

Mythology Part I

The Night Journey of the Soul.

In the universal myth of the descent into the underworld the hero finds himself an explorer in the province of death itself. This is the continuance of the scapegoat process, in which the hero, as man's agent, faces in depth what man himself so fears. The hero is our hope of overcoming death and understanding its meaning. The specific purpose of the voyage is usually to retrieve a loved one, (e.g. Orpheus and Eurydice) to attain knowledge of personal or racial destiny, (e.g. Aeneas) or simply to complete a great task. Whatever the reason, the myth involves the hero's suffering or witnessing the actual torments of the underworld before defeating death definitely in rebirth or resurrection. Usually the quest is successful, although in the Orpheus tradition the loved one is retrieved only to be lost again. *he loses sight but finds himself*

Much of the underworld myth's meaning lies in the fact of the hero's return to inner earth - to the natural mother. (Mother Earth) This is the stage of the germinating seed; the hero must spend the allotted time in the world womb before he can be born again in his role as divine hero who has truly broken through the local and material barriers of human life to become the Son of Man. The descent into the underworld is a rite of passage carrying the hero and man past the monster guardians of the higher truth which the underworld contains. As the voyager enters Death's Kingdom, he leaves temporal and physical things behind, and he emerges later as literally a new being.

The psychological reality behind this and all mythological processes is the process of self-realization. The voyage to the underworld is the "right journey" or "dark night of the soul" - the second and final stage meditation. It is the crucial stage of self-exploration in the face of a life already lived. The hero is the archetype of the self, and, as Jung wrote, "the archetype of the self has, functionally, the significance of a ruler of the inner world, i.e. of the collective unconscious."<sup>1</sup> Thus Inanna, "goddess of light and love and life," must confront in the nether world her sister Ereshkigal, "goddess of darkness and gloom and death" - the dark side of her own self. And Jesus descends to conquer Hell and to retrieve the other side of himself. For Christ and Adam are theologically and psychologically parts of the same being: Christ as Son of Man as redeemer of Adam's sin, is the New Adam.

This sense of recognizing and retrieving the various parts of the self - the evil and the good, the flesh and the spirit, the light and the dark - is at the very essence of the underworld.

1. Carl Gustav Jung: Symbols of Transformation - p. 368

myth. A comment by writer Alan Watts will help to clarify this point.

-----the descent into the depths is almost invariably one of the great tasks of "the hero with a thousand faces," of the Christ in his many forms. Hades or Hell may here be understood as the Valley of the Shadow, the experience of impotence and despair in which "I" die and Christ comes to life. The descent is likewise a figure of the descent of consciousness into the unconscious, of the necessity of knowing one's very depths. For so long as the unconscious remains unexplored it is possible to retain the naive feeling of the insularity and separateness of the conscious ego. Its actions are still taken to be free and spontaneous movements of the "will", and it can congratulate itself upon having motivations which are purely "good," unaware of the "dark" and hidden forces of conditioning which actually guide them.<sup>2</sup>

Full self-realization demands that we move beyond traditional ideas of good and evil to an acknowledgment and understanding of ourselves as both Adam and Christ, Inanna and Erishkigal. The descent into the underworld is a pilgrimage which the true hero cannot avoid, for only after the pilgrimage can the new complete self be born in the act of rebirth.

2. Alan Watts, Myth and Ritual in Christianity, p. 163

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tauric -- animal like bestial

no one likes to know what negative things they're capable