

Symbols of the Soul: 1 - The soul as a centre

Chapter 10 of Mysteries and Symbols of the Soul

Man is like a little biochemical robot that has a very short life on a little planet of a medium-sized star on the edge of the galaxy in a corner of the infinite universe, which came into being some fourteen billion years ago and will one day disappear again. This brief summary expresses the approximate well-accepted view of most natural scientists about humanity and the world. And that vision is supported by a large part of the world population. This view is understandable, as we cannot simply reject the conclusions of numerous scientific studies.

The enormous progress that natural and technological sciences have made over the past centuries have yielded great achievements for humanity, for which we can be extremely grateful. Nevertheless many people experience resistance with regard to the materialistic view of humanity and the world presented to us by the natural sciences. That is also understandable for, according to spiritual traditions, all of us possess the inner knowledge that life is meaningful and that there are hidden reasons why we live on Mother Earth as thinking, feeling and acting beings.

Meaning of life

The meaning of life is not, by definition, covered by the natural sciences. As far as giving meaning to life is concerned, we may encounter what we could call the science of the soul, for the search for meaning is inherent in being human; it is a quality of the human soul. It is fortunate that it is so, for if we do not give meaning to our lives, we experience little or no inspiration at all and depression will be looming, with its corresponding downheartedness and consequences. By giving meaning to our lives, we can slowly but surely discover our vocation as a human being, and follow it.

If we confine our sense of meaning exclusively to 'leading a nice life' and 'having possessions', our soul will fall asleep and we will focus only on the material world and its astral counterpart, which will never be able to give us overall fulfilment. An unsatisfied desire will remain, one that drives us towards more, prettier, better, and so forth. Every time when, after intense endeavour, we receive what we desired, again and again it will become clear: the thrill is only in the chase.

The science of nature, in the broadest sense, is by definition limited to perceivable things, with the senses or their extensions. According to the science of the soul, the sensory perceptible world is only one out of many dimensions that man can experience, and not by far the most important. After all, everything in the sensory world, is constantly subject to construction and breakdown, nothing is permanent. Natural sciences, restricted to knowledge of ever changing objects, will never identify the essence. The science of the soul concerns the living experience of the essence consciousness' contents.

It is wrong to think that sensory perception is the only form of reliable knowledge. For starters, a person wanting to conduct natural-scientific research in a responsible way, must follow a training course that lasts for years. Similarly, a person wanting to experience the dimensions of human consciousness that reach out beyond time and space, will have to practice too. Then, it will become clear that inner experiences can be reduced to universal structures, comparable to formulas that describe natural laws.

The sun and the earth

If our image of mankind and our worldview are based exclusively on what we perceive with our senses, we can make considerable mistakes. For thousands of years, man thought that the sun revolved around the earth, because this complies with what we see. The Polish priest and astronomer Nicolas Copernicus (1473-1543) studied the starry sky in the evening and at night with the bare eye, without a telescope, from an elevated terrace at his home in a fortification wall near the cathedral in the Polish town of Frauen- berg. Based on his perceptions from that observatory, he proved that the sun does not revolve around the earth, but that the earth revolves around the sun.

Copernicus wrote his discoveries down in a book, but waited years before publishing it, because he knew that people would laugh at him because of his new ideas, that they would tell him that he had lost his wits and possibly prosecute him for his heretical views. After his death, it took 150 years before the authorities acknowledged that Copernicus was right. The geocentric approach, in which the earth was considered to be the centre, had to be replaced by heliocentric approach, in which the sun is the centre.

In the science of the soul, the earth is a symbol for the personality of man and the sun is a symbol for the soul. If you want to embark on a spiritual path, your personality, with its many sub-personalities, should not be put at the centre – the earth – instead, it should be the soul, symbolised by the sun. This will irrevocably lead to a reversal in your life, a transition from a geocentric to a heliocentric starting point. As a result, you will experience life in quite a different way and you will change fundamentally. The spiritual sun will gradually shine in and through you, more and more.

Indeed, if you identify with your physical body, you are a biochemical robot in the periphery of the universe. On the other hand, if you experience yourself as pure consciousness, through which all kinds of conscience contents flow in and out, you are the centre of the universe. The centre of the universe is, to the soul consciousness, exactly the place where you are now. It is not a geographical centre, but a symbolic centre, outside time and space, a centre that is everywhere.

The world of the soul

According to several spiritual traditions, the sensory perceptible world is one of the many shadows of a much greater, deeper, higher, more radiant and more realistic world: the world of the soul. From that view we can consider everything that is manifest in our outside world or in our consciousness, as symbolic representations of the domain of the soul. In the best case it concerns concrete manifestations that arise from the domain that the Greek philosopher Plato (427-347 b.c.) called the world of ideas and the philosopher Henry Corbin (1903-1978) the imaginal world or mundus imaginalis. It is the divine astral world of the concrete archetypes that we can contact through mythical stories, holy texts, universal symbols and, of course, life on earth itself.

In the world we live in we can experience beauty, love and joy. But if we look at the world news or our own experiences, we instantly know that there is also a terrible lot of suffering, misery and horror. According to the science of the soul all this hardship comes from the polluted astral sphere that man is consubstantial with as he was born from it, grew up in it and breathes in it.

Greek mythology refers to the polluted astral sphere as the underworld, as Hades. Christianity has the notion of hell, elaborated (upon) in detail in for instance the epic 'The divine comedy', by Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) and in the paintings by Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516). We readily associate the words hell and heaven with areas, but it may be more accurate to relate to them as a state of consciousness, ranging from very low, dark and grim to very high, light and joyful.

In their masterpieces, Dante and Hieronymus Bosch, show us that man can be delivered from evil, that he can make an inner journey to the lost paradise. And that is also the joyful message that is conveyed in all world religions. The Chinese sage Lao Tzu, for instance, wrote about life from Tao. Buddha spoke about entering nirwana – a state of being beyond our imagination – and Jesus encourages his followers to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, the lost paternal home.

How did this polluted astral sphere in which humanity is captured, come into being? We can read about it in the downfall of the rebellious angels (Revelations 12) and the fall of man (Genesis 3). Of course, these are, mythical stories, providing favourite themes for artists, but that does not alter the fact that the deep truths of those myths can be very intensely experienced. The German protestant shoemaker Jacob Boehme (1575-1824) has written a lot on this subject in a visionary way, based on personal mystical experiences.

Visionary shoemaker

In the year 1600, Jacob Boehme had an overwhelming mystical experience, while he was watching several pewter dishes on a scaffold. In an inner vision, he saw how heaven, earth and mankind came into being, how evil entered the universe and how it could be eliminated. He was seized by the spiritual light several times later on in life, similarly.

The visionary shoemaker from Goerlitz found it extremely difficult to express his experiences and insights in words, but still he bequeathed extensive and impressive works that have inspired many great thinkers: no less than thirty books and over a hundred epistles. Boehme experienced much resistance in his life, because people considered his teachings as heresy, among other things. Personally, he thought this opposition to be necessary to strengthen the inner man. In one of his works he wrote: 'To me, the sun was often obscured, but it always came out for me again. The more often it sank, the brighter and more radiant it rose again.'

If we look at the soul as a centre, we cannot neglect the symbol of the sun. The physical sun, the gigantic fusion power station at a distance of around 92,900,000 miles away from earth, is a manifestation of the archetypical sun, the spiritual sun. Life, warmth and light radiate from that ultimate source – aspects referred to in Christianity as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The centre is everywhere

The sun is strikingly displayed in both astrology and astronomy, as a symbolic circle with a central point in it. It is a two-dimensional, static representation of a multi-dimensional, dynamic whole. Light radiates in every direction from a central point. Sunlight is a gift and man may receive it. Reading or hearing that the sun was worshipped and adored in ancient cultures, you may associate this with primitiveness and idolatry. Naturally it did have these aspects too, but most of the time it was rooted in a deep inner knowledge.

For instance, the hymn to the sun of Pharaoh Echnaton, can be recognised as a very pure prayer. It can be recognised as a holy text that is indeed about the physical sun, but it can also be used to tune in to the spiritual sun. The sun is approximately 109 times bigger in diameter than Earth is, and its mass is 300,000 times as large. If you let yourself be guided by the voice of the soul, you will surrender to the spiritual Sun, an energy source that is much bigger and more powerful than yourself. This source is aware of what is good for you and for the greater whole, more so than you could ever fathom.

It is possible to imagine the spiritual Sun as a sphere, with an omnipresent centre of which is everywhere and a nonexistent circumference. Obviously, this is hard to comprehend with your conventional mind. The spiritual Sun is everywhere, also in you, and its focal point can be spatially defined. It is in your heart, the centre of the human system that you live in, the microcosm, which reflects the macrocosm.

The mystical heart

The heart is a mystery. It beats roughly a hundred thousand times a day. That comes down to forty million heartbeats a year and almost three billion heartbeats in a human life span of seventy years. We humans are able to hear our heart beating, continuously. This is so with other organs. The heart has its own rhythm, one we are able to feel not only at the pulse, but throughout our body. We are only able to feel other organs when something is wrong, such as a physical discomfort or illness.

In the human embryo the heart has already been formed around the twenty-fifth day after conception. Then, the heart starts beating already. The heart is the most powerful muscle of the human body. Contrary to all other muscles, the muscle tissue does not age. In a continuous rhythm of contracting and relaxing, the heart permeates man with energy, throughout his entire life. That rhythm is subject to change as a result of fear or other emotions, such as physical exertion, meditation and sleep. All the cells in the human body – around 75 trillion – bathe, as it were, in the energy of the heart.

Scientific research has shown that the human heart generates the strongest electric and magnetic fields in the body. The brain also generates electric and magnetic fields, but these are much weaker than the ones emanating from the heart. The electric field of the heart is approximately 100,000 times stronger than the one emanating from the brain. And the magnetic field of the heart centre is about 5,000 times stronger than that of the brain.

Natural science demonstrates that if we change the electric and magnetic fields around molecules, atomic changes will occur, which allows other processes to take place. In the new activity of the human heart lies the key to fundamental renewal of humanity and the world. This renewal originates from the flashes of the spirit-spark near the heart, near the top of the right ventricle, to be exact. As the name suggests already, it concerns a spiritual principle.

Heart surgeons cannot see this mystical or sacred heart with the bare eye or with microscopes, but some people in whom the soul has awakened, are able to experience it. It is referred to with all kinds of terms, which are only symbolic, like: divine spark, primordial atom, pearl, grain, rose, lily and jewel in the lotus.

Purification

When a person has become receptive to the omnipresent spiritual light, the spirit-spark is able to ignite and start off a process of purification, a cleansing of the heart sanctuary. This process is symbolically reflected in the myth of the fifth labour of Hercules, or Heracles. This Greek hero receives the seemingly impossible assignment to remove, in one day, the thick layers of manure of thousands of cattle from the stables of King Augeas. Still, he succeeds. How? By re-routing water flow of two nearby rivers. First, through the stables and subsequently back to the former riverbeds, and thus Hercules fulfils this gigantic labour in only one day.

If a person allows the living water or spiritual energies to access his life, his heart sanctuary will be purified and he will be gradually liberated from the passions that have been summarised in the seven deadly sins: pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath and sloth. Then, the foundation for further renewal has been laid.

In one of his writings, Jacob Boehme compares the inner spiritual transformation with turning man inside out. In the original man, the earthly or material aspect resides in Adam, the man of light. Because he eats from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he must leave paradise and is turned inside out, as it were: the earthly aspect becomes the outside with the light captured within.

Now the issue is whether man, on the basis of the awakened spirit-spark in the centre of the microcosm, will cooperate in a process of being symbolically turned inside out again, thus liberating the light and enabling the original man of light to shine in full glory again.