the selfish part--does not go underground to get denied and projected on others. Sophia's path is one of friendship and memory that includes what we try so hard to leave behind: our selfishness, our hurts and jealousies. Sophia positions us--in the middle--not in either selfishness or unselfishness but rather in the space in

between. Only here are we free to choose, conscious of both, not in a state of the need-to-be one or the other.

Collectively, Sophia's path remains on the outside of every group, the moving reminder that invites the members of every group to remember and relate to what lies outside its borders. Her invitation is not to bring everyone into the same cage but rather to acknowledge difference, to become aware that indeed there is Other, and it is relationship that will honor both, not the elimination and trashing of any part of our humanity.

We are born into a group, many groups: the family, the local community, the state or region (South, North, etc.), perhaps we have a strong religious or ethnic identity from our family: Buddhist, Catholic, fundamentalist Christian, Jewish, etc.; there is a national identity; then there are all kinds of groups we enter into: the school and peer group of the classroom; after that, there may be a wide variety of choices: church, athletic, hobby, girl or boy scout groups, the military, the profession, the workplace, etc. Some people live their entire lives nested comfortably within their groups. For these people, life is fairly straightforward. They might say, as one man said to me, "I don't know what's wrong with kids today. When I was their age I knew who I was and I didn't go around wasting time (or doing drugs, getting pregnant, dropping out of school . . .)." Such people have a difficult time understanding what would drive a person to commit suicide or become depressed. Maria, a philosophical counselor, told me the story of a physician whom she counseled in her native country, Belgium.

Dr. R had retired after a very successful career. Before she retired, her life was pretty much organized around her professional role on the one hand, and her personal role on the other hand. She would wear her two hats alternatively, depending on whether she was in the office or at home. Yet, now that she was retired, it was no longer clear when or how to wear her two separate hats. What had seemed so well organized in her life was suddenly in total disarray. She also mentioned that she was having the same dream repeatedly about a closet, which when she opened it, she could no longer close, because it was such a mess and everything kept falling out. We philosophized on what meaning this dream could

have for her. We played around with a number of different interpretations. After a few weeks she reported that she wasn't having this dream any more. She was much relieved, because the dream had made her quite anxious.

Her strictly scientific world view had made it very difficult for her to deal with, not to mention manage, the chaotic, messy, "meaningless" world her life had become. She was used to "fixing" things, and felt powerless in terms of trying to "fix" her own life. . . .

At some point, Dr. R told me about her sister's "meaningless" suicide, and how she could never forgive her sister for the grief this had caused their parents. When I unexpectedly shifted from being understanding to almost accusing my client of not recognizing her sister's possible scream for help, my client was shocked. Later she told me how grateful she was for having me "wake her up". . . . She had glimpsed the world of the "meaningless" other, enough to know that it, too, existed and had a meaning and uniqueness of its own. She moved from being "caught" in an I-It understanding of her sister's suicide to one in which her sister had become a Thou. As a result of becoming a Thou, the sister's suicide was no longer meaningless. (See chapter 11 for explanation of Buber's I-Thou and "Turning.")

In the case of the physician above, it is clear that the "box" represents not only an orderly life, but the only life. The dream of the closet is a perfect portrayal by the unconscious of how society's "boxes" organize people. Without boxes, there would be chaos; no one would know what to do in the morning except sleep. (Is sleep such a bad idea, after all?) It is when these boxes unwittingly become the only reality that they become dangerously suffocating, cutting us off from ourselves and the deeper well-spring of creativity, vision, and hearing that awakens in us the capacity to honor, even notice Other. Studies have shown that people not only live their lives in the box, but even die in the box! Unlike other animals, humans are the only ones who die more often on Monday than any other day of the week. Monday has meaning only in the context of the box: Monday we return to work. Work is where, for many people, we have to stop being free, where we cannot be ourselves, where we must do what we'd rather not be doing. The dread of Monday hangs over us for 60 years, from the time we start school until retirement.

As awful as Mondays are, some people don't even have a Monday and would sacrifice anything to be admitted to the American dream, to join the work force and contribute something to society. For many people, these boxes represent survival. For those who are marginalized--people of color, immigrants, uneducated women, those who live in poverty or on the streets, the comfortable boxes of expectations appear like a safe haven they have never known, an oasis in a desert of deprivation and isolation. Their stories amaze and inspire us. There is the story about the young African-American boy who grew up in a slum, whose grades began to drop. His mother removed the TV and made him study. The boy had nothing else to do, so he began to read. What happened to him? He became a highly respected brain surgeon.

But the very reason we love these stories is because they are unusual. The reality is that the forces of poverty, racism, violence, and despair that infect so much of our country too often conspire to crush the efforts and hopes of many young people who want a better life. The point here is that from the point of view of poverty, the box is the ticket to survival and a decent life. To the outsider, poverty or prejudice seals the box, making it more and more like an impenetrable fortress because the roads leading to that fortress are being destroyed: decent safe schools with up to date texts and computers, well-paid dedicated teachers, access to financial aid, scholarships and low-cost tuition, extended social security benefits for children of widows while they attend college, etc.

The problem is not only getting into the box for those who want a chance to live like most Americans, but also what happens once that box is accepted and becomes the only value. It is understandable that someone of color from a background of poverty who has "made it" to professional status in the white world, does not want to be told to "go back" to the neighborhood. This "either-or" thinking, however, leads to an opposition that stalemates into anger and denial. With a slight shift, the person in such a dilemma can position herself outside both the "white-world" box and its shadow, the victimization of the poor and minorities.

For many African American students, this very situation occurs in the context of education: the dichotomy arises between "either" going white "or" staying black. Maria, the same one who counseled the physician in the previous example, works with Upward

Bound students at a university. To become educated and successful means having to submit to the "white man's ways." If one wants to "stay black" and uphold the integrity of what it means to "be black", one has to sacrifice becoming educated. Through dialogue the students were able to stand in the center, focusing on their own relationship to education rather than the black-white dichotomy, thus literally freeing them to act. It is in this in-between state where the freedom of Sophia is activated. Exile from the apparent safety of the box called "the American dream" is turned into the only place from which freedom is possible: perspective shifts and the power to act, to choose, to take what one needs is restored to the person.

The place of freedom is outside both the box and its shadow: the projection of "loser" or victim. The middle place, the gap, the place of exile, is where Sophia's home is. It is here that we are free: free to be ourselves, free to act, free to choose what part of the box, if any, we need or want. Turning the place of exile into the power to return wisdom and integrity and well-being for ourselves and others, however, requires skill, sharp focus, protection, attention, and first and foremost--the struggle to understand through friendship with others (see Part III for techniques and methods).

Here are some true stories of people who recognized their journey as one of entering and leaving society's boxes. The first story is so remarkable because it happened so quickly and covers a good part of the sequence just described, from being marginalized on the outside, to "making it," to being ejected from the box. I met this woman, Christine, very briefly. She and I had one of those conversations in which the depths are poured out with each other in the first hour. What she related was so astounding. She used the language of the box to tell her story. Christine was a secretary at a university. Her children had gone off to college so she decided to go back to school. She earned a college degree and went on to get her doctorate. Very quickly, however, she was catapulted into teaching and administration, where she became a high-powered professional. She told me she was totally identified with the box, but that her friends kept hinting that she wasn't quite "there" yet as far as her understanding of herself. She said she kept getting the feeling something was out of sorts, that she didn't "get it." Then, the stress built up greater and greater. Christine finally suffered a nervous breakdown.

When I met her, she had just quit her job at an Ivy League university and was going back to her home state to heal and recover her lost humanity, to spend time with friends and family. She understood that she was now outside the very box that she had previously idolized and equated with success, identity, and happiness.

If a person only focuses on the breakdown, then this is a case of illness. With a slight shift of perspective, Christine could see how this was a journey into a profound gnosis--a knowledge gained only by direct experience. She wanted to join the battle, she fought the dragon, got wounded, but she's got her jewel: her vital soul is intact and not imprisoned. The success of the journey depends on a shift in attention. In Christine's case, the understandable desire to move from being a secretary to a professional, and then out of it, to the place of exile, brought her to the place where vision is possible: the perspective from which we are able to see the entire "machine."

Some people don't want anything to do with the box at all, recognizing the dangers to human well-being from a consumer-driven society. Katy has adopted a lifestyle similar to the Amish or American homesteaders. She had read over and over again the statistics concerning the destruction of the environment and the hazards to health brought on by computers, microwaves, electricity, etc. Katy built a log cabin in the woods and lives without running water or electricity, heats with a woodstove, and cooks outside over a fire. She is intelligent, educated, and very talented, author of a trade paperback. She describes how members of her Bible-study group or friends at the convenience store react when she talks about her lifestyle: "They squirm when I begin to talk about how I live."

The "squirm" is a perfect description of the emotional reaction that is evident when the borders of the box are reached. This discomfort is usually followed by silence, turning away, which marks the inability to relate, to talk to, the person who is, in this case, literally outside in the cold. Exile is both the awareness of being cast out of home and the opportunity to recognize this place as the condition of freedom. This is the point at which a crisis is precipitated: the freedom to walk across that darkness and embrace the images of fear, loneliness, abandonment, poverty through trust and friendship.

A teacher named Katherine experienced rejection by the schooling box. She was a skilled, enthusiastic language arts teacher at a middle-school, teaching 6th and 7th grade. She drew the hostility and rejection of some of her colleagues for this inexcusable crime: having genuine admiration and respect for her students. This is a tough age to teach and many educators do not want to deal with the exuberance, resistance, and independence of this age group. Katherine loved to teach and she had so much excitement going to school that each day was a new adventure. Her students loved her and produced astonishing creative work, poems, art, and deep questions. Other teachers, bored and indifferent, rolled their eyes upward, sighed, and made diminishing comments to her in the teachers' lounge. After a quarter of a century of watching the slow death of creativity and independent thought in students by a system indifferent to the interior worth of the individual, she finally left teaching in disgust. She left the box and dealt with her exile in a way that enabled her to live in the gap, to move across the great divide through creativity and writing. Her efforts to reconcile her love of teaching with the system's killing of creativity and independence resulted in three books on creative intelligence for adolescents, books that combined art, poetry, and reflections on life by great thinkers.

A crisis of confrontation with the box can occur with no warning, within no context of a belief system. This happens suddenly. The sudden switching of worlds looks like chance or folly, but may be in fact, have an underlying pattern: upsetting things in order for personal fate to work its magic on collective destiny. James Hillman, in his book, *The Soul's Code*, discusses the sudden upsets and disturbances that modern psychology would call pathological but in fact are evidence of the genius or daemon. He tells this story: "Amateur Night at the Harlem Opera House. A skinny, awkward sixteen-year-old goes fearfully onstage. She is announced to the crowd: 'The next contestant is a young lady named Ella Fitzgerald . . . Miss Fitzgerald here is gonna dance for us . . . Hold it, hold it. Now what's your problem, honey? Correction, folks. Miss Fitzgerald has changed her mind. She's not gonna dance, she's gonna sing . . .'" Ella Fitzgerald gave three encores and won first prize. However, 'she had meant to dance.'" (Hillman 1996, 10)

This intersection of personal and collective destiny might explain what happened to Rosa Parks, credited with starting the Civil Rights movement. Contrary to popular perception, she did not act out of a value system of speaking out about injustice, but rather, simple fatigue. She just said no when told to give up her seat on the bus to a white man. Fatigue? What kind of magic or divine grace would make fatigue able to stand up against the entrenched bastion of racial hatred that insured that every tired black body must give up its seat to a white ass? Somehow, she claimed the power that was rightfully hers, by virtue of her humanity, to remain intact, within her own needs, despite the terrifying consequences. Her refusal to cooperate with the box unleashed history.

Another example of the sudden appearance of the genius which upsets the status quo happened to a man named Chris, a German man who had been a cargo ship captain. Chris had earned a very high salary for over 20 years, shipping goods across the Atlantic. One day, he was ordered to ship a load of nuclear weapons. He refused, not really knowing why or having ever planned to do so. He "just said no." The next day he was fired. With a family to support, no income, no future, and a house and bills to pay for, he was beside himself. For a year, he was disoriented and distressed in his unplanned, accidental exile. Not knowing what to do, he began to build boats, a hobby he had always wanted to devote more time to. He made large beautiful wooden boats with hand-stitched sails. After a while, his work drew the attention of museums and ship-builders, and now Chris' work is in high-demand and he is happy doing what he loves. In this case, art made a bridge in the gap in-between. His refusal to participate in the collective machine of death production disengages him from the world's death boxes. He is exiled, disoriented, then discovers he is in the place of creativity.

Some brave souls take on the dragon directly, standing up for justice and going for the jugular that keeps the box ticking. During Hitler's rise to power, an insurrection was led by Count Stauffenberg that would have killed Hitler in 1944. According to Dr. Herbert Deinert, professor of German Studies at Cornell University, this overthrow would likely have succeeded if the Germans would have supported it. But it was inconceivable to the Germans, due in part to their belief in statements made by Martin

Luther, to support the revolt because of the national value of loyalty. A citizen's first claim was to the Nation, the government--no matter what:

. . . (The conspirators') actions flew in the face of everything Germans had assumed for centuries about the relationship between government and the governed.

Luther, Germany's moral authority, had settled the issue long ago by quoting Romans 13 and allowing no exceptions. Insurrection was both a mortal sin and the cardinal political crime. In all matters but faith, any government was to be obeyed unconditionally.

The Lutheran Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing in Hitler's Germany, reiterates the doctrine nearly verbatim: 'Government is divinely ordained authority to exercise worldly dominion by divine right.' (from the Ithaca Journal (8/26/94) by Dr. Herbert Deinert, Professor of German Studies, Cornell University)

What is loyalty? To whom do we owe allegiance? To the institution or status quo or to justice and virtue? Is justice and virtue the same as the actions of our government or could they be different? Is truth really the same as the conception of truth held by my ashram or religion? Is virtue really identical to the behavior of my group or my spiritual advisor? Should we allow others to deny us the right to question, draw distinctions, and struggle--with each other--to understand and separate ourselves from identity with unexamined systems of belief?

When we create something, whether it is a religion, an academic department, a new movement in transpersonal psychology, any organization meant to promote a mission to help humanity, no matter how perfectly virtuous its intent, something is produced right alongside it which bears the image of what is cast off. A dynamic ensues which grips the new and noble organization in a battle with its own excluded image. Depth psychology calls this the shadow. But there is danger of using psychological terminology currently in vogue; it lulls us into thinking "oh yes, I know all about the shadow." Once a term becomes part of the cultural exchange, people interpret it according to the limits of their understanding. The word itself becomes equivalent to a box. The word makes us think we know when we do not know and thus stops thinking. Labels tend to halt the mind, put it into a temporary coffin in order to save time and "get on with it." Such naming abstracts the living subtlety of this very real dragon and acts in

such a way as denial does: by naming it we think we have located it, that we are not under its influence. In fact, terminology often serves the purpose of the dragon: to hide the huge invisible virus that activates itself to undermine our highest efforts towards progress in an ongoing incestuous battle. What is necessary to recognize is that much of the evils that eat away at our most cherished cultural constructions are evils spawned by the cultural construction itself. What we take to be our enemies, in other words, may often be only a mask worn by the automatic reaction of what lies on the other side of a boundary created between an us and a them, a me and an other.

## CHAPTER 6

### WHO OR WHAT IS CAST OUT? --

### AN EXAMINATION OF THE VITAL SOUL

The vital soul has been called by many names. It is an ambiguous, complex term that was in antiquity associated with the Mysteries, with sexuality, intelligence, conscience, the inner guide, fertility, fate, and the companion or guardian spirit. It has been called the mother-given soul, the embodied soul, the genius or Juno, and it was demonized by religion. Most of the civilizations in the ancient Near East that gave rise to Western culture have in their language a word that designates this aspect of soul.

Our experience of the vital is not just individual but it is also experienced outside ourselves, as the awesome force of life in nature. Almost all early societies had some word which expressed a force or power capable of arousing awe and gripping the attention. These groups did not draw a division as we do today between internal and external life; rather, this mysterious power was in nature as well as humans. Jane Harrison in her book about the origins of religion, Themis, draws distinctions between various words that designate the connective power or life force, by virtue of which shamans and magicians were able to heal and derive their power. Orenda is used by the Iroquois to name the experience of the power of nature that lives in man and nature: ". . . bodily life, vigour, passion, power, the virtue that is in you to feel and do, also to know, . . . it is by his orenda that the medicine-man learns the secrets of the future. . . . It is further the material of magical action." Mana seems to be a more specialized, perhaps more personal, mode of orenda. (Harrison 1966, 66)

Our vitality is woven into the social matrix; yet, like the orenda that flows through nature, our vital moves beyond the borders of our social identity. We belong to many groups and inherit the world view and identity of previous generations in addition to our individuality and what our heredity and circumstances donate.

If we pay attention, however, we will notice that something of us is left out of every group; it is either missing or not welcome. We saw in the previous chapters that when our anguish or deepest questions are not heard then part of us is exiled. Once we become aware of exile, we can take notice of the invitation to understand where we are instead of just feeling bitter and abandoned. To undertake the path of understanding, inquiry into the text that life is, is a Sophianic journey, for Sophia, too was exiled. We are invited to find the treasure in the dung heap, the lotus in the mud, in the land of exile. We become aware of exile because of the buffer zone of silence. This zone is protected by indifference, fear, ridicule and rejection which separates our exiled part from the world. This is a painful experience, but as we shall see, without it we go nowhere. To remain conscious of this split--to honor the cut off part and not sacrifice it on the altar of the world's demand for obedience and conformity--is to step onto Sophia's circuit. What appears--and feels--to be a crucifixion becomes an alchemy that forges our humanity. From the crucifixion comes eyes that are able to see. From this organ of perception created by the split within life, comes a place to stand outside of the mechanism of exclusion, scapegoating, and exile.

What then is the first step in this process? First, it is necessary to become acquainted with the part of you that has been exiled. I call it the vital soul. What is the vital soul? Understood in a religious context, soul is that which will suffer heaven and hell, that is immortal and will be judged according to its merits and failings. It was often left out in theological discussions, in spiritual paths which focused on the spirit, transcendence, leaving the body and earth in preference for nirvana, enlightenment.

Today, archetypal psychology is restoring to soul some of its color, beauty, and passion. Soul today is associated with imagination and feeling, with that part of us that connects to this world and perhaps other worlds, that longs for beauty, that is vaguely aware of intimations of fate, of the divine, of the good and the true. Soul is life, movement.

The soul as simple noun is impossible to define once and for all because it is one of those words that has become a convenient bucket into which many people put their feelings, hopes, opinions and imaginings. The definition of soul will depend upon

whether your point of view is from religion, psychology, or anthropology. However difficult to pin down, however, soul, as noun, represents an experience of human life that is shared across time and diverse cultures. The most "primitive" societies have a notion of soul: there is something about human life that survives, is seen after death as a spirit or ghost, and that is associated with the greater life of either Nature, cosmos, or prevailing divinity. Soul is ambiguous; it suggests a moving, a connecting, and it is both individual and in some sense, universal or that which connects us to nature, cosmos, and the dead.

### VITAL SOUL AS INDIVIDUAL

I will use the term "vital soul" to mean the core of individuality which, paradoxically, is awakened and expressed in relationship; therefore it is not confined to either interiority or to one individual. I will not use Jung's term "self" because the tendency is to limit our notion of self and individuality to the periphery of our physical bodies. The word vital is more like the connecting power suggested by the term mana or orenda. When we can take a stand outside the box, it becomes possible to survey the new landscape and get a feel for the different selves that become apparent. Dissatisfaction and longing--whether we long to feel the pseudo-connection of the box, or whether we accept our exile and long for redemption and protection from being scapegoated--brings about awareness of tension and two worlds. This is being in the gap, the place between worlds, and what is necessary to navigate is a hermetic task, a knowledge of the way wisdom magic operates. The first step is learning to discriminate the real you from the socialized you. Exile is transition from one identity that we are not even aware of, to awareness of that identity, to then getting to know a deeper individuality, one with conscience and power and vision.

The real spiritual journey that begins in the gap, between the worlds, does not focus on improving the ego or making it "holy" or capable of unconditional love and human bonding. As a matter of fact, that is one of the trickiest deceptions operating today. Some so-called spiritual people claim that the ego must be gotten rid of, and then act as though they have gotten rid of it: their selfishness and envy then goes underground

to wreak havoc in scapegoating and exclusion. Selfishness and unselfishness mean something only in the context of the other. The goal on Sophia's circuit is not to disown our shadow and abandon life but to become fully human: "It cannot be too often emphasized that what is to be transformed in the hermetic vessel is not the personal ego but the nonpersonal part of the psyche." (Harding 1973, 462) The tension that arises in exile is a kind of hermetic vessel; in this case, relating where you are and where you are not creates a span of attention which holds the opposites. This is a container. What you are--the whining and wanting ego self is held in tension with what you want to be--a creative, caring person. It is the tension between the two that creates a container within which will be born our humanity.

Our task is to discriminate what Plotinus calls the "alien" and remove it, for it is this that constitutes the real barrier to human relationship. The alien is the web of identities foisted upon us from birth, that dictate to us how we interpret ourselves and the world. Even when we undertake to study spiritual topics, archetypal psychology, whatever promises to lead us away from the deadening stereotypes of consumer society, there is always the tendency to adopt and keep a new identity: the Self, the overself, the create-your-own-reality self, even a Sophia self. The path of Sophia seems to be one in which identities are formed and then released--seen to be constructions. Her mantra is: the interpretation is not reality; the interpretation is not reality; the interpretation is not reality. So, realizing that part of us is adrift shakes things up sufficiently so that we start asking questions: who am I? why is this happening to me? why am I not accepted here?

What then, is our individuality? We become aware of it because there is a split in it: there is part of us that gets stuck onto the collective agenda and there is part of us that becomes aware of exile, that is troubled, in need of reunion with love and light, that has been cast out of what appears to be the human family. What appears to be the human family is really the collection of boxes that give our life meaning and order.

A transition has happened. The on-going agenda of the world has bumped us off the train. We have been left behind or at least it feels that we have lost our moorings. Where is home? we ask. This would be celebrated in antiquity, ritualized, honored as an initiation. The experience of exile from the world of agendas is a kind of death. Initiation

is about rebirth; dying to the old and claiming one's spiritual heritage. Rebirth is coming into one's new life, reclaiming one's power, freedom, creativity, and ability to relate consciously to the human family that does not want us, but is actually an agenda. This agenda is now seen for what it is--inhuman.

Furthermore, it is seen to be not external and not really internal, but more like an amoeba, an entity to which are attached many human souls--including, still, our own. This is seen to be the real "lower nature," the only "matter" that there is. The mysteries introduce the initiate to the spiritual task, the urgent one that we have lost sight of, that of creating humanity; this requires the discernment to distinguish the alien, what is real and alive and what is a construct, agenda. Our job is to free our Kore, our trapped vital from the amoeba-like creatures called cultural interpretations--the unexamined, dehumanized agendas of society.

Below are some descriptions of the vital soul from people who have attempted to interpret their experience of it. Some of the uses and terminology of the word soul will be covered, particularly by Carl Jung, who may be the person most responsible for the restoration of the vital soul in this century. The vital soul's history, its origins are embedded deep within the roots of Western culture, in Greece, Rome, and Egypt. The vital soul is associated with conscience, sexuality, fury, poetry, and inspiration. It appears that the soul can be viewed in its cosmic aspect, like the world soul; and then in this personal mode, where it is roared into life like the lion cub, ready to take on the world, to fight, proclaim its truth, create, and howl forth its destiny in the world of dozing dragons. Later I will discuss the Mysteries at Eleusis and the myth of Demeter and Persephone and the possibility of its interpretation as a ritual acknowledgment of the vital soul and its relation to the world soul.

## DESCRIPTIONS OF THE VITAL

The vital soul may be that part of the soul most closely in touch with the body. What is soul? Soul, psyche, the German Seele, the Latin anima all refer to this mysterious,

ambiguous, hard-to-define component of human nature that traditionally has been called feminine by poets, theologians, and psychologists. Soul is body-bound, elusive, and intrinsically bound to life and emotion. Soul is not abstract, clear, light or rational; yet, she has a noetic aspect. For Jung, the soul is "the magic breath of life" and that is why he uses the term "anima." (Jung 1990a, CW 9, i, (55)) The anima is so important in Jung's vision that he even calls the anima "the archetype of life itself." The anima is not an airy spirit belonging to transcendental realms, but hovers close to life. Anima is the feminine and chthonic part of soul and is equivalent to the Chinese conception of the p'o soul. (Jung 1990a, CW 9, i, (119))

Jung wrote volumes on the chthonic or embodied soul. He says that this peculiar soul quality is not consciousness per se, but gives rise to consciousness: ". . . it [anima] is a life behind consciousness that cannot be completely integrated with it, but from which, on the contrary, consciousness arises." (Jung 1990a, CW 9,i, (57))

Here, Jung has described the condition of being "outside": Soul cannot be "completely integrated" with consciousness. It may well be that the friction and tension between consciousness and "the soul that can't be integrated" is what actually produces consciousness.

Jung seems to take great delight in giving to anima the honor and special place in his work that she deserves. He credits anima with being about the only thing in a male's life which will shake him up and rouse him out of torpor and the deadly Christian morality that is its expression: "Soul is the living thing in man, that which lives of itself and causes life. . . . Were it not for the leaping and twinkling of the soul, man would rot away in his greatest passion, idleness. A certain kind of reasonableness is its (idleness') advocate, and a certain kind of morality adds its blessing. But to have soul is the whole venture of life, for soul is a life-giving daemon who plays his elfin game above and below human existence, for which reason--in the realm of dogma--he is threatened and propitiated with superhuman punishments and blessings . . ." (Jung 1990a, CW 9,i, 26-27 (56)) The inertia Jung speaks about that is protected by conventional (unthinking) morality is reminiscent of Typho (see the Isis section in chapter 2). Isis' sistrum symbolizes the soul's moving and shaking that arouses us into consciousness.

Our word for soul comes from the Greek psyche translated as soul, but whose original meaning was far richer and juicier than the overspiritualized thing of theological discourse. Imagine the difference between a dull discussion about soul by a committee of theologians and then think of the Indian Ma Kali as black warrior wisdom dancing on her consort's chest, a belt of skulls testifying to her smashing the limits of dogma. Imagine a century ago, the slaves' longing for freedom, the joyful singing of black gospel singers, or the ecstasy of Rumi's poetry or the fury and burning of underworld poetic vision. It is apparent from the following list of meanings that soul is rooted in the subterranean furnace of life as the source of passion, yet paradoxically, what survived death; its roots drinking from the soil and moisture and fire of sexuality. This fiery, sexual immortal part of ourselves was called in Greece the psyche, in Rome the genius, and in Egypt the ka.

Richard Onians, in his sourcebook on the roots of consciousness in language, Origins of European Thought, compares psyche to the Roman genius, and states that they are equivalent. Both psyche and genius designate the "life spirit active in procreation." Both took the form of the snake and both were located in the head (as opposed to the chest, home of the conscious self). (Onians 1987, 129)

An interesting switch in the traditional interpretation of the Garden of Eden story would be that we only become human when we disobey the status quo and follow the serpent, the wisdom of the body. When our gods get angry and remove us from their paradise of unconscious participation in non-human rules, only then do we begin the journey of liberation. It is only upon being sent out of Eden that the first couple becomes capable of conscience, shame. The suggestion of some sexual secret associated with the feminine, with the serpent, and with gnosis--the knowledge of good and evil--suggest that this fable is really an allegory about the path of our evolution. To become authentically human we must leave paradise, the illusion of safety protected by fear and threats and tabu, and follow the wisdom of the greater life of cosmos, nature, body. The Eden story is about conflicting orders; one coming from "above" which merely prohibits and threatens, while the other provides direction and the promise of knowledge, coming from the serpent. The serpent is a loaded symbol in antiquity. One of its meanings is wisdom. The genius, the inner guide, is portrayed as a serpent. Could the serpent in the garden be the

inner guide? The genius and its association with fire, conscience, fertility, immortality, the serpent, and its locus in the head directs our attention to this possibility (the following references are from Onians):

The genius is active in burning flame (263)

The genius assumed form of snake (129)

It is one's life spirit (227)

It is what survives death (131)

The halo portrayed in art around holy or divine figures is the fire around the head; the head contains the life-soul, divinity, his genius; the fire/radiance/halo belongs to the genius; the power in the head manifested itself as fire. (163)

The radiance around head is the expression of divine power, the genius (166)

[The] genius is the seed enclosed in skull (119)

Hermes, divine messenger, god of travelers, . . . was related to Hecate. From prehistoric times, Herodotus tells us that Hermes was represented as a squared pillar, having only genital organs and a head at the top, phallus erect, in the middle. A similar pillar or stele was often set up over a grave to represent the dead. This showed that what survived death was the **psyche**, for the generative power was thought to be the **psyche**, located in the head. Head and genital organs are its outward essentials. Hermes was the generative power in the world at large, as it were the universal fertilising **psyche**. . . . (Onians 1987, 122) (emphasis mine)

In their book, Wisdom of the Elders, authors David Suzuki and Peter Knudson discovered in the Dasana tribe of the Eastern Colombian rain forest, a remarkable knowledge of the architecture of the human brain. Colombian anthropologist Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff tells about several Desana metaphors for the human brain. One describes the brain as "an exquisite, crystalline rock--composed of countless, closely packed hexagonal prisms, each of which emits an energy of a subtly different hue. . . . In another Desana metaphor the human brain is a great, teeming beehive, . . . meticulously

organized and literally vibrating with life." Another metaphor tells about the brain as a "dazzling, symmetrical, bilateral bouquet of distinctively colored hexagonal columns." The authors note that Roger Sperry, whose studies revealed the independent roles of the left and right cerebral hemispheres in the human brain, states "In the human head . . . there are forces within forces, as in no other cubic half-foot in the universe." (Suzuki and Knudson 1993, 90)

Democritus said that the soul was divine in and of itself, without need of gods and afterworlds: "The soul is the dwelling-place of the daemon . . . in the soul you will find the only daemon there is to find." (Allen and Furley 1975, 383). The notion that soul might be divine in a natural way, without being derived or dependent upon Olympus or heaven, was demonstrated in the life of Socrates. Socrates obeyed his inner daemon, the voice that guided him through life with a warning "no" if he was to embark upon a course out of alignment with his destiny.

What is the daemon? How can something be spiritual without coming from a god? The early philosophers, as well as the language itself, tell us that the divine element in soul has to do with conscience. In fact, in many languages, consciousness and conscience are the same. Vladimir Soloviov, whose encounter with Sophia led him to develop Sophiology in Russia, noted that shame is what exhibits human consciousness. The Russians can say the phrase "I am ashamed" as either "to me is shame (lit., cold shuddering), or "to me is consciousness." (Harrison 1966, LIII)

Conscience is associated with the genius. The daemon is suggestive of, if not equivalent to, the genius. In Plato's Timaeus, the daemon is said to be the noblest part of the soul. Every human being has a divine daemon to protect and guide her. If she seeks wisdom and virtue and spends time trying to understand life, she nourishes her daemon, whereas attention to ambition and money-making debase the daemon.

The daemon of Socrates is described in detail in Apuleius' book, The God of Socrates: Socrates was condemned by his fellow Athenians to drink the poison hemlock. The reason, according to Apuleius, was he introduced the young men to the powers within their own soul, their daemon, rather than acknowledging the gods preferred by

Athens. Apuleius identifies the daemon with conscience and he ascribes to it the highest virtues and functions: " . . . the allotted daemon is conscience, which is the supreme flower of the soul, is guiltless in us, is an inflexible judge, and a witness to . . . [our] life. This also becomes the cause to us of our salvation, . . . converting the soul to what is proper. You will not err, therefore, in calling the allotted daemon conscience. . . . for the great division of the powers of the soul is into the gnostic and vital." (Apuleius 1993, 38)

The genius is the source of creative and prophetic energy, and it has been described in many cultures as a divine madness, source of poetry and ecstatic vision. The genius is rooted in the head, in the cerebro-spinal fluid, and is most likely related to the Kundalini force. The Kundalini has been defined as the personification of the evolutionary forces of the earth. (This is according to Richard Gilbert's interesting "Experiential Kundalini Technologies for Psycho-Spiritual Transformation," in The Academy of Religion and Psychical Research's 1988 Annual Conference Proceedings: Kundalini, Biological Basis of Religion and Genius?.) (Gilbert 1988, 103)) According to Gopi Krishna, who experienced and suffered the arising of the Kundalini force in his body, wrote in his book Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy In Man:

The whole science of Kundalini is fundamentally based on the assumption that it is possible for one to rouse to activity a mighty dormant power in the human body in order to gain freedom from sense domination for the embodied spirit, enabling it to soar unfettered to its celestial estate. (Krishna 1971, 195)

It is Plato's telestic (prophetic) mania that may be associated with the vital soul in particular, because of its association with the Dionysiacal:

The Dionysiacal (telestic) inspiration, renders (soul) perfect, and causes it to energize according to the whole of itself, and to live intellectually. . . . the telestic mania, expelling everything foreign, contaminating, and noxious, preserves our life perfect, and causes us to be sane, entire, and perfect, just as the internal telestic mania makes the soul to be perfect and entire. (T. Taylor trans. of the Scholia of Hermias on the Phaedrus, Shrine of Wisdom eds. n.d., 184) (emphasis mine)

It is the telestic mania that we need to awaken in those passionate souls who would become wisdom warriors.

The Telestic Inspiration is that which enters into the Ordinate Arts, or all those which are of a perfective, remedial, directive, and ordinating character. It is this inspiration which directs the activities of all healers, reformers, legislators, sociologists, and politicians, and carries them a stage further than would be possible by any purely deliberate and human power. But because the ideals at which these arts aim are those of Goodness and Harmony, and, because they depend more on the will and the volitional nature, they are not so generally recognized as arts as are the expressive, and hence the fact that they too depend upon inspiration in order to be truly effective is sometimes overlooked. But to direct the affairs of a nation, to find a remedy for social evils, or to cure the diseases of a human body, so that the good effected shall be real and permanent and not merely temporal and apparent, requires inspiration just as much as to produce a masterpiece of painting; and if the artist in colour or sound can be inspired, so too can he whose work it is to restore health to an individual or a community. Of this inspiration also there are many degrees, but in its highest forms the goodness which it brings to man is one which is not particular and partitive but universal and integral. The well-being of the whole human race ultimately depends upon that of each individual member, and hence those who are truly inspired by the Telestic Inspiration work not for any one sect or class or nation of mankind, but for humanity as a whole. The Telestic Inspiration is said to come from Dionysus, with whose worship the Eleusinian Mysteries, the most celebrated institution of antiquity which was concerned with the perfection of men, were connected. (Shrine of Wisdom eds., commentary on T. Taylor quoted above, n.d., 189) (emphasis mine)

In the myth of Dionysus, Cadmus is a king who grows old and no longer controls his kingdom. According to the myth's interpreter, Manly P. Hall, Cadmus symbolizes reason and spiritual truths which are in need of revitalization. In every tradition in antiquity, the battle between the forces of rejuvenation and the preservative character of institutions supported by ambition, personal gain, and exploitation has been portrayed as some kind of monster or dragon that must be fought. Cadmus is pictured as senile and doddering (very similar to Re before Isis poisons him) but within, he rejoices over the arrival of Dionysus, who personifies the renewal of life through the creative destruction of the forces of ossification: "Dionysius is . . . the spiritual vibration which awakens all

the latent forces, thrills them with its life, and joins them together in the sacred dance (vibration). . . . the lower nature opposes violently the unfolding spiritual energy which threatens to dissipate its power." (Hall 1975, LII) Isis' sistrum (see chapter 2) symbolizes this "spiritual vibration" that regenerates life by destroying the elementals of ossification (Typhon). But "the lower nature" that opposes spiritual energy is not the body or the instincts. It is, rather, the internalized messages from the memes, the forces of ossification that tell us to shut up, be loyal to our oppressors, don't question, conform and obey.

Hermes, as we saw, is associated with Hecate and the generative principle, the genius. It is Hermes that transports Dionysus to the mysterious land of Nysa in the midst of which is Meros, the mystery mountain. This is Meru, the sacred mountain, symbol of the brain, the seat of the Hermetic or Mercurial energies, pictured as fauns, satyrs, dryades and other strange creatures. The oldest and wisest of the satyrs was old Silenus, disillusioned and weary of life. Silenus is experience, "the oldest and wisest of the divine race that dwells in the brain." (Hall 1975, XLVI-II)

In Egypt, the figure that approximates the genius and psyche as daemon, is called the ka. It would be a mistake to exactly translate this term with a tidy definition because we are so far removed in time and understanding from the deeply spiritual context and diverse application of meanings experienced by the ancients. The ka was used to refer to many different levels of the life force, human and nonhuman. Scholars do agree, however, that the word is used to designate the life force, the vital power of a being. In the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the literal meaning of the word is "image." According to Budge, the ka "seems to have been the 'ghost' . . . of a man and it has been defined as his abstract personality, to which, after death, the Egyptians gave a material form." (Budge 1967, 247)

Later the word was symbolic of what "maintained the vital power, i.e., food, victuals." (Budge 1992, 173)

In Iranian Sufism, the entity that corresponds to the double or Egyptian ka is called Perfect Nature, the object of ecstatic vision. This transcendent guide forms a pair with its

terrestrial double, the man of light. Perfect Nature is Sophia, also called the philosopher's Angel or Sun, Daena, Perfect Nature, personal master and suprasensory guide, Sun of the heart, etc. Sophia is Perfect Nature, the guide in exile, the watcher and shepherd. (Corbin 1978, 26) She is paradoxically the essentially individuality but also the "pre-terrestrial vision of the celestial world," and as Daena, the "visionary organ of the soul." (Corbin 1978, 30)

What is consistent in the texts and stories is that the individual is the locus of the spiritual path: it is by following one's own inner guide that one attains to union with the divine world. The split between exoteric and esoteric religion revolves around this issue. Exoteric religion requires obedience to rules; thus, truth is equated to the interpretation of divinity by a small minority of powerful men; this corpus of doctrine, along with creation stories, ritual, and a priesthood is the intermediary between the person and her god. This insidious hierarchy controls access to divinity by placing these interpretations and rules as a necessary bridge to the sacred. In Iranian Sufism as in other mystical, esoteric traditions, a reversal of this hierarchy is accomplished through this individual, ecstatic path of search and reunion with the inner Beloved, the Watcher, Angel, guardian, protector, and friend. ". . . a direct relationship is established between the divine world and this spiritual individuality, independently of the mediation of any earthly collectivity." (Corbin 1978, 20) The "invisible guide" is the vital, the intelligence of the body.

What is Perfect Nature? An 11th century text, "The Goal of the Sage" (Ghayat al-Hakim), describes Perfect Nature as "'the philosopher's Angel,' his initiator and tutor, and finally as the object and secret of all philosophy, the dominant figure in the Sage's personal religion. According to Corbin, Socrates declared Perfect Nature to be the sun of the philosopher, the "original root of his being and at the same time the branch springing from him." The philosopher's Angel is the Form of light, the heavenly Sophia "conjoined with his star, which rules him and opens the doors of wisdom for him, teaches him what is difficult, reveals to him what is right, in sleeping as in waking." (Corbin 1978, 17)

For Corbin, the core mystery of the spiritual journey is not about a selfish withdrawal into spirit but a confrontation and battle that an individual must wage "against all the coercion and collectivization of the person." (Corbin 1978, 31)

Here again, embedded in esoteric Sufism, is the same theme of exile, the fight with the status quo and the meeting with the double--the ka, daemon, Sophia as vital voice, the friend.

In this perspective, it is not dualism, not the senses or instincts that bring us misery and obstacles. What is tragic is when our belief system or interpretation of divinity intrudes itself between us and our guide and friend, for then we are "mutilated, exterminated: a human abortion cut off from (Sophia) . . . a man without a Daena." (Corbin 1978, 30)

This theme perhaps appears again in the most exquisite fable of the two friends, the person and her double, as told in the Upanishads in which two birds sit on one tree; one eats the tree's sweet and juicy fruits while the other looks on and does not eat. Here the contemplating witness is again the guide.

When we expend all our spiritual efforts in a vain desire for consensus, collapsing everyone into "one," we miss the point. We have to find the friend within. It is by recovering our essential individuality that we become connected and cosmic, capable of authentic relationship.

How is wisdom associated with fury, mana, fertility, and the life force? We have seen that in many cultures and languages there is a term and even spiritual science associated with this individualized life force. This power is hot, fiery, source of inspiration, and the source of magic. Activation of it, for good or ill, brings a person to the portal between two worlds, the place of the shaman, the 8th clime of the Sufis, the gap, the belly of the whale, the place of transitions where monsters and hags are born, arise, embraced and beseeched for their assistance in following the circuit of Sophia.

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Feb. 2, 1997. I woke up sharp at 4:55 AM, bathed in sweat, and recalled this dream: I was in a big, sprawling farm house, with lots of smaller compounds or living units attached. I was living with a large, extended family, full of children, teenagers, adults and seniors. Occasionally, a huge fire would erupt from the barn area down the hill, threatening to engulf the entire structure and endangering the lives of everyone living there, especially the children. I went to the other adults, and said, "Come, we must stop this fire! We shall FACE this. Bring buckets of water and we shall end the danger." But then when I got down there, I was all alone. No one had come with me. I had to deal with it all by myself.

I walked into a large empty room: lovely, bare, all made of wood like a huge empty study or den. There against the back wall was a fireplace. In the fireplace was a small, low, fire, with embers glowing. I walked up to it and looked at it. There, in the fire, were flames that were alive, leering with the face of evil, a horrid grin. The fire was alive! There before me I saw the incarnation of evil. It was like looking into the face of all the cold cruelty of history that man inflicts on humanity embodied in one entity.

I suddenly knew what to do: I had to stand before it and "talk it down" in order to make it stop exploding and killing. I had to become as powerful as It. It felt like I gathered in all my power. I literally ROARED inside, standing before it, staring it down. I glared at it. Then--I became it. I looked down and saw my fingernails: they were glowing with an incandescent purple--I had become the fire.

I walked away with the knowledge that I had succeeded in stopping the evil destructive out-of-control entity. But something had changed: I was wearing a long black cape and I glowed like a furnace and I had this heat inside, a hot deadly ferocious roar. I had to go tell the others that they were safe. I was excited about telling them but realized that my own voice had been replaced by this roar; therefore, I had to speak very softly, slowly, gently, in measured terms, and maybe even write it down instead of speaking so that they would not be frightened.

I woke up from this dream shaking like a leaf, from the horror of standing face to face with the evil in the fire. It felt, however, like I had successfully passed through an initiation.

A few months later I was moving books around to dust and I moved this short fat book to another shelf. For no reason I pulled it out and began reading it. The book belonged to Paul; it is the Brhadaranyaka Upanisad with Shankaracharya's commentary. I began reading and couldn't put it down. It was about the vital force in the body. It said that the vital force was a deity, and to cling to and honor this deity was to be saved from death. The reason we need to cling to the vital, according to the text, was because the vital only needs food for its physical body to survive and so it is not subject to all the vanities and posturing that afflict the organs of speech and hearing etc. This deity of the vital is similar to the ka, genius, and daemon.

Death used here means rigor mortis, the inertia and the beliefs that allow it to continue on and on and on. This is "real" death in the sense of the vast sleep of ignorance that holds the world in thrall. It is held together by the misinterpretation of reality that clings to our speech, hearing, and sight, etc. The cultural messages that tell us to conform to stereotypes are both outside us and within us as internalized projections. This is "death." This "death" must be removed in order for these "gods" of speech etc., to return to their natural, divine state.

This deity [(the vital force)] after taking away death, the evil of these gods, next carried them beyond death. (Brh. 11) Now the result of this act of meditation on the vital force as one's own self, . . . [(carries them beyond death)] because death, or the evil that limits one to the body, is removed by the identification with the vital force . . . Hence that vital force carried these gods, that of speech and the rest, beyond death . . . evil . . . and made them realise their respective unlimited divine forms as fire and so on. (Shankaracharya's commentary on Brh. 11, Brhadaranyaka Upanisad, 67-68)

It [(the deity that is the vital force)] carried the organ of speech, . . . When the organ of speech got rid of death, it became fire. That fire, having transcended death, shines beyond its reach. (Brh. 12)

The Upanishad goes on to describe that the deity of the vital carries, one by one, the other sense organs, including the mind:

When it got rid of death, it [(the nose)] became air. That air, having transcended death, blows beyond its reach. Then it carried the eye. When the eye got rid of

death, it became the sun. That sun, having transcended death, shines beyond its reach. Then it carried the ear. When the ear got rid of death, it became the quarters. Those quarters, having transcended death, remain beyond its reach. Then it carried the mind. When the mind got rid of death, it became the moon. That moon, having transcended death, shines beyond its reach. So does this deity carry one who knows thus beyond death. (Brh. 13-17)

I read that passage and got shivers and goosebumps: "When the organ of speech got rid of death, it became fire." I immediately saw the connection with my fire dream. For me, the dream was a positive message: go directly towards the evil and confront it and you will divest it of its power by taking it on, owning it, controlling it, and using it for the good. The evil is in me, but not only in me. It is our evil. Although I must face the evil alone, the power that comes from the encounter is speech restored to its primal state, fire. Then I have to assume responsibility for the right use of fire/speech. After speech is cleansed of death and becomes fire, then the other sense organs must go through a similar purification. In all cases, the procedure is the same, according to Shankaracarya's commentary on the text: "meditation on the vital force as one's own self." (Shankaracharya's commentary on Brh. 11, Brhadaranyaka Upanisad, 67)

It felt as though the cosmos, through this Upanisad, affirmed the position I had taken in this book. When the deity of the vital force "carries" the organ beyond the coffin of the box and liberates it from death, the result is that each organ including speech, hearing, sight, smell, and the mind, are each restored to their original divine state.

# PART III: The Return of Sophia

## CHAPTER 7

### DEMETER AND KORE

### AND THE MYSTERIES OF ELEUSIS

The myth of Demeter/Kore, celebrated in the Mysteries at Eleusis, Greece, for thousands of years, speaks to the soul at many levels. The Mysteries reminded people that the ordinary life of buying, selling, eating, and procreating does not sum up human existence. We have a soul. That soul encompasses not just our routine affairs but soars into the deepest abyss of space and the mystery of the body. We are so much more than our cultural conditioning would have us believe. Life does not die. At the darkest hour, light returns. At the extreme of abandonment and loss, reunion dawns. Life goes through changes but it never dies.

This myth suddenly gripped me years ago while I was engrossed in reading about Sophia. I had begun to do research for my Master's thesis on Sophia. It was mid-September, approaching the fifth anniversary of Paul's death. It was not the day he died, September 28th, but the day of the fire, nine days earlier on September 19th, that seared my memory in horror. Every September 19th since then has pulled me into Hell.

Among Paul's books were several about the Mysteries at Eleusis. I was never really interested in the story but for some reason I kept noticing these books and finally took them down off the shelf, dusted them, and began to poke around them. Intrigued, I read about the elaborate rituals, processions, and paraphernalia associated with these venerable, archaic ceremonies that were the focus of religious life in early Greece, drawing the respect and participation of men and women from around the known world. I read about the lesser Mysteries being celebrated in the Spring and the Greater Mysteries in Autumn. When in Autumn? I asked myself. I read some more. They were performed

on the 19th of the month of Boedromion. I called a librarian to find out what month Boedromion corresponded to. September. My skin prickled with chills. I read more. Great fires roared around the throne of the hierophant, the officiator of the Mysteries. They were so large that they could be seen all over Greece on the 19th. I read more. That was the only day that suicide was permitted. People would travel from as far away as India to set themselves on fire in the sacred precinct.

The 19th of Boedromion was so important a day that it was given a special name, agyrmos, day of gathering. Although the word agyrmos comes most likely from agora, meaning marketplace, there may be some association with the Greek word gyros, meaning spiral or circle. There is, according to Richard Onians, a linguistic and historical association between time and fate and the circle. (Onians 1987, 451 n, and 251). The "goal" of the Mystery on the night of agyrmos was called telos which is usually translated as goal or end. Telos comes from teleo, meaning to initiate. Onians traces the word and finds that telos did not mean "end" for the ancients, but completion, as in a circle. He notes that the circle expresses completeness and represented a process. (Onians 1987, 461) The gathering of agyrmos might also be related to the "gathering of the sparks" in Hermetic literature. The sparks may be the small piece of divinity, the little bit of cosmic soul that lies buried deep within the cellular memory. To gather the sparks always seemed to be a thrilling possibility, because it suggested coming home, a release from the bondage of isolation and confusion.

Coincidence? Synchronicity? Does it matter if it remains a mystery? I searched and read and dug, but I never got to any satisfactory explanation. On the one hand, the sprinkling of meaning and hints of correspondences between historical data and Paul's accident got me interested in finding out about the Demeter/Kore story, the focus of the Mysteries. On the other hand, the more information I got about ancient rites and symbols, the less I understood, the further away I became from any kind of satisfactory answer to the questions I had about the deeper meaning of his tragic death. Some people would see this as reason to abandon the search for understanding. If there are no answers, why ask? Why leave on a journey with no destination? If you strip these events of all theories and dogmas, what remains is coincidence that has the power to arouse emotion and a feeling

of deep significance. Attention is drawn powerfully into life, not for the sake of survival and exploitation but for the sake of understanding. These messages and correspondences, if nothing else, had the effect of moving my attention or circulating my interest. This to me is the spiritual journey, one which is embedded in one's personal fate. If nothing else, the faculty of inquiry is aroused. Reality shifts; new dimensions appear. What was dull pain becomes acute interest. The interest draws attention to what before was unnoticed. When you see new things, you feel different about the pain. This quality of seeing repositioned me in relation to Paul's death. Rather than focus on the lack of answers, it presented me the possibility that there was more to his death than "mere chance and statistical probability" which some well-meaning relatives had told me at his memorial service. What was the "more" to his death? That even death has an underbelly. Even death is situated in a rich and textured web of complexity, at once literal and mythological, both immediate and historical. Death, instead of obliterating life forever, expresses its own quality of being rooted in an order that is at once cosmic as well as personal. It was thus the pattern rather than a specific content of meaning that the movement of attention from event to myth revealed to me. Perhaps such interweavings of significance are always there, but we do not notice them unless we are looking for something, unless we have a question.

Whatever it means, the story has unveiled many layers of itself over the years. It suggests a basic theme or pattern of interaction between the powers of soul. The myth tells the story of the rape of Persephone, her abduction into the underworld by Hades, and the anguish of her mother Demeter as she rages and grieves and struggles to find her daughter. It tells about loss, separation, search and reunion.

## THE MYTH AND THE MYSTERIES

I will use the version related by Kerenyi in his book, Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter. According to the Homeric hymn, Zeus has willed the abduction. Persephone is playing with the daughters of Okeanos, sea-goddesses. Gaia, the earth

mother, has connived to lure her to a patch of wonderful flowers, never before seen. The flowers are narcotic, like the narcissus, "heavily scented, stupefying flowers." (Kerenyi, 1967, 51) The ground opens. Out rides Hades (Roman name Pluto), god of the underworld. He lifts the girl into his chariot, taking his ravished bride on a long ride over the earth before returning to his home in the underworld. There she becomes his queen, powerful and "awe-full." She becomes the Queen of the Dead.

The place of the abduction was next to a river near Eleusis. Persephone cries and her wailing is heard by Hecate in her cave. The Athenians invoked Hecate as a daughter of Demeter. Hecate hears but does not see the rape. Helios, the Sun, hears and sees the whole thing. Demeter is the last to know. Demeter is stricken with grief. She rips off her crown, wraps herself with garments of mourning, then wanders around for nine days. She does not eat or bathe. She carries two burning torches. On the tenth day she meets Hecate, who also bears a light, and the two go off to Helios to hear what happened and who took Persephone.

Demeter is wild with fury. Grief turns to rage. She leaves the world of the gods and disguises herself as an ugly old woman and descends to the human world. She arrives at Eleusis and sits down at the Virgin's Well, to which the local residents come for water. Nearby is the palace of Keleos. The king's daughters come to the well to get water. The girls have a baby brother who needs a nurse. Demeter has foreseen this and offers to be a nurse. The mother of the baby and his sisters is Metaneira. As the goddess enters the palace, the doorway is flooded with divine light. The queen is awestruck, although she does not recognize Demeter. Demeter sat down in sadness.

Other versions of the story say that Demeter sat down in grief upon a rock. She sat without laughing; the rock is called agelastos petra, "laughless rock." A lusty serving maid named Iambe (as in iambic, satirical poems) began to make jokes and lewd gestures to get Demeter to laugh. Another version has Demeter going not to a palace but to a poor peasant family. The wife's name was Baubo, meaning "belly." She performed an obscene dance before the goddess by throwing herself on her back. Then Demeter finally laughed. In the Homeric version, Iambe did the same with her jokes and the goddess finally softened. But she is not consoled.

The queen offers her red wine, but Demeter refuses, saying that if she drank, it would be contrary to themis, the order of nature. There is also evidence that Hades was a disguise for the real ravisher, Dionysus, the wine god, in whose field, the Nysan Plain, the rape occurred. Herakleitos, the philosopher and critic of the Mysteries, said that "Hades is the same as Dionysos." (Kerenyi 1967, 40) That was why the goddess refused to drink his beverage. Instead, she invented her own drink which was served to the initiates and became a sign of the Mysteries. Called kykeon, meaning "mixture", it was made from barley, water, and mint. Initiates had to drink it.

Demeter became the nurse of the little prince, Demophoon. Although he receives nothing to eat, he grows and thrives like a god. Each night the goddess lays him in the fire like a log. She does this in secret. One night, the queen out of curiosity peeks in and discovers the bizarre ritual. She screams: "My son Demophoon, the strange woman is putting you into the fire. I must mourn and lament for you." (Kerenyi 1967, 41) Demeter is furious. She removes him from the fire and lays him on the floor. His sisters come and pick him up. Demeter reveals herself in her divine glory and wrath: "Unknowing are ye mortals and thoughtless: ye know not whether good or evil approaches." For Demeter was making the little boy immortal. But now he would remain mortal like everyone else. The goddess demands that a great temple be built in her honor, above the Well of the Beautiful Dances, where she first sat. It is built.

Demeter in her anguish withdraws and causes the plants to stop growing on earth. No more sacrifices are made to the gods. Zeus finally relents and sends Hermes to the underworld to bring the Kore back to her mother. (Kerenyi 1967, 34-41)

Persephone is allowed to return. But because she has eaten a bite of the pomegranate, given to her by her husband Hades, she must return to the underworld for a third of the year. She can remain above the ground for the other portion of the year.

Persephone gives birth to a male child, who was called different names: Brimos, Dionysus, Plutus, Iacchus, Zeus-Zagreus, or Phanes-Eros. In the Eleusinian Mysteries, the child is the center of the vision, called the "epopteia"--identical with the ear of grain held up in silence--called "the perfect great light that comes from the ineffable."

(Neumann 1963, 319) The initiation was called the "festival of vision." (Kerenyi 1967, 47)

## MYSTERIES INTERPRETED AS SOPHIA'S RETURN

What happened during the Mysteries? The details of the initiates' vision were a faithfully kept secret. Scholars have attempted a re-creation based on the writings of ancient historians and philosophers and artwork. There were two significant events that stand out: the announcement of the birth of Brimos and the presentation of a mown ear of corn. The weeks of preparation, fasting, and sacrifice did not culminate in watching a reenactment of Demeter's search and reunion, nor in a sermon or teaching. Identified with the suffering, searching Demeter, they reached the highest pitch of intensity and realization in a witnessing, a vision. The telos, the goal of initiation was to see. This seeing was called epopteia, the state of having seen. Those who completed initiation were called epoptai, those who have seen.

The initiates walked to the temple where the sacred rites were held on the holy night of the 19th of Boedromion: "great fire and smoke burst forth from it, breaking, as it were, the secrecy of the Mysteries." (Kerenyi 1967, 82) People participated with varying degrees of involvement. Those who were to partake of the Lesser Mysteries remained outside the Telesterion. Those who had prepared themselves by fasting for nine days and drinking the kykeon, a special barley brew, were allowed to cross the threshold into the inner sanctuary.

According to Hippolytos, a Christian scholar, the Hierophant ("he who makes holy things appear," (from Greek word phainei--Kerenyi 1967, 90) ) officiated at night "under the great fire." Next to his throne was an erupting fire. Hippolytos writes: "Celebrating the great and ineffable secrets, he proclaims in a loud voice: 'The Mistress has given birth to a holy boy, Brimo has given birth to Brimos! that is, the Strong One to the Strong One.'" (Kerenyi 1967, 92)

The initiates heard the loud chanting voice of the Hierophant who proclaimed that "the queen of the dead herself had given birth in fire to a mighty son." (Kerenyi 1967, 93)

We naturally think it is Persephone who is the mother. But in Eleusis it was Demeter whose name was Brimo. In Arcadia she was called Mistress. So whose child is it? C. Kerenyi, who did extensive research on the Mysteries at Eleusis and their meaning, found that the divine personages of this drama did not remain the same. In other words, the images names and objects associated with Persephone would be found not only with Demeter but Artemis and Hecate. Persephone is called Kore, maiden, which was applied to Athena and Artemis. Strangest of all, Persephone's earliest appearance is Medusa: "Persephone" means "she who was killed by Perseus." Kerenyi says of their identity that "Brimo is as much Demeter as Persephone. Besides which, she is also Hecate. As a matter of fact, she is Demeter, Persephone, and Hecate rolled into one." (Jung and Kerenyi 1949, 198) The Greek word Brimo and its variations are translated: "the power to arouse terror," "to rage," "to roar or snort." (Jung and Kerenyi 1949, 197) It is also related to the word "brimstone."

Brimos, too, was called by different names, one of which was Dionysus, the god of wine and ecstasy. But then Dionysus mysteriously appears sometimes as Hades himself, the seducer. The field where the rape occurred was full of vines and sacred to Dionysus. So what is going on? These divine persons are aspects of a cosmic drama that unfolds on the stage of the human psyche. If we think of Sophia as the intelligence of the life force and its power to manifest for the health and well being of both earth and humanity, then it becomes easier to analyze.

Here are the characters in this soul-drama, masks worn by psyche to awaken the seeker to the knowledge that death is not what it appears to be--and neither is life.

### HADES

Hades is hell. Hades is ruler of hell, the underworld. Hades who steals Persephone to make her Queen of the Underworld, had permission from Zeus and the earth mother,

Rhea. They did nothing to stop the violent mission. This suggests that the divine drama of loss, separation, and suffering is in some way beneficial to life, part of a larger cosmic order.

Church-based religions and many New Age or Americanized versions of Eastern paths tend to focus on the light and demonize the dark. Hell--Hades--is so frightening to many Christians that some will even go to extreme lengths to avoid even hearing it. Commissioners of Kleberg County, Texas, decided to change the official greeting from "hello" to "heaven-o" to send a more positive message. Kingsville courthouse employees have begun to answer the phone, "Heaven-o." Interestingly, the words hell and heal are etymologically related. So is heel. Achilles' mortality was his vulnerable heel. To get shot in the heel is to die, to return to earth, to become (in Achilles' case), human. I had to heel in my potatoes: this means they had to be put into the soil. Plants are heeled in to keep their roots moist before planting. That which most terrifies us--death, the underworld--is not what it seems. We make it conform to the image of our fear when we react as though it were literally true: i.e., that death is final.

Prayers such as the Great Invocation appeal to the natural inclination of gentle souls to "seal forever the door where evil dwells." The Mysteries at Eleusis offer an alternative view: that such literalization is itself the cause of much evil; that the doors to the underworld can open to reveal its Queen and that this Queen belongs to the heavenly Mother herself. The theme of violence, loss, redemption, and reunion suggests a cosmic recycling adventure, in which both the dead and the living circulate, move, and exchange places.

Hades is the past--or rather, the presence of the past. He represents what continues to live on after an event is over. Even though we think a relationship or deed is finished, in fact, it lives on in the underworld, where it germinates and bears fruit later. One of the recurring themes of the Mysteries revolves around plants--their dying, going to seed, and rebirth in the spring.

Hades, then, is the image formed by psyche of the cluster of accumulated images, beliefs, interpretations, dogmas, and assumptions about reality that hang around and persist generation after generation. These persist because vital energy, residual soul stuff,

still clings to them. Hades, after all, personifies the realm of the dead--those who have lived before but are still around in some form, in the underworld. People and living things come into being, but nothing really disappears. The Mysteries most likely revealed that just as plants die in the winter only to reappear in the spring, so too, there is no literal death for soul, no death as in non-being or disappearance from the cycle of life-death-rebirth.

It appears that the separation and reunion are divinely ordained. Both Zeus and Mother Earth, Gaia, permit and cooperate with the abduction. If we think of Hades as the repository of the past, as the collection of tropes or habits left behind after life has departed, then the myth takes on new meaning. What is the underworld but all that has lived before, the place where life "goes" after death. Perhaps Hades is the body, the physical vehicle of soul that is the container of the entirety of humanity's past: the enormous wealth of knowledge that resides as residue of all the life that has been lived on earth, as biology has demonstrated (ontology recapitulates phylogony).

What we think also comes into being and does not die. The beliefs we hold are created by us and become habits. They go underground, where we cannot see them, and determine for us the world that we will experience. Our reality is the accumulated interpretations that we hold about it. They live on, long after their creators. These are the memes (see chapter 4) and they seek to perpetuate themselves at the expense of our creative power and autonomy. Together they form what sociologists and psychologists call social conditioning. Events that happen--death, accidents, war, marriage, birth, etc.--are covered in layers of interpretations determined for us by previous generations and preserved through habit into the present.

Occultists call these elementals: our beliefs and interpretations are infused with vital power. Vital power belongs to us: we own the power and then we invest it in our beliefs. We literally give birth to our world by our own vital soul power. We hold a belief--that the world is doomed, for example. We then invest that belief with the force of our attention and emotion--and thus we bring it about. On the other hand, denial of the very real and imminent threats to the fragile web of life is itself a belief, even more dangerous and ignorant than doomsday prophecies. Denial is a condition in which

statements that cause uncomfortable feelings are put aside. They coagulate into beliefs underground. Denial usually masks fear: "If I think about the imminent threat to survival if industrial growth continues unchecked, I will feel helpless, angry, and afraid. I can't do anything about such a big problem so I will forget about it. Besides, science can figure out what to do." Denial is the oil that greases the wheel we turn that keeps us in a literal hell of our own making.

Sophia's way is to liberate soul power--which manifests as inquiry into the roots of life--from its investment in these beliefs. She leads us into a kind of thinking that is not afraid to plum the depths and question the heights. When we do so, we begin the adventure out of the underworld, for we begin to feel that indeed there is something missing in our lives.

The spiritual task is to return this living energy to its source--to cosmos, to Demeter-Mother Sophia, the soul of the world. The energy that clings to the thought forms is portrayed in the sacred drama as Persephone. Who is Persephone?

#### PERSEPHONE

Persephone means "she who was killed by Perseus." She is the Medusa, the frightful serpent-haired monster that turned to stone, anyone who looked directly at her. She is also the beautiful innocent Kore, maiden, daughter of her mother. But she becomes the darkly radiant, fiercely powerful Queen of the Underworld, guardian and protector of souls. "In Persephone the sublimest beauty as well as the most hideous ugliness has its foundation." (Jung and Kerenyi 1949, 178)

Years ago, a Jungian analyst mentioned that several of his women patients were having dreams about going to Korea. He could not figure out what this meant until he remembered that the unconscious uses language that sometimes sounds like what it wants to convey. He finally realized that his patients were going to the Kore, recovering the part of themselves trapped within the cultural expectations and assumptions. To go to Kore is to begin the quest for reunion. Kore is the missing half of Demeter. The wholeness of Sophia, the soul of the world, became split. Not because of some devil, not from any flaw on the part of the universal order--so the myth tells us--but to serve the design of the

cosmos. Part of the world soul went under, left. It, she, was violated, used, raped, to serve the purpose of--what? One way of viewing the rape, as we have seen, is to see that soul was used to serve the past. Persephone, as child of Demeter, brought something of Demeter to the dead, to the images of the past. Persephone and Demeter are two sides of the same Sophianic energy. Demeter belongs to the upper world, to cosmos and the universe; Persephone belongs to the body, to the individual, to the short swift event we call our life. One soul facing two different directions. A daughter is the continuity of mother. She represents the rebirth or renewal of the female line. She is the future of the mother. How can Sophia's future be in the underworld? That is what the myth appears to say. It is almost as if part of the soul undergoes change and evolution; the rest remains above. They work together, they belong together, but for the sake of life they undergo a separation. The spiritual journey is the search for reunion.

One way to interpret this mysterious separation is to view Persephone as the light within matter, or the embodied soul. In this view, Hades is the body, particularly the brain. The brain is the repository of human experience, the vessel that collects the residue of all life that has been lived. In archetypal psychology, this is called the collective unconscious. The vessel receives the new life, the soul, at birth. Persephone is the "piece" of world soul that is "captured" by the body. The body is the locus of transformation and the intersection of two worlds, the lower world of images--Hades--and the upper world of soul, Sophia. The meeting of soul and image allows the past (Hades) to change. Soul is "used"--carried off and in a very real sense, violated--to serve this cosmic purpose. The past never leaves: it reconfigures itself, constellates itself, gathers itself, in every birth. In this view, ordinary existence--what we call "life" is really a visit to Hades. Our Kore is the experience of being chained to the karma of the particular body and circumstances we are born into: gender, ethnic group, skin color, sexual orientation, family, nationality. In this view, as well as others presented here, there is no such thing as external matter in the way that materialists conceive of it: dead, separate, discrete. The body or material in which the soul is encased is still image, condensed thought.

As soon as we take our first breath at birth, we belong to the culture: the mother, doctor, hospital, family, circumstances, etc. are the "place" into which we are abducted

against our will. Incarnation of the soul into the body is usually described in negative terms. Although there may be some choice of circumstances to learn the necessary lessons, most traditions indicate that we are "doomed" to incarnate, unless we undertake to turn the tide by spiritual practice or yogic discipline. (See chapter 2, Themis section in which "doom" is public opinion.)

Perhaps Persephone is the naive part of our soul that unwittingly goes along with things as they are. When I tolerate scapegoating, when I do nothing when a child is being hit or verbally abused; or when I cooperate with perpetrators of sexual harassment by silence; when I unwittingly trash the hearts and lives of others with careless casual promiscuity; or when I say nothing to defend the victim of a racial or ethnic slur, part of me is abducted into hell. The real hell may be right here in agenda-ridden human interaction. It may be necessary to stop the train, so to speak, to halt the on-going agenda to recover our missing piece, our Kore.

Persephone as the continuity of the mother into the future represents not only biological woman but also for males as well, that part of the soul that has been gobbled up by the dragon of dogma and status quo. The myth speaks to us about how easy it is to fall into a deadly stupor, a narcotic trance. The flowers that drew Persephone to the danger zone are narcissus: the fatal flower named after the youth who was caught by his own reflection. Many traditions describe the soul as having two aspects, one free and one which becomes enslaved because it looked down and became enamored of the reflection below. One stays above, the other looks down and gets caught in the hidden agendas below.

The one theme that unites every wisdom tradition, East and West, is the necessity to discern the real from the unreal, truth from error. It is our life that is the school of the soul: its blooming confusion, its daily log book of accumulating error, its exasperating crucifixion we suffer between a bewildering array of choices and desires on the one hand and on the other, the feeling of being bound and restricted because of circumstances we can not change. Sophia, the beacon that lights the way for those who seek to understand life, reveals there is a logic to these contradictions and that she is present even in the most irrational, dense, and impenetrable thickets of life. That logic is revealed in the

Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone. To find our Kore, to release the consequences of our abduction from misery to reunion, we must seek to awaken Demeter in our lives.

Who is Demeter?

### DEMETER

Demeter, or Ceres, is commonly associated with agriculture. Our word for cereal comes from her name. She represents, according to Adam McLean, the vegetative forces above ground level, the ripened grain, the swollen fruits of the Earth. (McLean 1989, 57). For Robert Powell, Anthroposophical writer and student of Rudolph Steiner, Demeter is the Mother aspect of the Most Holy Trinosophia. This is Sophia in her three aspects: Mother as Demeter; Daughter as Persephone; and Holy Soul as Athena. She is Queen of Heaven, Virgin of the World, a form of the World Soul whose earlier incarnation was the Earth Mother Gaia. Her name, Ge-Meter, refers to this aspect of Earth whose bounty manifests in vegetation cycle, in seasonal growth, death, and rebirth. Her glyph is a sickle with a cross beneath it.

Jung sees Demeter as an aspect of women's consciousness, where Persephone is the future and Demeter is the stronger, older, earlier feminine that stretches into the past. (Jung and Kerenyi 1949, 225) Jung sees the myth and Mysteries as primarily the revelation of the continuity of the feminine with the male only playing the role of seducer.

If we look deeper into Demeter and her history, however, we find something that only deepens the mystery, adding one intriguing piece of information after another. What we find is a bigger mystery, but one which pieces together the puzzle into a pattern that includes men and offers a spiritual path of intelligence and power for women. The Mysteries included men; the initiates--male and female--identified with the sorrowing Demeter in her longing to reunite with her daughter. The use of plants, the analogy to growing and harvesting, has a deep and profound significance to the individual, her body, her fate, her death, and her resurrection. The Mysteries are not only about growing crops and the cycle of seasons.

The clue to Demeter is found in her Roman name, Ceres. Ceres is the female form of Cerus, meaning genius. Cerus means engenderer. We saw in chapter 6 that the genius is associated with fire, sexuality, rage (roaring), and the seeds in the head. Ceres is related to the word cerebrum, "the brain or cerebral marrow itself as the source of procreation (cereo, creo), seat of the procreative power (cerus = genius) and of frenzy as a becoming active, a burning and, as it were, eruption of the same. . . . this sexual fire of the marrow expresses itself in fury." (Onians 1987, 150-1) One of the offerings to Ceres was a garland worn on the head, made of corn-ears or "heads." (Onians 1987, 126)

The soul is essentially the source of life, for the ancients. The soul and seed of new life were in the head. The brain was equated with the contents of an ear of corn. A German idiom (er hat Grutze im Kopfe) says "he has oats (peeled grain) in his head." This means that he is intelligent. The grain is the seed. Plato in the Politicus speaks of souls as seeds falling into the earth and in the Timaeus as "sown" into the earth and other worlds. A lament of a Paiute Indian who lost his son, runs:

The corn-stalk comes to the ear again!  
But I here,  
I am the stalk that the seed-gatherers,  
descrying empty afar, left standing.  
Son, my son,  
What is my life to me now you are departed? (quoted in Onians 1987, 113, n2)

Years ago, when I first started doing research on my thesis on Sophia, I had a remarkable dream. That week I had been engrossed in discovering all these connections between fire and the soul's destiny. In the dream, I was walking in the country and came upon a field. There, growing in the field, were men's heads! There were heads everywhere--upright, growing right out of the soil--just heads: some smiling, some not, some with hats on, some bare-headed. It all seemed quite natural and appropriate. Then I woke up, shocked, feeling that something remarkable had been shown to me. But it was so bizarre; I had never read or heard of anything so strange. The following week, I came across a passage in The Origins of European Thought that said that men--their heads--were "assimilated to the corn" and this was behind the Eleusinian mysteries:

That assimilation appears in the stories that aforetime men grew out of the earth as 'sown ones'. . . In the Phrygian mysteries we know that the god was a 'sappy ear of corn reaped'. . . and that was also the supreme revelation at Eleusis. . . . In many districts in antiquity reapers cut off just the 'head' (the ear) and left the stalk. . . . Homer speaks of men as 'corn-stalks' and their slaying in battle as the mowing and falling of such, or just says their 'heads fell'. . . The flower or fruit of a plant, i.e. what contained the seed, was called its 'head'. (Onians 1987 , 113-4)  
(emphasis mine)

With a mixture of horror and shock, I realized the uncanny connection with Paul and his death--once again. The day of the fire, Paul had gotten up early to mow the lawn. I had awakened that day with the sound of the roar of the riding lawn mower. It was the mower that blew up five hours later. The sickle reaps--cuts down growing grass and grain. The mower is a modern sickle, a sickle-machine. What in the world was going on here? And why? I could not figure out why I was being tormented by these dreams, passages, and mythological figures.

Another memory came up then. I had a nightmare as a child of seven, that would recur off and on for years. I would be under the ground and hear a roar. I looked up and saw a lawn mower coming at me from above the ground. The perspective was terrifying: it was as though I was looking through a convex lens at it. The forefront was massive--right in my face--and then the sides sort of melted away in the background, like those distorted mirrors at a spook house. I realized with amazed horror that Paul's death was surrounding me; that it was even in my past. Who or where was I, then? Where was I being taken on this uncanny voyage where time was switched? The more I turned to the myth, letting the story and figures live with me for years, the further I was led into a reversal of ordinary consciousness. To continue . . .

When Demeter is looked at from both the point of view of the embodied soul, a little clarity comes. The logic underneath the black hole of suffering and death appears in the design of separation and reunion. Demeter is that aspect of soul that is rooted in the life force, located in the brain, the cerebral marrow. The life force in the body and the life force "outside" in the grain is the same. Demeter is in the upper world of seasonal growth where life grows, blossoms, bears fruit and goes to seed. But she is also within the body

as the life force--the power of generation. What separates us from the direct experience of that fiery genius of procreation and inspiration, fury and creation? The presence of the past--Hades. What separates Demeter from her daughter? Hades. But they are not truly cut off; they are aspects of one energy. Part of the soul is gripped by the flow of images that constitutes embodied existence: the wheel of karma, the march of images brought by the parade of the seven planetary rulers.

Demeter, as the Queen of the Upper World, is the life force--the very same life force that links the strands of DNA, that grows the forests, that splits the cells, that turns the protons, that circulates the planets around their stars, that moves the orbits of galaxies. That infinite Mystery that is Life, lies within us, as powerful as the explosions of stars, as mighty as the splendor of a galaxy. There is no need, the Mysteries say, to heal duality. We have nothing to connect to because we are not really separated from immortality and truth: the life force. Our task is to disconnect--periodically--with the realm of images that is our social conditioning, interpretations of reality. When our Kore "leaves" the underworld we re-unite with this life force. In this view, human history--the on-going sum of culture with its tangled mess of interpretations of god, reality, and the human--is the mediator that inserts itself, intrudes upon the unbroken continuity of the vital Soul.

Soul experiences herself through her own residue. As life is lived, it leaves behind something of itself: lessons learned, interpretations and images that serve survival needs. This becomes solidified, coagulated. Thought preserves itself. This hardening is Saturn, the tendency to ossify. Rudolph Steiner sees that the activity of life is prior to its organ, unlike science which posits the primacy of the organ which gives rise to the activity. Steiner's view accords with the logic of Sophia. For example, the activity of seeing leaves a residue, which over eons, hardens to become the eye. The residue is Hades, formed as the body.

Today, our interpretations of reality no longer serve the health and well-being of humanity. The Eleusinian Mysteries offer a way to understand how to tackle the enormous crisis that faces us, without going crazy fighting each symptom of it. Like Perseus who cut off the head of Medusa, he had to look away into his shield given him by

Athena. This shield is the capacity for reflection, which each person has, by virtue of being human. We can not solve each problem. By inquiry into the meaning and purpose of life: going towards reflection and understanding rather than unenlightened action is the only right action that will finally dismantle the structure of evils that man has built with his ignorance.

From the point of view of astrology, the circuit of Sophia is made even clearer. Demeter, as the life force, is our source, our real mother who loves us and needs us and is searching for us. Our abduction occurs with the first breath at birth when our inner Kore, Persephone, gets caught in the wheel of the motion of the seven planets. Suddenly, we are gone from our real mother's home. Hades, Lord of THIS world sweeps us into his carriage and away we go. This is the only underworld that there is, the Mysteries say. From the first breath, we succumb to losing our life force in service to the tribe. We belong now to history, to the flow of time. The society that nurtures us also forces itself upon us, for good or ill. We are made, more often broken, by the culture that receives us. The wheel is the culture. Our fate is the times. To grow up is to descend. To get older is to assume the crown of this underworld, to serve the souls that have already died. For every interpretation that sticks around, that is foisted upon us, has vital soul stuff clinging to it. Persephone is the image that organizes this cluster of soul-shreds into a meaning, capable of being grasped and understood by the seeker. Our inner Persephone, our Kore, is that part of us raped and dragged under by a society that fails to honor soul. To recover our birthright is to find our Mother, Demeter, that aspect of ourself that remains in the upper world, the life force that is intact, untouched, connected with cosmos. Death is not what it appears to be: the reunion of the embodied soul with world-soul took place in the Mysteries and happens when the body dies.

Demeter astrologically interpreted is the cosmos surrounding the configuration of the natal chart. This pattern of aspects and planetary placements, fixes the vital, stops it, focuses it upon a certain point in time and place. In this view, spiritual vision occurs when a person stops going "forward" acquiring more and more disciplines and systems, and instead, goes backward, toward the origins, the life force. When a person gets a feel for this kind of path, an interest in the ancestors arises. A person feels the necessity of

"going back" to recover, or loosen the chains of the blood line. The seeker realizes that there is nowhere else to go. With shock, she realizes that there is no future. The only portal to a future that is not a repetition of the evils of history, lies in the past.

The poison and the antidote are the same. We are imprisoned by the past but imagine that we are progressing and creating a future, when in fact, all we are doing is perpetuating the habits of mind that have created the crises we face. The clue we need is in the myth. We foster the arising of Demeter within us, when we allow the rage to guide us. Interestingly, it is rage that most people are afraid of. Rage turned outward in blame upon a person or group is destructive. Rage used to uncover secrets and reveal a path is not only right but it gets us moving, gets us unstuck from the wheel. It was not pity for Demeter that released her daughter, it was Demeter's rage and decision to stop all growth that caused the crisis that led to liberation.

It is not Persephone that gets herself free. All the action is on the part of Demeter. This suggests that we need to find the root of our power source within. Books on creativity and studies done on gifted students show that creativity and genius wither and die unless the person can recover the joy and interests she had when she was very young--before the culture raped the soul. To live fully, we need our vital intact. We have that vital power as children but it is methodically crushed by the machine of society's institutions. We awaken the power of the Mother when we turn back to our source, to the raw force of joy and pleasure of the undomesticated child.

Demeter had many adventures while searching for her daughter but it is her emotional state that is so intriguing for me. She suffered loss and was not just suffering like a martyr, wallowing in pain, but she got angry. It was not her pain and grief that opened the gates of Hades. It was rage. And decision: she refused to go along with the flow of growth and life. She made the plants stop growing. This withdrawal, this refusal to go along, was what forced the gods to act on her behalf to force the release of Persephone when they suffered the consequences of her decision. Rage breaks the monotony of depression and longing. In Part II, we saw that fury and rage are rooted in the creative outpouring of the unconscious. The lion must roar its newborn cubs into life. This does not mean we pick up a gun and shoot people--that is what happens when rage

is undirected. We must find out why we are depressed. We suffer because our Kore is in hell and we have to demand her release, for she holds the key to our survival. She is the future.

Demeter in the end succeeds in releasing her daughter from Hades for part of the year. But no longer is Kore just the innocent maid, passive and dumb. She has ruled. She has gotten pregnant. At the culmination of the Mysteries, the corn is shown, Demeter and daughter are united, and something else of profound significance for the soul has happened: Brimos is born! Brimo the strong gives birth to Brimos the strong. Who is this Brimos? and why is not sufficient to just have a reunion between mother and daughter?

### BRIMOS

The adventure of soul is not just a fool's journey, a futile imprisonment in the body for the sake of a future evolution of consciousness disconnected to our present consciousness. Nor are we doomed to remain victims of the wheel of karma just because we don't enroll in the right ashram. Something happened during Kore's underworld sojourn. She became queen and guide. And she got pregnant. The mystery of the life force--the fact of its power to create and renew life--expresses itself in the enigmatic figure of Brimos. Brimos is the form of the understanding within the body: the result or effect of the union of personal awareness interacting, responding to the times--to the history and culture that is the context of that experience. Put simply, Brimos is the Voice of Life Experience, the knowledge deep within the body, the kind of knowledge not found in books, yet confirmed by seers and sages.

The ancestor of Brimos was probably Bromios, the thunder child, born of the wedding of earth and sky, Gaia-Semele and Ouranos-Keraunos. The names Brimos and Bromios are related to the fiery brimstone. (Harrison 1966, 91) Semele was the mother of Dionysus. In some versions of the myth, Persephone gives birth to Dionysus. We have seen that Hades and Dionysus are sometimes fused together.

The baby Brimos, whose name is etymologically linked to the fiery brimstone, is a genius figure. Born deep in the bowels of the underworld, he may represent that aspect of the vital soul that is the source of regeneration, the intersection of sexual generation

and spiritual renewal. He is the symbol of the knowledge of the mysterious border between body and soul, the fruit of the union of the past with the present moment. His birth reminds us that our future lies in the recovery and renewal of the past. The promise of Brimos' birth is that no matter how unwittingly we fall into habit and consensus reality, that there is hope. A powerful alchemy is at work. The dull-witted passive part of ourselves has grown up and borne a child. Our Kore has gained something valuable from her abduction. She rejoins her mother not as a child but as a mother in her own right, having descended into the maelstrom of images and habits that constitute the storehouse of images--be it the brain or the collective unconscious or whatever term designates the residue of life that has been lived before us.

Perhaps it is through the divided feminine that the male will be redeemed. Brimos is our incipient humanity, our most individualized, body-centered vital self, born of the soul's deep penetration into earthly experience. When we recover our lost Kore, when we experience reunion between our searching soul desperate for her future, we celebrate the day of gathering. It is not only our most private, body-based self that we recover, but our humanity as well, for Brimos' association with Dionysus suggests that all the "pieces" of individual humans, when gathered together, reflect the Anthropos, or universal man. Little Brimos is the chthonic equivalent of Anthropos: together they form a complete human being. The priestess of gathering is Demeter-Kore. So the birth of Brimos is the event of gathering of the scattered pieces of humanity that are individualized in separate bodies.

Without Brimos, we would be left with a message that there was an unmendable rift between the worlds of soul and matter; matter being the past-as-image (Hades). Without Brimos, history and culture become the incarnation of the devil. Without Brimos, Hades is merely the worst of patriarchal tyranny and aggression subordinating all life to its own ends, perpetuating its own agenda at the expense of others. Brimos is the supreme gift of embodied existence, the deeply held secret of the transformation of pain, the effect of the white magic that Sophia teaches. Brimos is knowledge. Brimos is the rising from the hells of the Christ, from a Christian, Anthroposophical viewpoint.

Brimos is the expression of force and intelligence of experience derived from the survival of the crucifixion upon the tension of life's opposites.

## MYTH AND MEANING

So what is the meaning of it all? A myth has many levels of interpretation and this myth has been viewed in many ways, from the literal view that it is about the seasons and agriculture to the diverse perspectives of psychology, biology, and religion. Jung sees it as a feminine mystery that portrays the continuity of the generations which is felt as an unbroken link from past to future, in the mother-daughter bond. Other archetypal psychologists have interpreted the rape as a withdrawal of libido that accompanies depression or trauma. William Irwin Thompson interprets the myth as a portrayal of the disruption in which the ancient order of replication is replaced by reproduction. The male tears asunder the stable and enduring system of mother-daughter replication bringing sexuality and reproduction. Death arrives. Time becomes triangular: sprouting, flowering, and withering. (Thompson 1989, 25)

Hecate, as the dark face of Sophia, hears the rape and accompanies Demeter throughout the search and reunion. Hecate is the aspect we feel on the search for the lost part of ourselves; Sophia in her light aspect signifies the ecstatic joy of reunion. Before we can see with the eyes of the body in the underworld, we have to be able to hear, because there is no light. Hecate is the new moon. When we feel most abandoned, when our fate is sealed and all is lost, black night reigns and terror howls at our heels. Hecate, witch mother, hag of hell. Barrier to other realms of love and union. But the myth tells us another view of Hecate. She is guide and protector and holds knowledge of the original event, the abduction. Hecate as Sophia is the assurance that throughout the darkest night of loss, she is present. Hecate is not the way she appears to our fear. When we ask her for help, when we honor her--when we remember she is an aspect of the beloved Sophia--she is the one who provides safe passage when our world is torn asunder.

One can detect the moon in its phases appearing behind Goddess figures just as the sun shines through the myriad male divinities. Since prehistoric times, the Goddess has had a triune or three-fold nature: maiden, pregnant mother, and crone. The splitting of the feminine in the myth of Demeter and Persephone is significant. It even lurks in the closet of Western religion, as we saw in the Lilith section, where the primary image of the feminine half of humanity is split into Eve--a servile creature who became the scapegoat for Western civilization and Lilith--a wild demon, killer of children, feisty and too independent to lay beneath Adam who is her equal. Variations on the myth of the split feminine, where one half is underground or missing, can be found in the mythologies of societies around the world.

This is of profound significance not only for the woman who seeks to come to terms with the deep-rooted misogyny found in religion but for men who want to understand woman's anger and frustration at the cultural fear and rejection of female power and independence. Woman--to be effective in changing society--must recover her power--to overcome the overwhelming depression and grief at the daily reminder that there is no future in the world of dead institutions and dogma--she must move like Demeter from grief to rage. She must stop this world that contains no future. She must withhold her gifts of growth and life until her future is restored. She must no longer go along with things as they are, for we are living in a time when there may literally be no future in a few decades, not for humanity or life on the planet.

Although there may have been as many variations of this myth in antiquity as there are diverse interpretations today, it can still serve as a focus for the soul to draw forth herself. It acts as the canvas for the inner painter or the door that opens and invites us to come inside. There is no such thing as one "right" answer to the mystery which will invalidate the other meanings. Whatever the myth and its Mysteries conveyed and how it was interpreted is lost in the mists of time; yet the story survives. It had a profound effect on seekers then and it has the power to move us today. Variations of the raped and missing corn maiden are found throughout the world. It evokes one of the most exciting adventures into the origins and destiny of human consciousness. Therefore, we ought to look at these stories as the portals of initiation that they are: they are windows or doors

that open into other dimensions. They hold the key to reversing the literal world that keeps us bound in chains to repeating endlessly the habits of a destructive, mind-numbing culture.

Perhaps the most intriguing motive for the myth of Demeter's search and recovery of her daughter is the fact of the establishment of the Mysteries, which served humanity for 2,000 years. The same story that nourished and organized the hunger for meaning and spiritual purpose for our ancestors is still available today to awaken our memory of the connection between the personal and cosmic, the individual and society, the present and the past. The Mysteries, we know from surviving descriptions, alleviated the initiate's fear of death and provided meaning and hope. They awakened a sense of life's purpose and connection to the cosmos for generations of our ancestors. They embodied, expressed, and revealed the sacred.

Maybe thousands took part in the Mysteries because it was a mystery of collective human redemption: every single living (and dead) person lives in both worlds, the sunshine and Hades, and both worlds meet as the spiral turning back on itself. The telos of initiation is not an altered state but a return to source, body, and past, a spiral that never intersects but returns forever changed. The one thing we all share is a past, a present, and a knowing of both. The key to mitigating our fate is the realization that in our daily life lies the redemption of our past. That redemption transforms the future from a repetition of habit to a birth of the new--Brimos--waiting to be gathered and born again as renewal of soul in the world.

Whatever the myth may mean, the multiple layers of possible interpretations are like a bouquet of flowers: each color and each type of flower is unique and precious in and of itself. We can feast our eyes on one after the other and drink in its abundant and varied fragrance. It is the very multiplicity of dimensions that make the myth such a rich source of nourishment for the soul's hunger for self-knowledge.

## CHAPTER 8

# WEAVING SOPHIA: THE CIRCUIT OF SOPHIA

### CIRCUIT OF SOPHIA

Sophia has been called the Soul of the World, the anima mundi. What might this mean? In the myth of Demeter and Persephone, we saw that Rhea the Earth Mother did nothing to stop the rape, which leads us to believe that it was in some way beneficial for Earth. The mystery deepens when we discover that Rhea was also called Brimo by the Phrygians (Asia Minor) and her son was called Brimos, who was really Zeus! The only way to solve the apparent contradiction is to see Rhea, Demeter, Persephone (and Hecate) as modes of the same energy: the earth in her various aspects, dimensions, or levels. We are dealing with the most subtle, complex mysteries of human existence: our relationship to the earth. That relationship displays itself in many colors and forms: the earth feeds us food; she is our mother, our home, our source of life. The Mysteries tell us about other ways that the earth connects to us. Proclus in his Commentary on Euclid, tells us that "the Pole of the World is called by the Pythagoreans the Seal of Rhea" (cited in Mead 1965, 63). G.R.S. Mead in Orpheus, explains this peculiar passage: "Now the pole is the conductor of the vital and magnetic forces of the earth-envelope, and is, therefore, appropriately called by this name, as being the seal and signature of the vital forces of Divine Nature, whereby all diseases can be healed and all states of the soul vitalized." (Mead 1965, 128) (emphasis mine)

According to Proclus, Rhea is not involved in evolution. Demeter is. (Proclus cited in Mead 1965, 135) This gives us another clue. The earth is not just what we see: there is, so to speak, a continuous energy that manifests as the gravity of life here on earth. But there is also an evolutionary thrust--Demeter. This is the Soul of the World, she who turns. She who seeks--through us--her future, her Kore. Her future is literally in our hands, hearts, and heads. Her future is locked in Hades--the belt of images that is wrapped like a tight band about our genius, our vital soul, our life-force rooted in the

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head. Haven't we all heard over and over again to get out of our heads? We are told to get into our bodies and that the intellect is bad. The intellect that is "bad" is the flow of blah-blah abstractions and concepts and agendas. That is Hades, not the "real head." We have to return to the head. When we do, we will connect again to our bodies and to the earth--so the Mysteries promise. Our heads are collectively buried in the sand, buried beneath a ton of images, stale and rotting thoughts, destructive agendas that serve greed and tyranny and wholesale slaughter.

We ride Sophia's circuit when we cooperate with the evolutionary thrust of the Soul of the World. We have to help the process by disengaging from dehumanized agendas wherever we find them, even if to others we appear "negative" or "disloyal" or "uncooperative." When we finally begin to see how words and sentences are used as chains, we discover that we can use them as antidotes to the very poison that infects civilization. We become responsible by owning the power of our own chains. We have been "sentenced" to a prison of our own making. We simply take back that sentence and change it from a prison term to a sentence which speaks the truth. The little story of the Emperor's New Clothes says it all. Every one of us who participates in the machine has to say that the emperor has beautiful clothes. We keep it going by what we say and do not say. Suddenly, the child appears and speaks. This is our Kore, our future, our inner truth, our connection to our Holy Mother Sophia, Soul of the World. "The Emperor has no clothes!" she shouts. Or whispers. It really does not matter. Once the "Word" is out, the dragon of despair begins to wither and unravel. We have lived in a "civilization" so vicious and barbaric that it systematically targets the child within that sees clearly and speaks the truth. The time has come to turn that vicious targeting back upon itself. What must die now is not the human but the inhuman: the walls of illusion--made up of beliefs and assumptions about our relationship to earth and reality--that wrap us into a destiny of slaughter and pain.

How do we kill the killer, the illusion that binds us? The Mysteries once again have left behind a clue in the language. The goal of the Mysteries has always been called "telos." We have come to assume that this notion means that there is some noble "end" for which spiritual development is tending towards. That this is one more deception,

spawned and fueled by the conspiracy of ignorance, is revealed by an analysis of the word telos.

The original meaning of telos, as the previous chapter noted, is not a finish line at all. The real meaning of telos is circle. It means also "band" or "bond." (Onians 1987, 437) Ill fortune and death were considered to be bonds or bands. Telos also means payment, fulfillment of a promise. We have erroneously been led to believe (not intentionally, but by the failure to keep re-examining our assumptions about language, meaning, and the truth about spirituality) that there is a finish line, that this world is somehow the starting point that we must quickly leave behind in order to "get" liberation or enlightenment. So many spiritual disciplines have demonized the body and instincts, using language that suggests the body is a tomb. The body--like Rhea the earth--is both involved and not involved in evolution. Nature is anything but the "matter" of the scientists. It is anything but dead stuff. The only "matter" that is dead are the assumptions about matter that fuel a science that is hell-bent on acquiring knowledge without the wisdom to know how to effectively deal with that knowledge. What was thought long ago persists as habit energy, habits that have created and maintained a circus of horrors--war, racism, hatred, poverty, greed, and environmental terrorism. These habits cling to us like so many parasites. They are extremely difficult to dislodge because they are our shared reality. There is no matter in Nature, body, or the Earth, if by matter you mean dead stuff. The only thing that is "dead matter" are the collective beliefs and assumptions about Nature that stand between the individual and the natural world.

## WEAVING SOPHIA'S GIRDLE: TIES THAT BIND

Can we discover more about the chains that bind us to our horrible history? Caitlin Matthews discusses the dilemma of the girdle of Sophia. Commenting on the Meditations on the Tarot, she describes the zone or girdle of Sophia as a "belt of illusory mirages." She notes that "It is this zone which the prophets and Apocalypse designate 'Babylon'. . . .

Sophia's zone, like the parketh of the Jewish temple, guards the entrance to the holy of holies, the pleroma." (Matthews 1991, 173)

It appears that for the sake of evolution, soul is captured and then released, perhaps so that even the dead matter of images may someday be redeemed. Perhaps these left over images themselves serve as a vehicle for life. This may be the occult meaning of elementals: that energy clings even to the weakest thought. We know the power of visualization: successful athletes use it to conquer fear and to surpass the average. It is also to serve evolution that periodically we be freed from the band of images in order to return to Mother Earth. When the return is effected, new energy is released. This energy may be the arousal and expression of the Seal of Rhea: the healing energies of the earth are awakened.

"Evil is a fetter and its removal is an unloosing and unbinding." (Onians 1987, 365) There are even prayers to the girdle. The girdle is sometimes seen as that which enslaves. Like many of the terms used here, however, it can also be invoked as something positive, in the sense of being re-wrapped in order to change one's fate.

Here are some prayers to the girdle from the Rig Veda: "Unloose sin from me as a cord, unloose evil from me like the cord which holds captive a calf. . . . Unloose, unbind the error committed which is attached to my body." Such prayers, notes Onians, are "exceedingly frequent." (Onians 1987, 359) Another prayer asks the Girdle for wisdom: "Do thou, O girdle, assign to us thought, wisdom. Thou whom the ancient being-making seers bound about, do thou embrace me in order to length of life, O girdle." (Atharva Veda, VI, 133, in Onians 1987, 360). In many languages and widely different cultures, different kinds of fortune are conceived as something bound or wrapped about a person, described in this prayer from Ireland:

I bind upon myself to-day  
The strong name of the Trinity . . .  
I bind upon myself today  
The virtues of the starlit heaven,  
The glorious sun's life-giving ray,

The whiteness of the moon at even', etc. (Onians 1987, 360 n 7)

Instead of a cord, a garment or piece of clothing was used to convey the same idea. It was the job of the feminine, the goddesses, to weave the fates of individuals and the destinies of nations: "They (goddesses) who spun, wove and stretched the web, let them wrap thee in order to old age; as one long lived, put about thee this garment." (Atharva Veda, XIV, 1, 45, in Onians 1987, 361 n1)

Weaving is a metaphor for the spinning of fate and is found in stories, associated with feminine power, in all parts of the world. Spider Woman, sometimes called Spinning Woman, weaves the universe every day and unraveled it at night, according to Native American legend. Penelope guarded the life of her husband Odysseus by refusing to cut the thread of her daily weaving. Athena, goddess of wisdom, taught human women the skill of weaving. The Stoics believed that the Goddess wove the Web of Fate which caught souls in it just as the spider's web catches flies. (Walker 1988, 162, under entry, "Web")

Many women were burned at the stake simply because they were found with knotted cords. A witch's charm called the Magic Knot consisted of four interlaced vesicas. (See figure 3.) It could control the weather. During medieval times, it was believed that witches could control the winds, raise storms, and influence the weather by making knots with threads and cords or their own hair. "Witches' knots could also function as love charms, 'binding' or 'loosing' the passions according to the treatment of the interlaced design." (Walker 1988, 63, under entry "Witch Charm")

Fate is woven. Telos is a change of fate. Telos changes fate and also signifies a period of time in which fate was fulfilled. (Onians 1987, 451) A portion of fate is a portion of time. Telos is life, not the end. Life is a bond loosed at death, "when we have shuffled off this mortal coil." (Hamlet, III.1,64) Persephone, too, weaves: "Now the work that Core (Persephone) performs is that of weaving; she plies her shuttle in 'the roaring loom of time', and weaves out the universe." (Mead 1965, 141)

The ancients were much more in touch with the rhythm of the cosmos. Especially during the time of the honoring of the Goddess traditions, there was a sense of connection to time not as linear but as a circle. The cosmos moves in a circle; the seasons are

circular; there is a cycle of growth, harvest, death, and rebirth. Fate and time changed as the circle in the heavens changed. Individual and cosmic circle of fate was not distinguished. Ananke, necessity, encircles and binds the world.

Time and fate are circles. This explains the term "wheel of karma or life"--a theme that runs like a thread connecting cultures and tribes far flung from each other in time and space. A thread that perhaps weaves a common destiny of bondage and the promise of release.

The individual is bound to the wheel of fate. What can release her? According to Plato (Phaedrus, 246ff), the ideal and eternal world to which the soul aspires is outside the circle. The one who looses the bonds is Dionysus. Dionysus is a figure that dominated women's mysteries. Like Hermes, he serves the soul, the goddess. Dionysus is another name for the child born to Persephone. He was called the "Looser." (Onians 1987, 452)

His connection to Hermes is evident from the language. Homer associates magic with binding. He calls the Sirens that pull sailors to their death on the rocks by the enchantment of their singing, "binders, enchainers." (Onians 1987, 368) The Greek Sphinx that drives people mad with her endless riddles was considered to be a death-demon. She was called the "Tight-binder." (Onians 1987, 24)

"In many languages the general notion 'magic' is expressed by the term for 'binding.' It . . . is the commonest process of bewitchment." (Onians 1987, 372) What binds us is the key that lets us out of our prison. The real black magic or bewitchment happens every day, in small situations, when people are together--be it board room or locker room. Here becomes apparent the vicious "beast", described in the Roman proverb about the Senate: "Senatus bestia, senatores boni viri: The senate is a beast, the senators are good men." (Roman proverb, quoted in Campbell 1976, 91)

What is the beast? It is the amoeba-like covering, the language that preserves and protects power that serves itself at the expense of human beings. It is collective silence and denial that preserves the habits of racism, prejudice in all its forms, exclusion and discrimination, ridicule and disrespect. What binds us releases us. Integrity in the form of refusal to go along with this bewitchment is what frees us from our prison "sentence." To

speaking the truth, quietly, clearly, has the power to change the world. It will unleash the dragon, yes, but truth and integrity are more powerful than the dragon.

An ancient Assyrian poem describes the "turning" of victim and scapegoat to one of empowerment:

They have used all kinds of magic,  
To tie me as with ropes,  
To catch me as in a snare,  
To bind me as with cords,  
To overpower me as in a net,  
To strangle me as with a noose,  
To tear me as a fabric.  
But I by the command of Marduk, lord of charms,  
By Marduk, the master of enchantment,  
Both the wizard and the witch  
As with ropes I will tie,  
As in a snare I will catch,  
As in a net I will overpower,  
As in a noose I will strangle,  
As a fabric I will tear. (from Die assyrische Beschworungsserie Maqlu, ed. K. L. Tallquist, quoted in Onians 1987, 372 n2)

If we "turn" the wheel of fate, we counter-clock it. We stop time. We change our fate. If we turn the circle, we create a spiral, a pattern found in nature from cellular organisms to the cosmic swirl of galaxies. Sophia's pattern, the logic of life, that which turns our fate and restores her wisdom to the marketplace is revealed by the design of the horizontal number 8. This is the infinity symbol. Knowledge of the motion that leads to the turning leads to, as we will see later, the skill of riding the dragon, releasing its power back to the human for the healing of the world.

SOPHIA: OGDOAD, SPIRAL CIRCLE, AND WORLD SYMBOL

HERMES AND THE EIGHT

Hermes the Thrice-Great (or Thoth) is related to Sophia as the magic that reveals soul. Hermes and Hecate work together. Hermes is in service to the moon. The moon weaves and binds her magic spells that ensnare us to habit. The warp and woof of the web that holds us is made of thought. Thought is the cage. Thinking is the key that unravels the bars of the cage. Hermes as magic was coupled with wisdom in antiquity. "It is the power of Thoth that binds and loosens; he holds the keys of heaven and hell, of life and death." (Mead quoted in Gaskell 1960, 430, under entry "key")

Magic and wisdom were paired in Egypt, Persia, and throughout the ancient Near East. The Egyptian ka, which we saw was similar in meaning to the genius, was the vital soul or double. The ka was broken up into pairs of seven qualities and functions that are responsible for the maintenance of life. The ka first appears as nutrition. As it develops through our attention and care of soul, it unfolds and spiritualizes the organic function of growth. Its highest development is illumination, the clear perception that is wisdom. Illumination is paired with its expression or manifestation, magic. (Lamy 1981, 26)

The Egyptian Thoth was called Hermes by the Greeks and Mercury by the Romans. Astrologically, Mercury the planet rules both Gemini and Virgo, the sign of Isis and Sophia, the Virgin. September, as we saw, is the month in which the festival of Thoth was celebrated. Thoth is etymologically related to our word thought.

Thoth is called the "'Master of the City of Eight.' Thoth, the messenger of the gods, is the Neter (principle) of writing, of language, of knowledge, of magic; Thoth gives man access to the mysteries of the manifested world, which is symbolised by Eight." (West 1987, 63)

Eights are found everywhere around figures of wisdom. Sophia is found in the Ogdoad in Gnosticism, in the 8th clime in Persian Sufism. Sophia's 8th sphere completes the octave. The circle is complete--and then reverses itself, forming a spiral.

Plato, in the Timaeus, describes how Sophia, the Soul of the World was created as a circle turned back on itself: "And in the centre (God) put the soul . . . and he made the universe a circle moving in a circle, one and solitary, yet by reason of its excellence able to converse with itself, and needing no other friendship or acquaintance. Having these purposes in view he created the world a blessed god. . . . This entire compound he

divided lengthways into two parts, which he joined to one another at the centre like the letter X, and bent them into a circular form, connecting them with themselves and each other at the point opposite to their original meeting-point; and, comprehending them in a uniform revolution upon the same axis, he made the one the outer and the other the inner circle." (Plato 1937, 16-18)

"The motion of the planetary spheres is spiral and appropriately so," says Thomas Taylor, "as it is a medium between the right-lined motions of the elements and the circular motion of the inerratic sphere; for a spiral is mixed from the right line and circle." (Taylor 1804, Introduction to the Timaeus)

#### EIGHT, THE SPIRAL CIRCLE, AND INFINITY

The pattern that I came to call the glyph of Sophia which appeared to me when I was eating lunch that afternoon many years ago (see figure 1) now makes so much sense. Since that time, I have seen the horizontal eight in many places, in mathematics, computer images of chaos, fractals, and in symbol books. It is a perfect symbol of the turning around that I think is our future. In going back to relate to what has been left behind, we bring all the conditions of the present--our ideals and vision for a better future--to bear upon the past, what is left behind. We perform an alchemy with the past, such that the future will not be a mere preservation of what has gone before but a container for the humanity that we create as a result of relating to the past. Our humanity is precipitated out of the struggle to relate--to the past, to the excluded, to our ideals, to each other, to our selfishness.

Here is what I found about the horizontal eight. In mathematics, the 8 laying on its side is the infinity symbol.

The creative force that is raised through the endocrine glands or spiritual centers is called the kundalini. The spiralling motion of the current suggests a serpent, which in turn symbolizes creative force. . . The numeral Eight, because of its shape, is associated with the two interlacing serpents of the caduceus, signifying, therefore, the pattern of movement of creative energy.

The number Eight may be compared to a power belt which transmits the power from the drive-wheel of the engine to the power-wheel of a machine. Curiously, such belts are usually crossed in the exact shape of the figure eight. Nearly all symbols having the shape of the 8 convey the fundamental idea of evolution, i.e., the transmission of the force of one cycle or form into the next higher expression. Eight is the number of evolution and is connected with the spiral motion of cycles. It is the number of the inevitable and onward rush of time. . . . It is a symbol of regeneration and the entrance into a new state or condition of the soul. The eighth day often typifies resurrection.

Since evolution can advance only by replacing that which is sown, the number Eight is the perfect symbol of balance or cause and effect. (Edgar Cayce quoted in Shelley 1976, 16)

The Pagan Irish called death "going to the Spiral Castle." New Grange was called "Spiral Castle"; in front of its doorway is a broad slab carved with spirals. "The spirals are double ones: follow the lines with your finger from outside to inside and when you reach the centre, there is the head of another spiral coiled in the reverse direction to take you out of the maze again. So the pattern typifies death and rebirth." Oracular serpents at Delphi and in sepulchral caves in Ireland were spiralled. (Graves 1966, 103) (emphasis mine) The branch of the alder tree, the tree of fire, is "a token of resurrection--its buds are set in a spiral. This spiral symbol is ante-diluvian: the earliest Sumerian shrines are 'ghost-houses', like those used in Uganda, and are flanked by spiral posts." (Graves 1966, 171-2)

The old pagan ritual of handfasting was common in the British Isles, legal even in Scotland until 1939. Handfasting was a common law marriage ceremony in which the couple joined hands in front of witnesses. The joining is based upon the "ancient Indo-European image of male-female conjunction, the infinity sign, whose twin circles represented sun (male) and moon (female) cycles, one right-handed and the other left-handed as when the figure 8 is drawn with one clockwise and one counterclockwise circle. . . . Marriage, then, consisted of uniting the two right hands like an ordinary handshake, and then the two left hands, so that the partners' arms formed the graphic cycles of 'infinity' or completeness.

It is interesting to note that patriarchal society retained only the right-hand handshake in token of agreement, friendliness, or greeting. The use of 'female' left hands was dropped, except for one purpose: to formalize the Morganatic marriage, which was known as 'marriage of the left hand,' by joining left hands only. (Walker 1988, 181, entry "Handfasting")

A potato grows along two spirals, one going clockwise and the other going counterclockwise. The spirals intersect at each eye of the potato, the place out of which grows the new tuber. It is interesting that the place of new growth is called an eye and that the eye is the pivot point, the place of meeting between both inner and outer, as well as between the two spirals that move in opposite directions. (personal communication from David Fideler)

#### THE WORLD SYMBOL: HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL PATHS

Think about the Western path of thought and spirituality as being a vertical line: the making of Western culture, with its Great God above and the creation of interiority by anima idealization, yogic discipline, and the cultivation of beauty, music, art, and culture. The one "place" that has been neglected and forgotten is the realm of human relationships, community, person to person and group to group interaction. This is "lateral" compared with the vertical line that goes "up" to God and "in" to anima. The step-by-step, person to person connection can not be made by a premature unconditional love. Truth, vision, and relating must happen first in order to release love and connection. Only respect for the difference of another makes us capable of seeing, hearing, relating, to the other. The other has to stop us, "block us" as the Yarralin say below (four laws), in order for there to be balance and symmetry.

In Australia, the Yarralin tribe have had their land and culture systematically destroyed by the Europeans. They recognize that the European culture is one that promotes death. Western death culture consistently denies and devalues living laws of nature that promote the health and well-being of human and animal life and that of future generations.

Ethnographer Deborah Bird Rose lived with and wrote about the Yarralin. She learned their rules of conduct which are based upon recognition of the integrity of the land and its reciprocal connection with human, animal, and organic life.

The following are the Yarralin rules, which are "a kind of logos or principle of order governing the relationships between Aborigines and the rest of the natural world." (Suzuki 1993, 46) They articulate a wisdom that is reminiscent of the natural order symbolized by Maat.

1. Balance: A system cannot be life enhancing if it is out of kilter, and each part shares in the responsibility of sustaining itself and balancing others
2. Response: Communication is reciprocal. There is here a moral obligation: to learn to understand, to pay attention, and to respond.
3. Symmetry: In opposing and balancing each other, parts must be equivalent because the purpose is not to 'win' or to dominate, but to block, thereby producing further balance.
4. Autonomy: No species, no group, or country is 'boss' for another; each adheres to its own Law. Authority and dependence are necessary within parts, but not between parts. (Suzuki 1993, 47)

The lateral path is carved through speaking with integrity and honesty when the situation calls for it. Sophia, Wisdom, reveals herself through logos; Sophia and logos work together. Speaking is magic, it does something. What it does is to break the zone of silence that protects and sustains the belt of illusory images that keep a person isolated from and unrelated to each other and to the natural world. This speaking may be the path peculiarly suited to woman. Speaking out traverses the gap of silence that surrounds the illusory images of authoritarian structures, habits, institutional attitudes, exoteric religions. The speaking out may be done verbally, in a group, or between two or three persons. It may be done publicly, in a lecture, on radio or television. Some people prefer to write. Even if it is a letter to the editor, the effect is very noticeable. It relieves the terrible stress of keeping our sense of injustice in the gap of silence. But the hardest work is perhaps done person to person. This is where the flames of change burn hottest, where

the zone is ruled by the self-appointed guardians of the gate, the keepers of the border. The speaking is not for women only. It is the invitation for men to take a stand in the locker rooms, in the mechanic shops, in the halls of academia, in the hospital corridors and operating rooms, in the military, in the courtroom, in the teachers' lounge, in the corporate board rooms across America. The illusory zone of images is fueled by habit that keeps intact the hatred and suppression and ridicule of minorities, women, gays, Jews, foreigners, the old and infirm, the handicapped, or whoever is a convenient scapegoat.

The horizontal path is complementary to the vertical. It does not replace it nor is it superior or "advanced." Both are necessary to complete a circuit which includes difference and the possibility of relationship. I started playing around with a design that makes a cross and which includes a horizontal complement to the vertical male path, and which also includes circles, because my intuition is that an open circuit that carries a kind of cosmic electricity is able to flow when this missing horizontal direction is added. When I added the circle, it became the astrological mandala. Then, I found in the Women's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects, a figure that is the intersection of two eights. It is called the "world symbol." (See figure 2.) This sign appeared in medieval alchemy as four circles, which represented the four elements. The world symbol means "everything that exists," the entire world order, held together by a mysterious, unseen central force that the Hindus called Maya--the Goddess who created the material universe. In another interpretation of the symbol, the circles might represent the bases of the four colossal pillars that were supposed to uphold the heavens, while the pillars could be seen in perspective, converging on the central point called axis mundi or the Pole of the World." (Walker 1988, 63, entry "World Symbol")

A friend of mine described a version of this world-symbol image as seen in her meditation: ". . . two infinity symbols, one horizontal and one vertical, and intersecting at their common center. Red and white drops were pursuing each other, circulating throughout the entire symbol along various paths. The turning, circulating image was viewed from various vantage points--the view from the figure's obverse side (e.g., clockwise to counterclockwise) reverses the direction of the circulation." (See figure 4).

Note that in Tibetan tantric physiology the red and white drops are the female and male essences.

If I were to imagine what the human world would look like if both paths were activated, I would see that design of the world symbol. This design would act like a receiver for information from the cosmos. A gifted healer told me once that she cured a diseased kidney by placing her hands over a healthy kidney and then placing her hands over the diseased person's kidneys. The kidneys healed. She explained that a diseased organ "forgets" how to be healthy. Her hands captured the image of the healthy organ and transmitted it to the ailing kidney. By a kind of sympathetic magic, we cut through by means of right speech, the images and beliefs that separate one person from another, one nation from another. We make it possible to receive another healthier image of humanity than the ones promoted by greed and consumerism. The "hands" that travel between the two worlds of health and disease is the logos which joins together what is separated by silence and illusory images. The "healthy kidney" we are searching for is a balanced, healthy human community that nourishes the potential of each of its members, which connects to nature and life on the planet in mutually enhancing ways. Where is the healthy organ of humanity? It is simultaneously deep within the blood and the cellular memory--and it is beyond us in the order and beauty of the cosmos.

Sophia is the psyche's reminder to us that all of life is permeated with meaning; she reminds us that no one path is "spiritual" because that means that the rest of life is "unspiritual." Inquiry goes wherever the soul is intrigued. What fascinates soul is herself. All of life talks to soul. Soul talks to life. They want to get to know each other, via our capacity to allow this exchange to occur. We make it happen, by opening the channels to complete the circuit of reflection and conversation. The place of union between soul and life is our awareness. Perhaps they were initially one and human reflection splits them apart. Perhaps they were initially separate and we bring them together. Does it matter? Perhaps both are true.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

What does it mean that Sophia is food? As I started writing this book, I kept getting the image of Sophia as food. It made me laugh, because the notion of spirituality I have been acquainted with is anything but the lowly, common, base, vegetative, inert, unconscious, unevolved realm of plain old food. Yet, that was one of the distinct vibrations, or significances, that Sophia suggests. As I write, it feels like I am giving her--my interpretation all stuck with my vital, my interest and interpretations--back to the cosmos in the form of writing. Just as people throughout the ages give back what is meaningful in the form of beauty, art, music, and dance to the community, so, too, these images come through the stuff of a life, changing it forever and letting itself get changed in the process, too. This is the alchemy of Sophia: she, as personified wisdom, changed me, guided me, steered my attention here and there, and finally is leaving me in the form of this writing. As I give her back, she is colored forever by my particular focus, the unique perspective I have, simply by virtue of the fact that my experience, feelings, and interpretations are different from anyone else's.

I honestly felt that I have been sucking on her all these years in this way: the image of Sophia has been so real, so vivid, so present. The image has drawn me hither and yon, up to the heights of spiritual devotion, and down to the depths of passion. It has--by some method unknown to me--insisted that I not shut out of my life people who eat meat, people who don't meditate or people whom the holy deem "unspiritual." This is what I mean by Sophia being the path of friendship: even Frankenstein has a deep meaning and is included in the sweep of her love. Friendship is to first recognize difference and then encounter that difference without judgment or denial or turning it to use. Friendship is extending the lines of awareness and interest to all of life, be it stone, soil, star, child, or the homeless. It is just those "lines" of awareness that become a container woven with the strands of interest and inquiry: Sophia becomes the Grail, the possibility of recognition of the (not-merely) human as the only authentic divine.

No sooner had this image grabbed my attention, than I started finding references here and there about food and its relation to wisdom! This, of course, is the way Sophia works. An image is produced, it grabs your attention, then you find the books and references that flesh out, substantiate the image, make it intelligible. This back and forth,

between the ordinary and the conceptual (book knowledge) relates two ordinarily opposed poles, bringing them together in new insight, unique, meaningful, deep--and almost always funny. So I will share with you here what I found and then bring in some more "food for thought" that came to me last spring.

Immediately following the "sucking on the breast of Sophia" image, I happened to open a book I hadn't looked at in years, The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype, by Eric Neumann, Jungian psychologist, and this was on the page that opened:

The feminine vessel as vessel of rebirth and higher transformation becomes Sophia and the Holy Ghost. . . . Just as in the elementary phase the nourishing stream of the earth flows into the animal and the phallic power of the breast flows into the receiving child, so on the level of spiritual transformation the adult human being receives the 'virgin's milk' of Sophia. This Sophia is also the 'spirit and the bride of the Apocalypse, of whom it is written: 'And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.'

And at this highest level there appears a new symbol in which the elementary character and the transformative character of nourishment achieve their highest spiritual stage: the heart spring of Sophia, the nourishment of the middle. This central stream flows from Sophia in our Philosophia, . . . A new organ' becomes visible, the heart that sends forth the spirit-nourishing 'central' wisdom of feeling, not the 'upper' wisdom of the head.

. . . Thus modern man, on a different plane, discovers what primordial man experienced through an overpowering intuition; namely, that in the generating and nourishing, protective and transformative, feminine power of the unconscious, a wisdom is at work that is infinitely superior to the wisdom of man's waking consciousness, and that, as source of vision and symbol, of ritual and law, poetry and vision, intervenes, summoned or unsummoned, to save man and give direction to his life. (Neumann 1963, 329-330)

This is an example of the "cookie crumb" path that wends its way through the thicket of our abandonment. If you really undertake to try to understand life, Sophia will awaken. Sophia is simply the figure--an emotionalized way of thinking--that serves to stir up attention, to get it moving, to journey you into finding out about why you are here and what your purpose might be. So when your interest in really trying to figure out what the heck is going on in your life, this "person" comes to life in you. I think all it means to say an archetype gets activated is that life is so rich, personal, embodied with the stuff of

emotion, attachment, color, and scent, that whenever we embark on anything vital, it gets embodied in image--a dog, a sword, a woman, a hero, whatever picture describes the particular quality of the adventure. So, here I am, thinking about Sophia as food--the image just sort of drifts into my mind--and then I immediately find this reference to food. What has happened is this: my mind gets stirred up, it moves. This is soul. Soul moves. We create soul by literally moving attention, in the case of Sophia, we move it towards trying to understand life. Sophia disappears from our life--as it did from the exoteric religions--when the struggle to understand ceases because we have "found the answer" or when we equate wisdom with our favorite religious figure or teacher. She reappears as guide when we begin to seriously question life and begin the struggle to understand its complexity as it is presented to us in our day-to-day relationships.

Another example of how you can locate Sophia and move out of (mild) depression or inertia is by allowing attention to drift wherever it wants and to let it lead you. Again, this will only work if you are primed with the desire to look at life differently: as a question mark instead of a finished paragraph. Here is an example of how I stumbled onto something so ordinary that led me on an adventure that was entertaining as well as remarkable.

One morning as I was making home fries for one of my teen-aged sons, I came upon a potato in the back of the cupboard that had rolled away from its buddies. It had these whitish tentacles coming out all over it. Normally, I would toss it among the pine trees in the back yard, but for some reason, I kept it around on my counter for the next month or two. The withering potato reminded me of something, but I couldn't figure out what it was. I was intrigued. I started letting a few more potatoes lay around the dark cupboard.

There was something familiar about those weird, bulging sprouts, emerging uniformly out of their hosts. Then I remembered. They look like teenagers!! But not every teenager. These look like the teenagers that the system labels "losers:" the ones who don't fit into the system; who drop out or won't play by the rules; who do not

construct a self-identity from competition, grades, sports, cliques, clothes, and clubs. These sprouts are the kids that the system can't control, contain, or force to conform. The sprouts are alive, growing stronger with every day that the potato disintegrates; they reach for the sun or soil in their necessary urgency to live beyond the constraint of death.

I wondered what else the potatoes would tell me, as they laid around getting older. It seemed that within the potato itself, after a certain period of time, something began to grow that was able to penetrate the firm boundaries of the potato skin. When the potato first starts to sprout, you can see that it is covered with a lot of tiny dents, called eyes; it is out of these dents that you can see the first little arms escaping from inside the potato. Calling these "eyes" might not be coincidental--for the eye not only sees, but reveals soul.

The potatoes told me this: that the system (meaning the current world view or a persistent way of operating, such as the school system, organized religion, or any status quo) is like the potato. It ages. For a long time, it is sufficient unto itself: totally contained, whole and complete, it provides nourishment for those who feed on it. It doesn't need anything outside itself. But, after awhile, these little sprouts start to butt their heads out through the skin. Cooks cut them off the potato, for they are toxic, I've been told.

In this imaginal world, the potato is a social system and the tubers represent the person who asks disturbing questions or the employee or group member who observes the inconsistency between stated ideals and practice. The questioner is held in suspicion and labeled "negative" or "disloyal" or "not a team player." Of course, you have to use your imagination to follow the crazy leaps I am making, if you, too, want to hear messages from potatoville. The potato and its sprouts offer a lot of laughs besides serious food for thought.

Here's the potato: no wings, no radiance, no burning bushes but potentially, every bit as revealing about how to live life. And of course, you don't need to pay the potato for its messages. Be it potato, tree, duck, boulder, or your own babies, you just look, listen, and learn. Potato philosophy gives new meaning to the phrase "natural philosophy."

## SOPHIA'S CIRCUIT AND THE ALCHEMY OF RELATIONSHIP

In a way, images such as Sophia are on loan to us. They are a kind of food for the soul, produced by the human experience of being infused by a greater Mystery through longing for the divine. They settle on our dull routine and touch it with a magic that draws our attention and interest to the peripheries of ordinary consciousness. Hints of synchronicities urge us on to explain coincidences between events and research or chance meetings with strangers who ignite our passion to understand. Friendships forged in the fires of group rejection and scapegoating become the alchemy of this path, where your identity dissolves and reforms in an endless circuit of witnessing and bringing the Other into existence.

No explanation, no spiritual dogma, or theory will ever be able to contain or exhaust Sophia. The explanation itself would serve only to create a boundary area beyond which Sophia would escape to function as a magnet to pull the heart out of the cage. Why? So she can roam free, so she can be Other. Why? To invite attention to move, to leave the boxes and coffins of limited belief, to draw attention away from where it is at in order to remember what was forgotten, in order to draw into encounter each other.

So these pictures of Sophia and myths of exile and return are like books on loan from a cosmic library; ours to learn from. They are also like milk for our hungry inner child, ours to devour and savor, to suckle until they are dry. They do not belong to us in the sense of becoming our identity, however. When we think we are Sophia--or when we equate Sophia with our belief system or favorite religious figure--Sophia as a living potency departs.

Writing about Sophia is my way of letting her go; as much as I tried to keep her and own her for my identity, it just didn't work. She is food for the soul, not a possession. So that she will not rot and smell up my psyche, I have to let her go, back to the cosmos where she belongs. But her return has been touched by me, too. She carries the scent of my attachment to those I love and the life I'm living. It is the scent of one particular life--always in relation. She touched a life, my particular context of relationships and events, the emotions and responses and interpretations I gave to that life. She stirred it up and got

me looking for meaning in places I never would have suspected. I never found an answer, although the feeling of approximating a climax of understanding seemed unbearably immanent at times. She caused me to go back and forth, back and forth, from the pole of my miserable, petty, silly self with its grandiose save-the-world complex to the opposite pole of the sense of intimate, impending union with divine Mystery. From mystical experience where all was one, perfect, and completed back down to changing dirty diapers and wiping up vomit, she invited me to ask what is this roller-coaster all about, anyway? It is, I think, this friction between the far distant poles of life that actually creates soul. It is a kind of crucifixion between selfishness and idealism, bodily instinct and spiritual practice, the isolated self and the group, fear and joy, creative flow and the frozen inertia of depression, and all the other crucifixions we suffer from--this friction is itself a journey in which consciousness gets forged. To allow them all to be is a Herculean task of holding the world up. To stretch it all out with our consciousness--to keep all of these parts separate so they can be--without collapsing one into the other, without negating any of it, seems to initiate a kind of alchemy of life. What is distilled from the friction, the tension, may be our humanity. Salt is what remains after the burning, the only chemical to survive the burning and decomposition of the body. Salt, Sophia's substance, the essentially human, the residue of life, wisdom.

What is Sophia's circuit? Attention to the immediate, to the present, remembering, moving attention to ideals, to spirit, and returning . . . a spiral, a turning, a dance of attention and friendship and acknowledgment and desire, a royal sweep of interest, penetration--and feeding from--all of creation.

## CHAPTER 9

# WOMAN'S ROLE IN THE MILLENNIUM

### OUR OWN EXILE IS THE PATH TO SOPHIA

The circuit of Sophia has been described around the theme of exile. It is our experience of exile that leads us to wisdom, to the clear perception that can become our protection and guide. Sophia was exiled from the spiritual landscape, from history. Our own lives, if we notice, are lived with the deepest parts exiled from the love and acceptance of other people; sometimes literal exile. The largest group to suffer exile is women. Women were exiled from the mainstream male culture. When we recognize that the place of exile is where Sophia is, we gain perspective on the real nature of what it is we want to be included in: that in some ways, we have been excluded from something that over time became increasingly non-human and non-living and non-spiritual. With that realization comes power and vision. We gain the capacity to choose, for what lies outside the boxes is the place of freedom. We can choose to relate to that which we left behind or we may choose to simply resonate at our own frequency, creating for ourselves and others a new, more life-enhancing order or meaning. Either way, Sophia's circuit awakens the capacity to bring forth and express what is within for the restoration of sanity, for the survival of the human race. Thus is brought about our own return from exile; for coming home is to awaken the power within. Our return from exile alters the landscape and dismantles the beast, circulating the mighty force of vision and expression of the individual's own unique experience and perspective. Each of us brings about our own return--and this is Sophia's historical return. We dismantle the thought structures that are the walls that keep us from seeing that our future is in the hands of the other. The circuit of Sophia is a spiritual path for women that is embedded in life and relationship. It calls forth the experience and unique vision of each person.

## EVE, LILITH, AND THE SERPENT

To know what woman's role might be, we have to look at the role she has played historically. For the last two millennia, woman has been forced to bear responsibility for the "Fall of Man." Because of the culture's myth of origin in which Eve disobeyed God and so caused the expulsion of the divine couple from Paradise, woman has been scapegoated for the disobedience of her mythical ancestor. But what would happen if we imaginatively reinterpreted the fable of the Garden of Eden in Genesis? Let's say that it is not about our origins but rather about our future. To continue the fantasy, let's imagine that the creation of humanity will be brought about through Eve disobeying dehumanized institutions, dogmas, and rules and following instead the life daemon, the serpent of wisdom, exiled from the Garden so that she may recover her power--Lilith. Leaving Eden, reclaiming her other half, Lilith, is the female spiritual task that she must accomplish which will transform her as well as society.

It is interesting to me that so many people want a garden of paradise when all the interesting figures of the creation story are outside of it, especially Lilith. As we saw earlier, Lilith could not get along as subordinate to Adam and she was ostracized from the creation story and ended up at the Red Sea, generating demons. "With the exception of Isa. 34: 14-15, where she is said to inhabit desert wastes, Lilith has been completely exorcised from Scripture." (Phillips 1984, 180, n6)

What happens to Lilith and Eve is more exciting than boring Adam whining to God about his independent ex. Even the serpent ignores him. Are Adam and Eve being expelled just like Lilith? Will Eve go searching for Lilith, her missing piece?

Eve bites the apple; knowledge becomes possible. Lilith holds the power: she knows the secret name of God and possesses the magic. What a team they would make! Eve has been the scapegoat for Western civilization; Lilith is the scapegoat for God! Eve represents human woman; Lilith is the symbol of female power, the secret knowledge of the name of God which controls his fate. Knowing the name of the king or deity is synonymous with power over his life; to say the name is to end his life. "The story of Lilith . . . seems to embody the deepest male fears of impotence, weakness, and isolation

in the face of unfettered female sexuality, assertiveness, and independence." (Phillips 1984, 39)

Woman may indeed belong to the serpent and men to their gods, but not in the way the misogynist theologians believe, for as we have seen, the serpent is the symbol of the vital, the genius, the continuity of the blood line--and wisdom. ". . . [there was an] ancient association between sacred women and serpents in religions of the Near East. Snakes were thought to control 'wisdom' (magic), immortality, and fertility. As such they were the special companions of women, and often guarded earthly or celestial gardens of delight. At times they were embodiments of Woman." (Phillips 1984, 41) The serpent of course was demonized by Christians and made into the devil. So was Eve. "[Eve] is held to be the devil's mouthpiece, Satan's familiar. Eve was not only excluded from the privilege of being made in the image of God, but she was viewed as a friend of Satan and sometimes conflated with the serpent, the forbidden fruit, and even the Fall. She was thought to be made of evil substance. There is a Jewish legend that says Adam originally had a tail which was the part of his body that made Eve. The man's useless coccyx is a reminder. A similar story from Bulgaria tells about an angel carrying a rib to God during Eve's creation that was replaced by the devil's tail. Early German tales (Hans Sachs) wrote that Eve was created from the tail of dog. (Phillips 1984, 42)

The serpent is also the form assumed by the genius. The serpent is depicted all over the ancient world as the symbol of wisdom or initiation. Of course, the Christians demonized the serpent and made it the devil. The dark side of Christianity has been its successful effort to foist its interpretations of reality upon its members. It removed the problematical Sophia and consistently rooted out those teachings (such as Gnostic versions of Christ) which assist individuals in recovering their inner connection to the greater life of the cosmos. There appears to be a conspiracy of ignorance to keep people from finding out about their own genius, the source of all gods, the connecting link to the infinite power that is universal life.

The serpent--symbol of wisdom and the intelligence of the embodied life force--has been equated with Satan since Genesis. But it was not always so. The Acropolis had its own "household snake" and even the early kings and heroes of Athens were thought of

as snake-daemons. Eventually the cult of the snake disappeared, as the human form of the hero gained preference. At Eleusis also, there was behind the figure of Demeter an old local snake. In the Mysteries the marriage of Demeter with Zeus, who "took the form of a snake" gave way to the human form eventually. (Harrison 1966, 287-8 )

When the year was based on a lunar calendar in ancient Greece, "the goddess herself was a snake. When she took human form the snake became her 'attribute'; it was the 'symbol of wisdom.' When Pausanias saw the great image of Athena in the Parthenon he noted 'at her feet lies a shield and near the shield is a serpent.' Who was the serpent? . . . it is he--the lord and the luck of the state." (Harrison 1966, 267) The continuity of symbolism with the serpent representing the presiding genius is evident from this passage.

In occult views of the body, there is a physiological basis for the association of the serpent with wisdom. The ancient Egyptians apparently were aware that snakes manifested the highest development of the pineal gland. The pineal gland when activated is the organ of the brain responsible for spiritual vision, astral projection, and the phenomena associated with the third eye. The uraeus, symbol of wisdom, is the figure of the sacred asp or cobra on the headdress of ancient Egyptian rulers. It was raised, laying upon the forehead in the same place the Hindus put the third eye. The Maat symbol was an ostrich plume, another symbol of truth. It was similar to the pineal gland in shape and was worn like the feather of the 'American Indians as though rising from the brain. (Hall 1972, 209-110)

## EVE AS THE SCAPEGOAT OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

Eve as the personification of the female sex has served the purposes of the tribe. She is scapegoat for Western civilization, the target of the patriarchal shadow. Just listen to this very short, random list of misogynist ravings which demonize woman, and then you will see a tiny fraction of the tip of the iceberg of the fear and hatred of woman, especially by

Christian male clerics and theologians. You will see why the feminist movement was necessary.

(1) the most notorious document in Western history was published in 1486, written by Catholic theologians, Dominican order, approved by the University of Cologne and Pope innocent VIII: the Malleus Maleficarum. Politicians, clerics, academics, and legislators--all male--feared the terrible powers of witches, individually and collectively.

The Malleus bears a large share of the responsibility for the deaths of thousands of women at the hands of authorities, both secular and religious, Catholic and Protestant. . . . The crudeness of the misogyny . . . is astonishing.

'All witchcraft . . . comes from carnal lust, which in women is insatiable . . . Wherefore for the sake of fulfilling their lusts they consort even with devils.'  
'[Woman] is more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations.' She is deceitful, with a 'slippery tongue,' 'a liar by nature.' She is naturally credulous and impressionable, therefore 'quicker to waver in her faith, and consequently quicker to abjure the faith, which is the root of all witchcraft.' Since women are 'feebler both in mind and body,' they have weak memories, are undisciplined, impulsive, and particularly dangerous when given authority over anything. . . . (Phillips 1984, 70)

For though the devil tempted Eve to sin, yet Eve seduced Adam. And as the sin of Eve would not have brought death to our soul and body unless the sin had afterwards passed on to Adam, to which he was tempted by Eve, not by the devil, therefore she is more bitter than death. (Phillip 1984, 55)

(2) Fatima Mernissi writes that al-Ghazali (1050-1111), who developed an influential theory of civilization, justifies the seclusion, veiling, and scapegoating of females.

Ghazali 'sees civilization as struggling to contain the woman's destructive, all-absorbing power. Women must be controlled to prevent men from being distracted from their religious and social duties. Society can survive only by creating the institutions which foster male dominance through sexual segregation.'

Women are thought to possess qaid, 'the power to deceive and defeat men, not by force, but by cunning and intrigue.' Because they have qaid, women can bring

about fitna, which is highly feared. Fitna is the word for disorder, chaos, and the uncontrollable sexuality believed to be embodied in women. To desegregate Islamic life would release that sexuality and destroy Allah's order.' (Fatima Mernissi, Beyond the Veil, quoted in Phillips 1984, 154)

Mernissi records two of many Muslim sayings relating women to fitna: "She resembles Satan in his irresistible power over the individual" (Abu al-Hassan); and "[Muhammad] said: 'After my disappearance there will be no greater source of chaos and disorder for my nation than women' (al-Bukhari)." (Fatima Mernissi, Beyond The Veil quoted in Phillips 1984, 154)

(3) As John Phillips writes, men avoid the encounter with their own nonexistence that confronts them as the sexual power of women by reversing the natural order of nature:

From the genital of Woman all men have come forth, and to the genital of Woman must men return. Psychologically, then, women must be regarded as perpetually confronting men with the threat of nonexistence, and men avoid this terror by reversing the natural course (women are really born from men) or by denying their sexual yearning for the comfort of oblivion (women are seducers.) Thus the association of the first woman with the devil-snake in legend and art ought not to surprise us. Eve must be the creation of Satan, or created by God out of Satan's substance, or placed on the earth to do Satan's bidding. (Phillips 1984, 44-45)

## THE METAPHORICAL WORLD

What is the particular role of woman in the regeneration of humanity? If she is to bring to birth humanity, how will she accomplish this? First of all, it is necessary to imagine a world that is a metaphorical one, right alongside the literal one that we live in. To find the metaphorical world is to bring the dysfunctional one-sided literal world to an end. This is really not hard to do if you think about the origins of Western civilization. At the birth of Western philosophy and science stands the vital, turbulent, cruel, beautiful world of the ancient Greeks, and their interaction with Egypt, Asia Minor, Palestine, and the

lands around the Near East. The works of Homer provided the context, the soil, out of which Greece, and subsequently the Western world grew to maturity. The battle of Troy, the adventures of Odysseus, all the wars, all of this is embedded in a colorful mythology. History looks at battles, kings, dates, heroes, and brave acts. However, there is a mythological substratum beneath all the conquering generals. Our soul is drawn to the three goddesses of power and beauty who assembled in a beauty contest before Paris, the human judge. Trickery and deception, typical of the Greek male imagination, won the day. Paris gave the prize to Aphrodite because her bribe was most enticing: she would give him the world's most beautiful woman to wed if he chose her. He did. She arranged it so he could steal Helen, already married, and thus began the treachery that set off the Trojan war.

If you read history books, you will see barely any discussion of the context out of which these battles occurred. It is just ignored. Why do we assume the battles are real but the goddess beauty contest is "just myth," therefore a lie, and ignore it? The point here is not to go out and prove or disprove the historical validity of the wars: whether they occurred or not, they formed the emotional glue that has held together Western consciousness for millennia. Just read about how emotional became Alexander the Great, Napoleon, and the many generals and royalty that visited Troy, inspired by the tales of heroism and brutality. The point is this: there is a current that runs underneath the literal "historical validity" that textbooks take for granted. This is the current of soul, imagination (the way archetypal psychologists use the term). Soul knows that the realm of myth is what completes the story, giving a whole picture instead of a partial one that focuses only upon the literal, physical battles. Without the color and drama of these goddesses, without the ultimate prize of the beauty of a woman, there would have been no history ("his"-story)--no war, no journey of Odysseus, no ten years of slaughter and suffering. It is the soul's stuff that interests soul, not the warriors slaughtering each other. What creates literal history is this twist away from soul; what discreates the suffering of history is a return to soul. The stories that record the perspective of soul lead us into the belly of the whale of history. We develop an organ of vision that can get underneath to see the pattern that forms the foundation between the literal event and its human context.

The soil that covers the roots of literal history gave it birth and nourished it. To be fully human is to discover that soil, not to discard it as "just dirt."

The discovery of this soil may lead to our recovery from our own history. Right now, it owns us: we are a victim of the past. We cannot get out of the maelstrom of evils--generated by the thousands of years of brutality inflicted by religious wars, the tyranny of ignorance fueled by literalism, racism, and the multitudes of ethnic hatreds--simply by continuing. To get to a place where we are bigger than our history, we have to get underneath it, to the place that contains it. Getting from the top branches, the twigs of the ordinary machine of days, to the soil underneath is not that difficult. The trip from twig to trunk to roots is the circuit by which the tree is witnessed and experienced. This is Sophia's path by which we acquaint ourselves with more of life than appears in the textbooks.

A good place to begin traversing Sophia's path is to study the myths. There are many ancient myths that speak to woman's path: One of the earliest myths of antiquity is about Queen Inanna, who voluntarily submits to being stripped of her power at the gates of the Underworld. She is put naked on a meathook to submit to voluntary death. After a long long time, her female handmaid, who was left behind in the upper world, comes to fetch her. Inanna had told her to come get her if she was gone too long. Inanna is given back her royal clothes and insignia. Regaining her lost power, full within herself, the Queen marches back to her royal court. There she finds her lover, Dumuzi, who, instead of mourning her loss, is enjoying her absence, living a life of ease and ruling in her stead. In her book about the Inanna myth, Descent to the Goddess: A Way of Initiation for Women, Jungian analyst Sylvia Brinton Perera describes Inanna's return to the upperworld as anything but sweet and pleasant.

Inanna is restored to active life and rises from the underworld reborn. But she returns demonic, surrounded by the pitiless demons of Ereshkigal (ruler of the underworld), whose duty it is to claim the dead. In the myth they are to claim the underworld's substitute, and Inanna returns with 'the eye of death' herself to choose her own scapegoat. She has met Ereshkigal and knows the abysmal reality: that all changes and life demand sacrifice. That is exactly the knowledge that patriarchal morality and the fathers' eternally maiden daughters have fled from, wanting to do things right in order to avoid the pain of bearing their own

renewal, their own separate being and uniqueness. Inanna comes up loathsome and claiming her right to survive. She is not a beautiful maid, daughter of the fathers, but ugly, selfish, ruthless, willing to be very negative, willing not to care.

. . .

. . . It may . . . feel fearsome when a woman comes out of hiding to stand her ground--to herself and/or to those around her. We see this demonic form of the returning goddess in much of the early women's liberation fury. . . . each individual woman initiate may have to go through it. (Perera 1981, 78-79)

Inanna must choose a scapegoat, for that is the law of the flow of life. Inanna represents a dynamic within life, whereby one attitude prevails in the flow of consciousness. An example is the "patriarchy"--the attitude towards life in which woman, earth, body, and nature are despised and demonized; the belief that took hold in the exoteric religions. The "patriarchy" is based upon the belief in hierarchy, where a male God is at the head, like a CEO. This CEO grants authority and power to his earthly counterpart, the male, who rules the earth via scapegoating and demonization. What the Inanna myth describes is the birth and death of this attitude: in order for patriarchy to come into dominance, the power of the feminine willingly submitted to its own death. Why? Because the feminine is closest to, is in touch with--therefore, obeys--this cosmic, natural rhythm. Perera tells us that the problem for Inanna is to find a substitute for herself. The only one equal to her power is her consort, Dumuzi. In her love song, she tells him:

You, beloved, man of my heart,  
You, I have brought about an evil fate for you . . .  
Your right hand you have placed on my vulva.  
Your left stroked my head,  
You have touched your mouth to mine,  
You have pressed my lips to your head.  
That is why you have been decreed an evil fate,  
Thus is treated the 'dragon' of women . . . (Perera 1981, 79-80)

What about Inanna's female servant, the one who came to fetch her? I think she plays the same role as Eve, the part of our feminine that was allowed to remain in the

upper world of patriarchal suppression. Lilith was banished because she refused to submit to a subordinate position. She wanted to be equal and her independence caused Adam to demand a better wife, so Lilith flew off to the Red Sea, uttering the secret name of God. So, the power to unravel the mystery of humanity and its relation to this tyrannical God lies with the feared and hated Lilith, Queen of demons. The real power of the feminine is outside creation; outside, that is, of society, the prevailing attitude. The only feminine allowed to stay with the patriarchy was a subservient woman, Eve, obedient. . . .until the serpent. The affiliation between the serpent and the demons spawned by Lilith is apparent. Eve remembers. It is through Eve that the voice of the missing power of wisdom is received and honored. Eve, like Inanna's servant girl, remembers her destiny--to awaken the life force, to allow the intelligence within the life force to speak. This intelligence has the power to guide us, to protect us from literal death by learning how to die and kill--metaphorically.

## BRINGING HUMANITY INTO EXISTENCE

One of the most vivid intuitions experienced by Jung while touring the African savanna on the Athi Plains, a game preserve. A vast spectacle unfolded before him, in which huge herds of animals slowly moved in silence, grazing with heads nodding. He sensed that this must be like the world at its very beginning, with no human observer.

There the cosmic meaning of consciousness became overwhelmingly clear to me. . . . Man, I, in an invisible act of creation put the stamp of perfection on the world by giving it objective existence. This act we usually ascribe to the Creator alone, without considering that in so doing we view life as a machine calculated down to the last detail, which along with the human psyche, runs on senselessly, obeying foreknown and predetermined rules. In such a cheerless clockwork fantasy there is no drama of man, world, and God; there is no 'new day' leading to 'new shores', but only calculated processes. . . . I had been looking about without hope for a myth of our own. Now I knew what it was, and knew even more: that man is indispensable for the completion of creation; that, in fact, he himself is the second creator of the world, who alone has given to the world its objective existence--without which, unheard, unseen, silently eating, giving birth, dying, heads

nodding through hundreds of millions of years, it would have gone on in the profoundest night of non-being down to its unknown end. Human consciousness created objective existence and meaning, and man found his indispensable place in the great process of being. (Jung 1965, 255-6)

Who will bring humanity into existence? There is indeed something extraordinary about the fact that human consciousness "registers" nature. I get the sense that Jung recognized--all the way into the core of his being--the Other. With recognition of Other, we not only bring the world into existence, but we bring ourselves into being, as well. Once there is an Other, we are in relationship and that relationship re-orientes us to the world. We are suddenly stopped where before there was simply a machine that "runs on senselessly." In some mysterious way we feel accountable to the Other. The experience is ours, yet this possession belongs simultaneously to the Other, the Other brought it into existence. A sense of responsibility is born. We have entered into a world that is newly sacred, unlike the world of churches and conventional spirituality.

Once we encounter Other, a new world of relationship is created. We are turned by Other and accountable for that meeting. We stop and cannot ourselves go on mindlessly "unheard, unseen, silently eating, giving birth, dying, heads nodding through hundreds of millions of years . . . in the profoundest night of non-being."

Jung realized that "man is indispensable for the completion of creation," its "second creator." But who, Dr. Jung, will create the human? Who will witness--and bring into existence humanity? Who will "stop" and register the endless progression of human consuming, the heads nodding in endless dozing and grazing in shopping malls, bars, the human lives spent in anesthetized in alcohol and drugs, entombed in front of TV, enslaved every day to an inhuman "machine calculated down to the last detail, which along with the human psyche, runs on senselessly"? As "man" brought nature into a second creation, woman will bring humanity into existence. This will happen through consciousness of the past and the resurrection of divinity within the life force.

The significance and importance of the ancestors in antiquity (especially Egypt), the shamanic traditions and indigenous tribes, I think, is their connection to the living vital. In these societies (where women are not scapegoated), recognition is given to the

living quality of the ancestors: in some sense, they are present, exerting their guidance and needs upon the living. Sexually, woman carries from birth the eggs which later will be fertilized and make a child. The male produces sperm on-going throughout his mature life; as it is released he makes more. In a way, woman sexually does not enter the current culture as does her contribution to the genetic pool. Everything a male becomes in his lifetime is the source or the influence of the sperm he creates. For the woman, she needs nothing except maybe to protect the eggs already in her body from the moment of her own conception. Perhaps what scares males so much is that culture is not necessary for woman to fulfill her biology; she's ready with or without culture. Without a space created by the separation of woman from involvement in society, man could not provide his own gift--a sperm that has changed, that reflects the contribution of culture.

#### WHO IS "WOMAN" AND WHAT IS HER ROLE IN THE MILLENNIUM?

As "man is indispensable for the completion of creation" woman is indispensable for the completion of humanity. To make humanity whole, the human world must be brought into existence, through consciousness. Hints run like a golden thread through philosophy and religion that the regeneration of humanity will occur through woman:

In man is centrifugal energy, buried, dormant in his very blood. This energy only expresses itself by uncoordinated outbursts of activity. The real issue--the resurrection of organic, creative energy--depends upon woman; the female in her, being by nature the protectress of the continuum, existence, must transform itself. (Suarez 1973, 123) (emphasis mine)

[Woman] is defining the terminal omega of the allegory [Adam and Eve]: the resurrection through womanhood of the immeasurable energy incarnate in existence. (Suarez 1973, 128-9)

The one catalyst which can effect and control such a cosmic unification is woman. If the women of this country would determine to reach out to the souls of all women of all countries with this love-appeal, no power on earth could stop

them in their cosmic march around the world. Women should not hesitate to begin this great march by fearing the opposition of men for the wisdom of men will soon see that such a unification is the only hope for all the world and they will work for it with equal eagerness. (Russell 1988, 58)

It is woman who "created the first human culture" who moves culture forward, "without losing its bond with the root and foundation, it achieves the highest forms of psychic reality. . . . It was Briffault who discovered the fact (which is still insufficiently recognized) that early culture is in very high degree the product of the female group, . . . (Neumann 1963, 280-1)

The following are excerpted from Caitlin Matthews' book, Sophia: Goddess of Wisdom:

'Wise men of old gave the soul a feminine name. Indeed she is female in her nature as well', says Gnostic Exegesis of the Soul. All who possess a soul are female, is the Gnostic argument. (Matthews 1991, 92)

Simon Magus, [father of Gnosticism], was 'possessed of 'the secret fire' by virtue of his partnership with Helena. Esoterically, it is the female who possesses the initiating fires of creation, and who may initiate her partner into its secrets. (Matthews 1991, 168)

The mystic AE (George Russell) wrote: 'Some renewal of ancient conceptions of the fundamental purpose of womanhood and its relations to Divine Nature, and that from the temples where women may be instructed she will come forth, with strength in her to resist all pleading until the lover worships in her a divine womanhood, and that through their love the divided portions of the immortal nature may come together and be one as before the beginning of the world.'

As women resume their power--guardianship of the secret fire which the Shulamite, Sheba, Inanna and Lilith manifest--a more dynamic and just society will result in which the Black Goddess will be joined with Sophia freely and effectively. (Matthews 1991, 56)

How will this be done? Woman must "stop" the flow of literal history. The stopping is a metaphorical killing, the killing of the god by saying the secret name. The killing is necessary because the king--the prevailing attitude, the ruling consciousness--is

senile and the land is barren and the people suffer. The secret name that must be spoken is the name of the Power within each person. The single king dies; the Power within the individual must come to birth, and it is woman that knows that. Woman, by virtue of her biology, her connection to moon, cosmic rhythm, to incoming souls, knows that each person has their own connection to cosmos, to the unknown divine mystery that flows within as the blood and without as the firmament.

A careful reading of the esoteric literature, be it Gnostic, alchemical, or Kabbalistic, reveals that it is woman who embodies the future because it is she who carries the knowledge of the past in her blood into the present. She embodies the future, not just literally as mother of progeny but the future as knowledge of the past. Our future is not further development of technology and weapons of war and so-called progress. It is the "stopping" of the endless continuity of habitual consuming and nodding and dozing.

Woman is the doorway, the portal to other worlds, not just for the male as the Jungian anima, but historically, as harbinger of the future. The future is not in time. We are not going anywhere nor are we transforming, evolving, or growing. Our future may be to stop and account for the past, and in so doing we re-create and transform the present, from a state of endless consuming to a state of vision, of witnessing. Woman is the pivot for the transformation of collective mindlessness.

The task of woman is to rebuild the grail that was torn asunder by exoteric religion. What is the grail? It is formed by the conscious reunion of Eve with Lilith, or the return of the servant to go fetch Inanna home. The power and rulership of woman as embodied wisdom must restore health, fertility, growth and well-being in the kingdom that has become a wasteland. When Eve joins Lilith, the secret name will be called out from the rooftops, so that the senile, vicious god of humanity's brutal history will die along with its literal one-sided interpretation, for it is blasphemy and ignorance to equate the unknown mystery, the creative unknowable Power of the Life Force, with a man-made image of it. The secret name that destroys the god of the religions that has kept true spirituality in the underbelly of human culture is the naming of the god within each person. The magic power of the wisdom goddess that controls the fate of every god is simply to speak from the place of power within, from the salt, the residue of lived life

that wisdom is. This is the only power that can kill the demonic grip on us of the prevailing attitude. The god--the thought structure or attitude that has preserved itself long past its natural time--must die and it is woman who will release the name of humanity. With the uttering of our own truth, we kill the demon ruler.

The end of the world is indeed at hand, but it is not the floods and earth changes. The end of the world will happen when woman assumes the mantle, becoming the guide for men, following the intelligence of the life force.

Some day there will be girls and women whose name will no longer signify merely an opposite of the masculine but something in itself, something that makes one think not of any complement and limit, but only of life and existence: the feminine human being.

This advance will (at first much against the will of the outstripped men) change the love experience, which is now full of error; will alter it from the ground up, reshape it into a relation that is meant to be from one human being to another, no longer of man to woman. And this more human love (that will fulfill itself, infinitely considerate and gentle in binding and releasing) will resemble that which we are preparing with struggle and toil, that love that consists in this, that two solitudes protect and border and salute each other. (Rainer Marie Rilke (1988), Letters to a Young Poet)

# CHAPTER 10

## WISDOM THUNDER POWER MAGIC

### The Thunder: Perfect Mind

For I am the first and the last.  
I am the honored one and the scorned one.  
I am the whore and the holy one.  
I am the wife and the virgin.  
I am (the mother) and the daughter. . . .

I am the silence that is incomprehensible  
and the idea whose remembrance is frequent.  
I am the voice whose sound is manifold  
and the word whose appearance is multiple.  
I am the utterance of my name. . . .

I am the hearing that is attainable to everything;  
I am the speech that cannot be grasped.  
I am the name of the sound  
and the sound of the name.  
I am the sign of the letter  
and the designation of the division. . . .

(Note: The Thunder: Perfect Mind is one of the texts found in the Nag Hammadi collection, many of which are considered to be Gnostic in origin. This particular speech by a feminine being is not, according to the editor, necessarily Gnostic. Thunder is the name of the female divinity who speaks. Thunder in antiquity is the voice of the highest god, whether it be the god of the Greek pantheon or Hebrew Bible. Thunder reveals the god's presence on Earth. (Nag Hammadi Library, gen.ed. James M. Robinson, 1990)

### LOGOS: THE SPEAKING OUT FROM THE PLACE OF EXPERIENCE

According to philosopher Martin Buber, there is no spirituality divorced from life, from human interaction. In Hasidism, he says, "the holiest teaching is rejected if it is found in

someone only as a content of his thinking." (Buber quoted in Friedman 1960, 91) What Buber calls "spirit" is not some higher faculty, some rare quality achieved by ascetic practice and isolation from community, but rather, spirit "is man's totality that has become consciousness, the totality which comprises and integrates all his capacities, powers, qualities, and urges . . . Spiritual life is nothing but the existence of man, in so far as he possesses that true human conscious totality." (Buber quoted in Friedman, 1960, 92)

How do we become conscious of that totality? Jungians advocate therapy in which the person who is on the path of individuation comes into healing contact with the unconscious through dreamwork and analysis. This bridge of analysis is a kind of container through which the outlines of the Self can be felt. The Self is a symbol of that which connects the small life of the ego-persona with its shadow, anima, mother image, indeed, with the larger life of the unconscious and its archetypal motifs.

The circuit of Sophia offers a way to connect with that larger life in everyday situations, without the mediation of therapist, guru, priest, or healer. It is not that these mediators are wrong or stand in the way of realizing Sophia's path. The important thing to remember is that such methods are temporary, are to introduce the person to the possibility of creating their own unique bridge to the other side, not relying for too long a time upon the artificial and temporary method of mediation.

Logos is a word that is used in conjunction with Sophia. There is no one definition for the term, for it has a rich history of meanings that travel back into time, before even Plato's use of it to designate that which relates same and other (for this I am indebted to the work of Robert Schmidt). Logos connects difference in a way that reveals both. It is a useful term because it suggests a speaking as well as the quality of intelligence. Although the term has come to mean reason as a dry, logic-chopping conceptual tool, logos did not mean that in antiquity and it does not mean that for many deep thinkers. For Heraclitus, the pre-Socratic who saw that change was the basis of life, logos was the fire that moved through life in an endless vibration of creation and destruction. For Huston Smith, interpreter of the wisdom teachings, "reason can also play an interpretive role, serving as a bridge to join a newly discovered world to the world of

common sense." (Smith 1991, 132) What is this "newly discovered world"? It is the dynamic of life, the wisdom we acquire from living life, learning its lessons, surviving not with bitterness but with vision, the transforming of experience from reaction to the capacity to see, understand, reflect. This kind of reason is the struggle to understand and give voice to the intuitions of soul. We know deep inside that love is the source, but how do we express it? Do we just pray for it every night and wait or is it our responsibility to give birth--in voice--to what we know inside is true? Wisdom spoke in the market place, at the city gate. We have to bring the "highest truths" of the existence of soul back into "common sense"--the world of human interaction and commercial exchange.

We could think of logos as a speaking forth which connects two things that are not conceptual, not related in the intellect, but rather two things that are incompatible, not in the same family, so to speak. When there is an agenda, let's say a staff meeting at a social services agency, what is allowed is confined to the matters under discussion. Imagine a scene where a dedicated employee is distraught about the agency's disregard for and mishandling of a case involving abused children. From the administration's point of view, everything is just fine. From the employee's perspective, the agency's mission to protect children has been compromised. The employee's perception is an example of the "other" that is totally different and excluded from the agenda. The two situations are unrelated on the surface but "underneath" are bound to each other in mutual distrust and fear. Logos is the human capacity to create relationship between these two events. Logos is a word that is used to signify the capacity to create connection in such a way that reveals what is feared and excluded--the employee's plea for integrity. We see these situations all the time, but may not recognize it. When we speak out from the place of truth within, this is often reacted to by others as though it were intrusive and unwelcome. It is even feared and treated as though it were infectious. Finding the right "logos" takes practice and the capacity to withstand rejection, misunderstanding, and also error. You learn by trial and error, just like a baby has to get up, stumble, and crash a lot before she learns to walk.

When someone speaks from the heart, she may have touched off a wave of heartfelt thanks for speaking out, but she became an outcast as well. Speaking out is to

reclaim your power, but like Inanna it means giving up the docile, make-nice, do-what-Daddy-wants persona. To fight a battle for soul, women have to go to the Red Sea where Lilith lives and risk the isolation and abandonment that Lilith symbolizes. What appears like exile, however, Sophia tells us that is where the treasure of understanding is to be found. It is only exile from the point of view of the dysfunctional, poisonous, senile prevailing attitude; it is not exile from the viewpoint of soul. Power is threatening. Woman must learn how to use her power. She learns through practice, by trying out her voice.

On October 7, 1979, Pope John Paul II spoke to 5,000 nuns gathered at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, D.C. One Catholic nun dared to speak from her experience, from her anguish about the subjection of woman by the Church. Sister Theresa Kane, dressed in a brown suit with a lapel cross that identified her status as a nun, surprised the pope and the national television audience with her strong, uncompromising message. She told him to "be mindful of the intense suffering and pain which is part of the life of many women in these United States" and urged him to open up "the possibility of women as persons being included in all ministries of our church." (Roberts unpubl., 65) The 43-year-old Bronx-born Superior of the Sisters of Mercy of the Union became an instant and mighty symbol of hope. She was honored for her courageous voice and called a "prophetic figure" by the Women's Ordination Conference. In another speech years after her confrontation with the pontiff, she spoke about the exclusively male image of divinity and its role in the subjugation and victimization of woman: "We are almost exclusively looking at God as a male image. And I believe there's a very integral relationship between the use of the male image to represent God and the subjugation, oppression and victimization of women and womanhood. This suppression of women exists in all our structures: ecclesiastical, political, religious and social." (Roberts unpubl., 65)

With Sister Kane's direct, clear voicing of the truth, the balance of abusive power that has kept oppression intact through silence, denial, and protection of male power, suddenly shifts. The voice from the underbelly tells the world-reminds the world-that the

ones in power are only in power because they rest upon the silence and pain of the marginalized and oppressed.

The term "prophetic figure" applied to her shows the direction and the might of this voice. As we saw in chapter 6, prophecy is linked to the telestic mania that Plato describes--the inspiration that clears away debris by the clear, forceful ring of a voice that speaks its truth. This is Voice as sistrum, driving away the coils of inertia and ignorance that cling to us like an alien parasite. It is the voice of truth that has the power to rearrange--or dissolve--the structures of belief and habits of misogyny that perpetuate victimization. To be prophetic, however, is to commit oneself to the dangers of the path of light and truth. The person who voices truth is now in the dark light that shines outside the boundary, ejected out of the collective box sustained by habits and lies. Sister Theresa told the Women's Ordination gathering that "to be prophetic, either as an individual or as a group, is to be unpopular with authorities, be they civil or ecclesiastical. . . . It also means to be willing to face suffering to a great degree, even to becoming an outcast." (Roberts unpubl., 65) The strength to bear the outcast status derives from the shelter provided by clinging to integrity, justice, and truth.

There are several lessons for women in Sister Theresa's courageous confrontation with papal authority: 1) in a single event, this speaking out brings to the present moment the entire 1500 year history of habits and beliefs that put one gender into power at the expense of the other; 2) the speaker needs support--speak out! Don't let the courageous one suffer alone the fate of Prometheus; if many women speak from the place of suffering, a genuine shift may occur that will put a stop to the mindless march of old habits.

Because women are the largest population to be excluded from power, when a woman speaks from that place of exile, her voice shoots like an arrow and pierces the illusion of habit and lies and prejudice that perpetuate our dysfunctional paradigm. Can a spiritual path for women be detected here? Male-oriented spiritual paths generally lead the seeker to leave the world, to abandon its call to power and prestige. But women are already outside the power structure. For woman then the "direction" of the spiritual path is not to leave the world, but to enter it--not as a poor imitation of a male--but with all of

her female power intact--destructive (of dysfunctional policies and patterns of behavior) as well as creative.

There is supreme power in the voice. The magic necessary to return soul to society is the voicing of one's truth, pain, vision. "Magic, power is in the words: 'The force of magic does not reside in the things; it resides within man and can escape only through his voice.'" (Onians 1987, 68) To speak one's mind is wisdom.

### SPEAKING SOPHIA, DOING SOPHIA, MAGIC SOPHIA

What does the return of Sophia mean? It means that we--each of us--has to return the voice of the vital back into the marketplace. What is the voice of the vital? It is the expression of what we have learned, not from textbooks and schools, but from life. We "toss the salt" back into life, wherever it lands, the residue left behind deep within us, after we have died on the cross over and over, stretched upon the impossible contradictions of life. This is the voice of our experience, not of stupid collective opinion, but the voice that is from the head: clear perception from the eye of the earth, from the place in the gap, from the place of freedom. Each person who speaks expresses one piece of the wisdom of the earth.

The speaking does something: it is a doing, in the same way that magic is a doing. Magic in antiquity was not cheap entertainment but an affair of public ritual performed with full social sanction. In Plato's *Alcibiades*, Socrates urges Alcibiades to the highest standards of conduct and education. Socrates goes on to describe the Persian education of princes. Of the four teachers who are selected according to their virtues--wisdom, justice, prudence, bravery--it is the one who is the wisest who teaches the magic. Socrates then explains that the art of the magician is the service of the gods. The same wise man also gives instruction in kingly duties.

Fine tuning our attitude, our actions, and even our learning to the cosmos requires not so much more schooling and discipline, but rather an openness to the possibility that we really do not understand, that we are in the grip of a mystery that permeates every

pore of the body, that we are face to face with infinity when we touch and greet the web of our life. To realize that our life has holes into infinity leads us not into insecurity but into trust. Who do we trust to read the vibrations of the cosmos? Neither priest nor astrologer but your own intuition, finely tuned. Trust yourself. There is no error in a final sense, only turnings.

By a kind of sympathetic magic, the doing Sophia, the speaking Sophia, brings her back into the collective life, into the marketplace. We have to learn the art of magic to restore the king within, the real guru, the guide and mediator between worlds. Universal correspondence is one of the most important of the Hermetic doctrines. The macrocosm, the cosmos, is reflected in the microcosm, the human world. Each is connected to the other not causally but because each is related to a common pattern or archetype. It is because of this reflection that relates the two that makes magic possible. (Godwin 1991)

When we resonate according to the motion of Sophia, we literally move history, change it, effect her return. Sophia is the meeting point of the I and the we. She is us-- each I--buried within as the coherence and integrity of the cosmos at its point of intersection with the individual. Each of us is the one who will restore Sophia to history. How? Through the circuit of turns that leads deeper and deeper into life's mystery. Who will lead us? Each of us has our own guru within: the daemon who will activate when we give her the food she needs: great ideas, deep questions about life, a desire to understand, the capacity to change our habits towards acting with honesty and integrity. The world will change and Sophia will return when we express the guru within, when we become a channel for the intelligence of the life force.

In Hermetic cosmology, there are "multiple planes or fields, related to each other not causally but by reflecting a common pattern or archetype. It is this reflection that makes magic theoretically possible, an action on one plane being able, under certain circumstances, to move by a sort of resonance the entity that corresponds to it on another plane." (Godwin 1991, 27)

If this is accurate, then it means, by a kind of sympathetic magic, each person can act to bring back Sophia. Sophia, co-creator with God, can return to history, to religion,

by the speaking of the voice of salt, the residue, what has been ignored or marched over by the powerful.

Robert Sardello, in his book Facing the World with Soul, has a very poignant description of the effect of the conjunction between individual and world soul. This conjunction, he says, manifests as word. He pinpoints with uncanny accuracy the essential meaning of the cosmic vibration that sounds the wisdom of the spheres at the intersection of individual and World Soul: it is resonance. He reminds us that what the soul takes in has nothing to do with the acquisition and internalization of knowledge, nor with the understanding of systems esoteric teachings. Soul learning does not even have to do with acquiring right meaning or accuracy about spiritual teachings. What then, is the learning of the soul? It is what sounds right. Sardello reminds us of a time when the singing of the soul was known to be the World Soul. This "music of the spheres" was the sound made by the planets and picked up and read by the imagination. This sounding formed the basis for meditation practices.

In the Vedic traditions, the source of the Veda is Vak, the creative word. Vak is a feminine noun derived from the verb Vach, to enunciate or speak. In both the Vedas and the Tantras, Vak is considered as both the source of creation and the all-pervading basis of manifest phenomena. It is the primal and origination word power, dwelling in all things. (Sardello 1992, 63)

## "BRIDE OF THE BLADED THUNDER"

(Note: Thunder-brides are Semele, Alkeme, and Dido who are fertilized by Thunder gods. (Harrison 1966, 168))

To strike with the thunderbolt is to speak from the place of vision, from your own experience and clear perception. It means to act outside of--from the place between--the opposites of virtue and vice. When we live only within the world cast by the box and its ossified edges, we believe what we see: that these are the only choices available to us. But seeing is not believing. To really see is to move beyond this apparent choice. Can you imagine how feeble would be the story of Jesus in the temple with the money-

changers if it read like this? Jesus says, trying to make nice: "Hey guys, how do you feel about my asking you to pack up your stuff and movin' it down the road? I don't want to cause any trouble here. I'm just doin' my job, you know. I want you to know that I'm here to listen; I want to hear your side of the story." The impact of the real story derives from his wrath. It is the thunderbolt that drives away greed, tyranny. We must realize that some rancid, destructive human expressions or enterprises need to be obliterated: not by control-freaks, police, or military types but by the clear vision and thunderbolt of wisdom.

Our own truth is the thunderbolt. Only we have power over it, can control where it strikes. Spiritual traditions tell us to control our anger; people who have been raised to "make nice" think that compassion and peace require that anger be denied and repressed. Conversely, people who don't make nice often use their fists to make their point. And so humanity slowly decays in a crucifixion between the opposites of making nice and aggressive self-destruction.

The only alternative to getting paralyzed between the two is to realize that the emotion is like a neutral power that is unleashed: it must be used. If we know about it, how it works, we can use it instead of for maintaining silence in the face of oppression or for bashing someone's face in.

Years ago, in the mid-1980s, a woman professor passed along some interesting news from her chiropractor. He informed her that all across the country, chiropractors were seeing a large number of women who had problems with their throat chakra. The throat chakra is the psychic center in the body that oversees self-expression, speaking from the heart. Why do so many women have trouble speaking? We saw earlier that the Feminine was split into an acceptable Eve, dependent and subservient to Adam, and the cast-off demonized Lilith. Women, many of us, feel constrained to speak only what is acceptable. We are trained early on to "make nice" and not disturb. Woman has been ridiculed down the ages for her "reckless tongue" and gossip. From cartoons to media to bad jokes, we are told we talk too much, we nag, or demand that our reluctant partners relate to us by talking. I have heard young women--brilliant, educated and talented--

speak in bitter terms, humiliated and angry at the cultural message that women should be seen and not heard. (In this context, the reader is referred to the work of Carol Gilligan.)

Perhaps the age of speaking out has come, a speaking in which the deep, excluded vital has a voice. Sophia symbolizes a kind of discrimination in which relationship to authentic learning as well as life experience is honored: this immediately disqualifies the babble that infects most public discourse, and junk on TV and movies and talk shows. The babble is what is accepted, desired, and encouraged precisely because of the power that real speech has--to bring into existence the raw power of integrity, clear perception, authentic relationship, and true vision. Authentic speech stops the machine of destruction and trivia dead in its tracks; that is why there is so much resistance to it.

How do we activate the voice, the vibration of experience, the cellular memory of connection with nature, the realization of the circuit of vital cosmic rhythm that moves us, dances us, turns us to each other? We have to slowly, carefully, unwind the serpentine vital--our emotions, interest, needs, and desires--from its ivy-like clinging to images of deity, demons, archetypes, even from Soter and Sophia, from Jesus and Mary, from Buddha and Mohammed, from Krishna and Kali, from the Goddess and Themis and Maat, from Athena and Zeus and all the rest of humanity's inventions. We have to separate our emotions, our identity from them--not because they are bad or false or wrong--but simply so that we can have a relationship with them, to account for them, to set up a dialogue with them in which we ask them questions. As we engage in this process of encounter, standing off, questioning, becoming ourselves different from them, the alchemy of Sophia becomes activated. It is through asking, through really wondering what the heck is going on here, that we change our gods, our societies, our relationship to self, nature, and each other. We need to move our gods as we too begin to move. We re-situate them, de-idolize them against a background of mystery--they become objective to us, known, and consequently stand apart from both ourselves and the unknown.

The message of Sophia is one of relating, especially through voice. Sophia's sister in India is cosmic vibration, speech, and the gloriously obliterating explosive raw power of the cosmos, who speaks in her Vak form:

I move with roaring, howling, and radiant might.

I move with the infinite and nature's powers.  
I hold the love of the Lord of Lords.  
I hold the fire of the soul. I hold life and healing. (Rig Veda X.125.1)

What is it that strikes such terror into the hearts of misogynists everywhere, throughout the ages of humanity? Isn't it just this howling radiance, this terrible roar and fire that life is? Woman carries knowledge in her blood, the blood that flows in synchronized rhythm with the cosmos. It is the knowledge of this Other feminine, cast out by the prophets and rabbis, demonized by generations of life-hating theologians and monks, that threatens to blow apart the house of straw built on slavery, tyranny, and a hierarchy sustained by subservience and exclusion. The Other feminine lives in the body, of male as well as female. The Other feminine is raw power, the life force, invisible, all-pervading, terrible and awe-ful. This is the power that lives in the human, lives in the tree, the bird, the bull, the thunder, the blood, and the far-flung infinite light of stars. It is this vital power of life that flows in our veins that gets eaten, cannibalized, chopped up, transformed, banished, stolen, fought over; yet, it remains elusive, this stuff of existence, birth, death, and even our gods. It is, in fact, not our possession, we are gifted with its power for so brief a time. Like being wired up to a magic circuit of lights and electricity, it is ours to do good, to harm, to know, to forget, to connect, to let go, to use, to waste, to feel, to touch, to become cosmos.

# CHAPTER 11

## THE POWER OF FRIENDSHIP

### TURNING, TURNING, WE DANCE THE DANCE OF SOPHIA

The turning that is required is to see that our history--the killing, mass murders, and wars--has been lived out literally; and that what is necessary is to kill figuratively. Woman is the pivotal "place" where this can happen. By going to the past--accounting for what we have kept in the closet--we travel into the underbelly of culture for the past thousands of years. This is the circuit of Sophia, to go up and up into spiritual vision and ideals and then down again, to confront Sophia's dark face. In the modern return of the feminine archetype, not only are the nurturing, cooperative instincts returning, but the power of Sophia's other face, as well--the fierce creative/destructive energy of Lilith/Hecate/Kali. The dark face of wisdom--if we let it lead us--takes us not into death but into the realms of excluded life--the generations of conquered, marginalized, and powerless upon whom our modern civilization rests. We have done lots of wonderful things as humans, we have also destroyed, maimed, tortured, and raped each other and the earth. We have to turn back to grasp, understand, look at and question what we have done. This is a going forward. When we attempt to understand, then and only then can we speak of progress as an evolution of consciousness. We do not go backwards in order to become "primitive" but rather to take account, to notice, to stop, just as Jung came alive at the moment he saw the herds. We have to create humanity now, that is our task. We need to bring each other into existence by turning to each other, drawing forth what is within the other, and holding each other accountable for what is expressed, what is desired, and what is made by human speech and hands.

The spiral that is the vision of Sophia, the horizontal 8, is the pattern of a reversal which is yet an evolutionary movement. Like the moebius band, it turns back upon itself, yet never repeats the same place. Turning, turning, we are moved by the circuit of life to activate the intelligence of the life force, for our survival, for our becoming authentically

*Sophia: Exile and Return* by Kathleen Damiani

human. We turn to another, we turn to understand or grasp the past, not to swallow it and identify it with ourself but rather to come into relationship with it. Think of a constellation of magnificent stars, some here, some there, some large, some far away. The task is not to combine all stars into one amorphous stellar glob, but to recognize each one, to relate--through conscious witnessing--one to the other to the other, so that a pattern of connection can reveal its exquisite design. Another way of looking at our future spiritual destiny is to imagine that when each person's humanity--the salt of their unique experience and perspective--is brought into existence, related to, that awareness itself becomes a kind of electric energy with the individuals as the positive and negative points that make a continuous circuit.

#### WHERE IS SOPHIA?--THE CROSSROADS

Sophia, like Hermes, is to be found in the borderlands, outside the boundaries, somewhere in a place called 8. The Gnostics locate her in the Ogdoad. For the Persian Sufis, according to H. Corbin, she is in the "Eighth Clime,"--a "clime outside all climes, a place outside all places, outside of where." (Corbin 1976, 9)(emphasis in the original)

The sensible world, the place where most people are sensible and expect you to be, too, is made up of seven climes or dimensions. What lies outside traditional geography, according to Islamic esotericism, is a universe perceptible to the spiritual senses, what is called in Arabic, the "'alam al-mithal" which for Corbin is the archetypal world (mundus archetypus). He emphasizes that this world is a world of image, also called the mundus imaginalis: "a world that is ontologically as real as the world of the senses and that of the intellect." (Corbin 1976, 9) This world has an epistemological validity; that is, it is perceptible and has "a noetic value as real as that of sense perception or intellectual intuition." (Corbin 1976, 9)

It is this world that is apparent to awakened vision that is the hope of humanity and the promise of Sophia. Each of us must bring Sophia to bear in our immediate

circumstances in order to turn back the wheel of time and dislocate the deadly reaper of consequences of our habits of destruction.

The realm of Sophia is in the realm of the intermediate. This means that there is another world besides the two with which ordinary, "sensible" folk are acquainted with--the empirical world and the abstract world. "Between them there is a world that is both intermediary and intermediate, described . . . as the 'alam al-mithal, the world of the image, the mundus imaginalis.'" (Corbin 1976, 9)

It is in this magical interval that the intersection between the known and the unknown flips the world upside down, halting humanity's death march. This is the place from which the child calls out that the emperor has no clothes. It is the voice of honesty--the emperor is unwrapped of his cloak of lies. The lies that bind us to the habit of history dissolve. The enchantment is broken. The spell that was cast upon us will not work when we see that we have made literal what our spiritual sight knows is metaphorical. What we do not realize--yet--is that "metaphorical" is more real than the literal and leads to the "killing" of literal death. The metaphorical is more real in the sense that it completes the literal; therefore, the literal alone is false. Wisdom is an effect of seeing not only the literal but the metaphorical (symbolic).

Taking literally what the oracle said in ancient Greece led to one disaster after another: "If you invade, a great nation will fall." Only the oracle didn't say whether it was Greece or Persia. That ambiguity may have been the point. War lays waste great nations--any and all. The most famous of the oracles that led to literal disaster that could have been avoided by the wisdom of honoring the metaphorical was the one that told Laius that he would have a son who would kill his father and marry his mother. Taking it literally, Laius gave his son to another family to raise in a far off region. When Oedipus was grown, he rode off and came to a crossroads. He got in a fight and killed a stranger. This was his father.

And so the chain of events rolled on, the wheel of fate was sealed, set in motion by "reading" life as literal instead of having a symbolic dimension. Notice that where the killing took place was at the crossroads. The crossroads are where Hecate and Hermes were worshipped; their herms were found at every crossroads. The crossroads represents

the place of turning, the intersection of the literal and symbolic. A symbolic "reading" by Laius would have been to see what every wise and loving parent knows: that of course, the son must "slay" the father--metaphorically. The son is the future, the new life that wants to grow and fertilize the soul with vitality, new vision, strength and virility. The father must "die" in the sense of abandoning, killing, his own agenda when that agenda is no longer life-enhancing. The son brings in the new order. Change. Growth. Transformation and creativity. Right order--tao, rta, maat--flows in the direction of new life and insures growth, health, and well-being when death is allowed and nourished as well as life. Death does not have to be a literal ending. Death is healthy. When we encourage our old institutions (and old ways of thinking) to die, we are in fact, cooperating with the deepest, most spiritual impulse of life. When we dishonor it and fear it, it becomes the image of our terror, a monster that follows us, fueled by our fear and loathing, chained to us just like our history is bound to us. In the Phaedo, Plato defines philosophy as "a continual exercise of dying." (Plato quoted in Mead 1965, 182) Love of wisdom--philo-Sophia--is learning how to die.

It is almost as though the Oedipus myth is the cornerstone of Western civilization. We, like Laius, interpret life literally and then go to extreme lengths to avoid our fate. It is the avoidance of fate that brings about literal death and tragedy. To turn our fate from tragedy to joy is to travel the circuit of Sophia, to the underbelly, to the residue, to ride the dragon home. Home is not in nirvana, not in anyplace but right here. Right here is not just an empirical, abstract "here" but a here with holes, a here with an ear, a here with a door into there.

The dilemma for Joseph Campbell, as it is for many thinkers, is how to relate to the world once you have experienced the mythic, the mystical, the unreality of consensus reality. His solution is to bring back to the hard literal world, the magic of the other: "The art required is to make sounds, words, and forms, whether of base or of noble provenance, open out in back, as it were, to eternity, and this requires of the artist that he should himself, in his individual experience, have touched anew that still point in this turning world of which the immemorial mythic forms are the symbols and guarantee." (Campbell 1976, 94)

The crossroads represents the fate of each of us and the fate of the world. We take back the power of the evils that bind us into repetition of our history by relaxing the grip that certain words and beliefs have on us. When a teenager tells his mother, "I hate you. Why don't you let me have the car?", the wise mother does not take this literally. She knows that the word "hate" is not literal but expresses the vehemence of the vital and its need for independence. Just as this "hate" is not real, neither is love necessarily what it seems. The smile and flowery words can hide real hate. Wisdom is to know the difference.

## FREEDOM TO RESPOND

The philosophy of Martin Buber revolves around the idea of turning. For the sensitive, deeply religious Buber, several factors together form the foundation of his spiritual destiny. The first is the primacy of human relationship. The second is the capacity to turn to Other. To recognize Other is to reverse the order of the profane march of events we call life but in fact is a state of sleep and ignorance, in which other people are merely objects. When Other is recognized and relationship is present, dialogue is possible. His book, I and Thou, distinguishes between the Thou which is the encounter with Other as wholly Other and I-It, in which the Other, or you, is merely an object in the self-referential enclosed box of ordinary (un)consciousness. Decision is "the realization on earth of divine freedom and unconditionality. . . . The name of the act of decision in its last intensity is teshuvah, turning. Teshuvah means the caesura of a human life, the renewing revolution in the middle of the course of an existence. When . . . the will awakes to decision, the integument of ordinary life bursts and the primeval force breaks through and storms upward to heaven." (Friedman 1960, 33)

For Buber, the ordinary world of "shoulds and oughts" is conditioned reality and makes people slaves. The unfree person is defined by social conditioning; he or she has no destiny, and lives in "'a mediated world cluttered with purposes.' His life never attains to a meaning, for it is composed of means which are without significance in themselves.

Only I-Thou gives meaning to the world of It, for I-Thou is an end which is not reached in time but is there from the start, . . . The free man's will and the attainment of his goal need not be united by a means, for in I-Thou the means and the end are one." (Friedman 1960, 67) The issue of mediation mentioned in this passage refers to the swamp of "man"-made bridges that intervene between a person and Other, where Other is another person, Nature, God. Sophia as the archetype of relationship becomes evident and actualized when man-made mediation is seen through and not allowed to be the primary determining factor in life. Our vital power has gotten stuck to these thought structures and beliefs--such as exoteric religion--and we then are deprived of the power inherently ours, power to respond, to attend to, to hear--Other.

We have to gather our vital back to ourselves--not to withdraw from the world but to re-enter existence and to reach out and help Other to come into existence. "It is only the free man who really acts in response to concrete external events. It is only he who sees what is new and unique in each situation, whereas the unfree man sees only its resemblance to other things. . . . he responds freely from the depths as a whole and conscious person. The unfree person, on the other hand, is so defined by public opinion, social status, or his neurosis that he does not 'respond' spontaneously and openly to what meets him but only 'reacts.' He does not see others as real persons, unique and of value in themselves, but in terms of their status, their usefulness, or their similarity to other individuals with whom he has had relationships in the past." (Friedman 1960, 67-68)

What does it mean to be free to respond, to be a true friend? Normally, we organize the mixture of other peoples' demands and intrusions according to the boxes we were given by our culture. Here are some examples. A mother here in Ithaca told me that in her native region, industrial northern Germany, children are to be seen and not heard. Her two beautiful, mild-mannered, gentle little girls were giggling on a train in Germany and an older woman became very angry and asked her what kind of a mother was she to allow these girls to make noise? Are we in the United States any more free? I was in a grocery store last year. A young mother wearing a tailored suit was pushing her cart down the aisle. Sitting in the cart was a little girl, about 4 years old who looked to me like she had just dropped from heaven. Her light blond curls fell all over her smiling face.

Like a sweet cherub, she was pointing here and there at the colorful items on the shelf. She was not rambunctious, just delighted, and sometimes she let out a squeal of joy. I was so taken by this child that I stopped my own cart and watched her. She filled me with happiness that moment. Then she began to sing. Her voice sailed above the amplified commercials coming over the loudspeaker. I was entranced. She sung no particular melody, just a melodious trill that turned the warehouse atmosphere into an enchanted garden of delights. Tedium turned to magic. Then it happened. The mother got angry and told the child to shut up. She did. I turned to jelly. My heart raced and my knees felt weak. I felt my face get hot and red. It felt like a kick in the stomach. I knew what I would feel like if I just walked away, angrier by the moment. I would go home and wish I said something. I have been in situations like this before and never said anything. My silence always came back to haunt me.

This time I acted. I waited until my face didn't feel red. I walked over to the mother and apologized for intruding, but I had to tell her how happy her child had made me when she sang and maybe it was okay to let her keep singing, that it bothered no one and in fact, made everything seem special. She was polite but firm, "I'm sorry, but I cannot let her sing because she goes to day care every day and the staff has a rule that the children cannot call out or sing, because the staff will think it is an emergency and it will be hard to control things."

"But she is not in day care now. She is here with you," I answered.

"It doesn't matter. I have to train her so she will do what she is supposed to when she is in day care." I said something about a child's future creativity and intelligence being dependent upon creating environments conducive to self-expression, but she was not interested, only mildly annoyed at the interruption.

The mother is imposing the agenda of the day care on her child such that it will become the definition, the parameters of this child's experience. This is social conditioning (which we all buy into, to some extent or another). This is the evil that Buber talks about, the only real evil there is. The day care agenda is simply a rule that grew beyond all human proportion. It grew so big, reaching far and beyond the building where it lives and the staff that reinforces it. The agenda has reached its tentacles into this

family, choking the creativity, joy, and natural exuberance of this little girl. If she is stubborn, if her vital is stronger and feistier than her need for security and social acceptance, then the conflict between her innate creative intelligence and the imposed agendas of society will lock in battle for her soul. This is the only duality worth worrying about where the stakes are life or death. This is the battle that every person must engage in for the sake of their own survival and that of the planet. The agendas are all over the place; they have a life of their own and seek to live at the expense of our humanity.

I do not want to give the impression that I am usually courageous or even conscious. Again, each of us is a mixed bag, sometimes conscious, mostly on automatic pilot. When my own boys were in need of day care, I visited several centers in the city in which I was living at the time. I was talking to the director when I heard a little girl screaming. I turned and saw a very angry staff person dragging a crying child down the hall by her hand. The adult was yanking her arm, telling her to shut up or else. I did nothing. I was shocked--but it did not register at the time. The event was not available for me to respond to; otherwise I would have confronted the director right then and there and told her that I would never put my children at the mercy of that beast, that she should fire a woman who was so mean to the children entrusted to her care. As it was, the director ignored it and I turned red and said nothing, but got out of there as quickly as I could. I never said anything and to this day, that is on my conscience, because how many more children did this angry ignorant woman emotionally abuse? So now I try to be more in the moment, to be aware of my feelings when they arise, to speak from these feelings--in the moment.

Another example: A friend of mine, Amy, was pregnant with her second child and was about to buy a female Newfoundland dog with the money from her last paycheck before she took maternity leave. She had fallen in love with these huge furry friendly creatures. She and her husband had gone to visit an acquaintance who was a highly respected veterinarian. Although it was her desire and decision to get a dog and her husband had agreed, too, the veterinarian could not hear this. He ignored the woman and directed his attention only to the husband, asking him what kind of dog did he have in mind, and how did he feel about such and such kind of dog. It was as though the woman

was not present in the room. Man-to-man was the only reality. The full import of the conversation and her exclusion did not register with Amy until later. According to Buber, she was the victim of an I-It. She was an object that did not exist in the veterinarian's all-male universe.

Another female friend had a similar experience. She said that before she married her second husband, she was a nobody to her male co-workers; they hardly acknowledged her. When she married and introduced her husband to her co-workers, they were immediately impressed because the new husband was a lawyer; that made her rise in status. Now she has entered the universe of acceptable people, who are admitted according to their social, professional, or economic status.

A final story about my teacher and father-in-law. Anthony was a person who was present in the moment. He was what Buber would call a person who had turned his being to spirit. Anyway, he and Paul and I were going to the Chinese restaurant on State Street in Ithaca. It was a typical Ithaca winter evening: cold, rainy, miserable. Anthony was discussing something. I was hungry, paying attention to nothing except imagining what I was going to order for dinner. Suddenly, a very drunk man stumbled and lurched right in front of me. Before I even registered the event, Anthony had jumped in front of me. He grabbed the man, pulled him up, dusted off his coat. Smiling, he straightened the drunk's crumpled hat and bid him good evening. Then he resumed our conversation. It all happened so quickly. It began and ended in a moment, yet I was only dimly aware of what transpired. But Anthony was truly there to that man. Anthony was present in the moment. His vital soul was not clinging to an agenda, therefore he was free to respond with compassion.

## BECOMING AWARE OF OUR OWN EXILE

Each of us participates in a Sophianic journey when we become aware of our own exile. Exile may happen when terrible pain, illness, or death throws us out of the ordinary world. Often, our inner suffering is not welcome in the world. A person experiences a

kind of zone of silence that is imposed by others to create a safe distance. The person feels a pressure to keep quiet, so she has to live in a world split between the inner pain and the routine world where only certain topics are welcome.

Often we are in situations that violate our integrity, which make us aware of dishonesty, posturing, inhuman treatment of others. We want to understand why there is pressure on us to conform to a code of silence regarding certain injustices. Each of us sooner or later feels the pressure to go along with the status quo, even when the status quo denies soul and its demand for honesty and justice.

To notice this pressure is the first step. Then we have to choose to separate from it. To watch what happens next begins the exciting adventure of Sophia's path. Everything slowly begins to change right before our eyes. Like a fault-line during an earthquake, the earth begins to shift and tremble, and then to split before our eyes. It is a terrifying path, Sophia's, but the only one which radically alters the landscape of hopelessness. The not-so-simple act of separating out from the pressure to conform to soulless situations reverses the worlds. The inner comes up and the outer begins to lose its grip upon our destiny. We are suddenly in a world of shamans and magic. We are swimming with raw power, suddenly released by a shift of attention.

To turn the dragon's wrath into your own power to use for the good of the community traditionally falls upon the shaman or yogi. The person who sees carries the responsibility to insure the survival of humanity--wherever the situation occurs. The individual in touch with her own genius, her own clear perception, can turn the fate of humanity from extinction to health. This is done through vision and self-expression. We think that it is only "action" which can change the world. But what is action without wisdom to know what to do? Much of our action ends up reinforcing or strengthening the very habits we are trying to change.

## GENIUS AND FRIENDSHIP

For the early Romans, as for many other cultures, freedom was the concern of the genius. Slavery was the condition of the repression of the vital, the silencing of the genius. Liber, freedom, is related to the same word as the generative soul, the genius. Liber also means to pour liquid, wine, and was associated with Dionysus, he who loosens the binding. The Anglo-Saxon word freo means not only "free" and "noble" but having desire, joy, for it is related to freon, to love and the word friend, (German Freund ) and Frig, the goddess of sexual desire, love, and fertility. (Onians 1987, 474-5)

The way to effect Sophia's return is to inquire beyond the literal, to have the courage to suspend the agenda and seek the authentically human. Inquiry frees the genius. Our task is to liberate our vital soul from agendas that have become inhuman, that no longer serve new life. We have all been in situations where someone is ridiculed or put down because of their enthusiasm, their independence, their unique perspective. It might be in a business or academic setting. You know the feeling: someone is scorned and the room falls quiet. Seldom does anyone go to the defense of the victim. Why? Because they don't want to join the victim. They remain behind the safety curtain of silence. And so, every person's genius suffers. The crossroads is arrived at in every single situation that puts one person or group outside. Outside--the land of exile--is created day after day in every situation we find ourselves in.

Example: I heard about this incident from a person attending a critical thinking workshop. A young man from Florida was delivering an enthusiastic presentation to a group of about 15 people. He was passionate about his topic and the audience was interested and sympathetic. During the question period, an older man ridiculed the speaker by saying "Oh, come on, you can't really believe that. What would your mother say if she knew you said that?" The tone of voice was not friendly or joking, but dripping with sarcasm and derision. The room got suddenly dead quiet and cold. The speaker was visibly shaken at this unexpected attack out of nowhere. Of course, when you are not prepared for attack, you cannot answer, because there is no rational thing you can say to an irrational assault. The speaker was humiliated; no one said a word. The workshop ended on this sour note. The presenter later told my friend that he would never, never return to this university under any circumstances.

This scenario could have been turned. If anyone in the audience had the courage to express their own genius, their own vital, the assault could have been turned back upon the aggressor. Many good-hearted people believe that love and compassion are the only way to deal with a situation. Too often, however, these are words that can be used to remain uninvolved. The belief that one is compassionate can actually serve denial, shadow projection, and scapegoating. For real compassion and love to be released, there has to be clear perception and true speech that expresses it.

The comment turned an "ordinary" situation into a crisis of fate. Every person there was implicated in the crime against the vital. Every person there had a chance to redeem the exiled genius, the vital that is the only source of our intelligence, creativity, individuality, and power. The older man is the one in crisis. He precipitates a crisis-in-kind for everyone else present. He is hungry not for the blood of the younger man but for his own missing vital he sold into slavery. He is reminded of it by the younger man's enthusiasm so he cries out in anguish, attacking what reminds him of his lost soul.

The effect of bringing up and expressing the underbelly has a powerful effect upon the world, for it tends to "stop" business as usual, interrupting the unconscious perpetuation of the status quo. Here is an example of how one woman "stopped" the passive-aggressive cruelty of her family: "Joan" is 30 years old, unmarried and overweight. She has struggled to come to terms with her mother's death and feelings of worthlessness and abandonment in years of therapy. Recently, she attended a family reunion. Her grandfather said to her, "Last time I saw you, Joan, you were a loser. Glad to see you're making something of yourself." Joan cried for hours. The last time she had seen her grandfather was when she was only 12. Now, we are taught in our Christian Bible classes to turn the other cheek, to forgive those who harm us. New Age gurus babble on about unconditional love. Sophia's path, on the other hand, urges us to acknowledge our betrayal and honor our rage; for indeed, something of infinite worth has been trashed by cruelty and thoughtlessness. The comment turned Joan to trash. But instead of internalizing it, she waited a day, and when another opportunity presented itself, she turned to her grandfather and said, "It's not me you hate. It's yourself." There was dead silence in the room full of relatives. The effect was like a bomb going off; but

in this case, what was destroyed was the family's dysfunctional denial of its own shadow that allowed for emotional abuse of its members. The grandfather, after stunned silence, broke down crying. So did his wife. The entire situation was rearranged, all because Joan had the courage to return the evil back to its source--by speaking from her rage and pain.

Anger and rage can be the only message that we get that our humanity has been violated. Truth and action may be necessary in order to release the possibility of compassion. If Joan had yoked herself to some misconception about compassion--"Oh, they don't know what they are doing. I will forgive them"--she would have missed the opportunity to lance the boil of cruelty that hog-tied her family in dysfunctional behavior. Compassion is released only when the truth of what is trashed expresses itself and is heard and received.

Truth before love: truth releases compassion. Only then can love and authentic humanity enter. Truth--seeing and saying it--turns a vicious situation around. The young man who was attacked in the conference might have replied: "I see you have resentment towards me. What provoked you? Can you talk it about it?" Such situations are redeemed best, however, by people in the audience who rescue the attacked person.

Each person is responsible for the safety and well-being of the genius whether it is attacked in herself or another. The wounded one is under attack and is emotionally felled; she or he deserves to be defended by the others who are present. Every situation like this is a crisis of freedom, an opportunity to free the genius--of everyone present--from its slavery and exile. By our silence we re-create the coffins that we construct for ourselves. We need to realize that every person who is scapegoated and not rescued precipitates a crisis for every single person who knows of the situation.

He who really knows how far our generation has lost the way of true freedom, of free giving between I and Thou, must him[her]self, by virtue of the demand implicit in every great knowledge of this kind, practice directness--even if s/he were the only person who did it--and not depart from it until scoffers are struck with fear, and hear in his voice the voice of their own suppressed longing. (Buber 1988, 69)

We have come full circle. The friend is the genius. The friend is what frees us. Sophia's circuit is the restoration of the voice of the human releasing the binding that keeps us in chains.

Sophia is within us as the power to change the world, to restore soul to the barren world of competition and consumerism maintained by a code of silence that protects the status quo. We turn around and claim the enormous power that belongs to us as strangers, by speaking from the place of exile--home of Sophia. Then we become capable of breaking the silence that protects the world from an encounter with soul. We voice the integrity within; our voice is the bridge across which Sophia moves to return to the world.

# EPILOGUE

## IMAGE AND INQUIRY

Sophia considered as an archetype of wisdom is a personification of an aspect of psyche. A personification is like a constellation. A constellation in the night sky is a cluster of stars that take on the appearance of a familiar animal or object. Sophia is like this familiar form that unifies a cluster of thoughts--i.e., interpretations, ideas, attitudes, and beliefs--which together form a more or less coherent and consistent meaning. This meaning was identified, shared, and named by civilizations in their spiritual or philosophical traditions in remote antiquity around the world and throughout history.

People like to give names to some clusters of thoughts because these beliefs seem to be true as well as alive. Making the image a "person" brings the meaning up close, in a non-abstract, vital way. People then feel comfortable expressing their attitudes and thoughts about life and death by means of such named images. Why? Because they are suitable containers, filled up with our hopes, expectations, and needs. These named images are "persons" because they evoke feelings of aliveness, of love, inspiration, and the capacity to organize the mixed bag that life is. They seem to lead us somewhere--into states of altered consciousness, into understanding, inspiration, healing or whatever. Sophia is such a "person."

What are other persons, named images, used in our culture to unify feelings and thoughts about life and death? God is the C.E.O. of images in western civilization. God is an image that was named (and also intentionally not named) by our ancestors in the ancient Near East. God is the unified form that expresses a cluster of beliefs and attitudes about life and death, an image fueled and sustained by billions of people, the focal point around which religions are shaped. Before the Christian era, the Olympian gods and goddesses were images that constellated the feelings and attitudes of the early Greeks. The multiplicity of images in polytheism provides a richly textured variety that reflects the diversity of human response to the unknown mystery of life, a variety which includes the feminine.

The constellation that Sophia represents is the capacity of the mind to penetrate through the images it creates. This penetration involves activation of thinking, what I will call inquiry. When inquiry begins, we notice that we have questions and wonder--about everything. This inquiry begins a journey in which circulation begins. As we begin to question, we feel ourselves begin to move. With this movement we feel resistance from others. We begin to notice hostility to our questioning. And so the adventure begins. This adventure culminates in moving, in a circuit, or spiral which has the effect of radically altering the landscape of the ordinary. This adventure is the only way that power can be effectively unleashed and used by the individual for the restoration of authentic community and the healthy transformation of society--one which fosters health and nourishes the fulfillment of individual potential.

The path of inquiry is an ancient and venerable path, one which has a history in the East and in ancient Greece. I think that Sophia is the image that reveals and expresses the power of thought to create, preserve, and destroy itself. When inquiry leads thinking through this process of creation and destruction, we are on a Sophianic journey. In other words, when thinking really does its thing: when it fails to be caught and trapped by dogma and unexamined cultural assumptions, it moves and this movement is "caught"--reflected in or expressed by this image historically known as Sophia.

For Sophia herself is but an image produced by psyche, by the human mind. She is the image of the image itself. She is the image that reveals the knowledge of how the mind creates these named persons or images. Sophia leads us to the ultimate scandal, the final tabu of Western civilization: the knowledge of the secret name of God.

Through us, she speaks the secret name of God not to usurp "his" power or rule in his place, but for the sake of clear perception, for the sake of the knowledge that will free us from slavery to the causes of our personal and social misery. She offers us protection and guidance in the path of gentle unraveling that leads the soul to the shocking and liberating freedom from its own constructions, including its idea of "God" or divinity. She holds us close, wrapped in her exquisite veil, the final comfort, the last womb of darkness before we are born again. This second birth is not into another belief system, not into another image, but a springing to life and liberty, the place of freedom: in the

knowledge and possession of the power of our own mind, using thinking to create, to lead, to construct--and then to dissolve our constructions. Inquiry frees us to experience the Mystery, the divinity perhaps of the God that is NOT the same as our belief about it, not the same as the image we have of it. We will not be able to experience or even relate to the Mystery of life unless we can free thinking, free the psyche or mind, from its slavery to belief and image.

The second coming is our humanity: Sophia in us, through us. Out of the alchemy by which we participate in creating and dissolving thought structures, our humanity is born. We redeem the redeemer by freeing the Voice of humanity. born of the union of our vital soul and the culture, the strong one--Sophia--gives birth to the strong one--the Christ in hell rises from the dead. The divine is restored to its human source: its primal power and majesty revealed in history. The secret name of God is spoken: Humanity.

Kathleen Damiani

## ILLUSTRATIONS

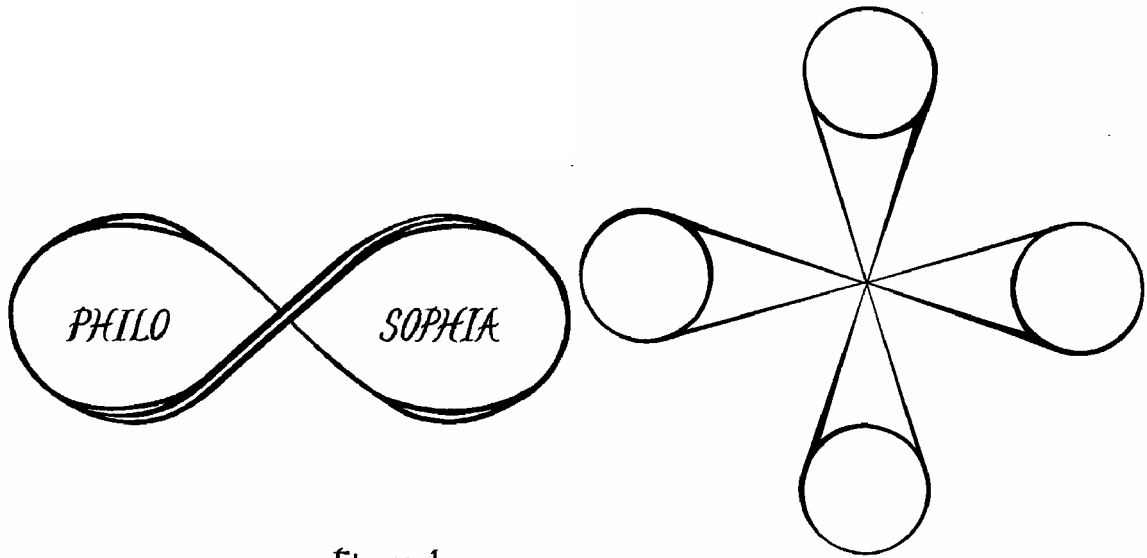


Figure 1  
Glyph of Sophia  
(Circuit of Sophia)

Figure 2  
World Symbol

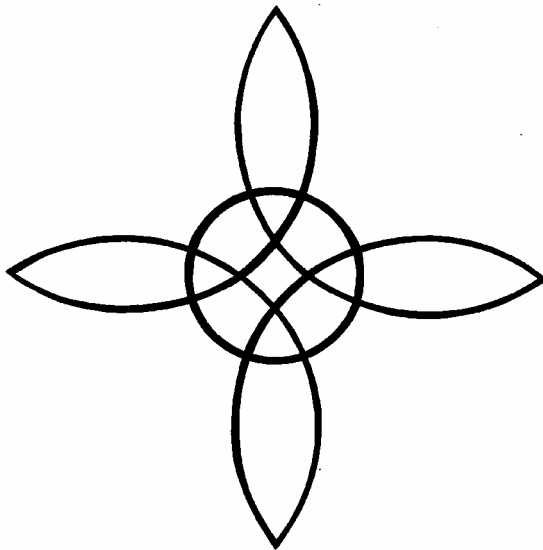


Figure 3  
Witches' Knot

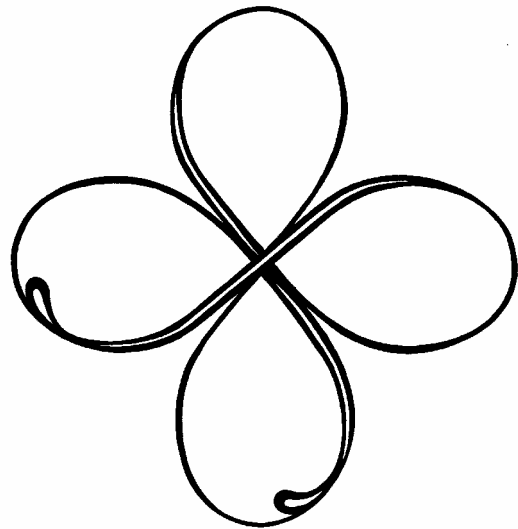


Figure 4  
Circulating Cross

*Illustrations courtesy of Rosemarie G. Quebral*

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