

Mysteries of the Soul

Reflection 4 - Development in the four worlds

Spiritual text: *Hymn of the Pearl*

You are the son of the king from the '*Hymn of the Pearl*', and you have travelled to Egypt. More precisely: the human system in which you are momentarily living has descended from a heavenly realm down to the world of sensory perception and has made a connection with what you now experience as your physical body, referred to in the mythical story as the dress of the Egyptians.

The major question now is whether you will wake up because of the letter of invitation that you have received from higher regions. Can you accept the inner assignment to seize the pearl and return it to the ones from whom you originated: your royal parents in the land of the East – the realm of the sunrise?

It only makes sense to procure the pearl and start the journey to heaven if it is in compliance with your inner being, if it resonates with what is written in your heart. If you do undertake this pilgrimage – for which you will certainly receive help from the heavenly realms – the reward will exceed all your expectations.

Before we take a closer look at the hidden gnostic wisdom in the '*Hymn of the Pearl*', we first wish to emphasise that symbolism can always be understood in several ways. In addition, far from all of the interpretations are correct, that is to say, in accordance with authentic spiritual traditions. Furthermore we advise you not to immediately analyse myths. It is better to think them through thoroughly first, for then there will be a living experience of them and no separation between object and subject, between the story and the person who wants to interpret it. If you start by reading the holy texts attentively or listening to them with your heart, the work will be done by the undivided consciousness of the soul. On the contrary, if you listen or read with your head because you want to unveil the symbolic images, the result will be the work of the objectified consciousness of the earthly personality-soul, and you will lack inner enlightenment from the world of experience of the soul.

The prodigal son

The theme of the '*Hymn of the Pearl*' may seem familiar to you. It is much like the famous parable of the prodigal son, which is much shorter than the '*Hymn of the Pearl*' and is described in the Bible in Luke 15. There is also a similarity to the even shorter parable from Matthew 13:45-46, that consists of the following two sentences:

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls: and having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.'

What does the pearl represent? Most classical holy scriptures do not answer this question directly because the answer belonged to the inner teachings that were passed on orally and not written down. The pearl means the same thing as what other traditions refer to as the divine spark, the spirit-spark, the primordial atom, the rose or the lotus. This element is the high-energy spiritual core of the human system, of the microcosm. It contains the personal blueprint of an individualised soul that is able to evolve. The original human microcosm has

the same internal structure as does the cosmos. It is spiritual by nature and was created to cooperate in the execution of the divine plan of creation.

We could say that it is the task of the human microcosm to absorb divine energies, to transform them internally and subsequently radiate them outward again. That is the essence of creation. In a symbolic sense we may see this process of creation as breathing in, a transformation and then breathing out. These processes are made possible by virtue of the soul of the microcosm, in which three aspects can be distinguished: spirit-soul, soul and personality-soul. If the soul has been individualised, then creation can take place in a better, greater and more glorious way; comparable to the way that a grown-up, through knowledge, experience and power, is more able to create something useful and beautiful than is a child. The Hymn of the Pearl can be seen as a symbolic representation of the journey of the microcosm through countless states of existence and incarnations in order to gain much experience and thus be more suitable to cooperate in the divine plan.

If the son of a king is a young human microcosm, naturally the same goes for his brother who stays home with his royal parents. What do we imagine that the royal parents represent? They have conceived this heavenly being. If we compare the 'Hymn of the Pearl' to the creation myth from the Bible (Genesis 1), the obvious view is to regard the king and the queen of the East as God, whom the Hebrew text refers to as Elohim (plural). In the Kabbalah the Elohim are seen as creative spirits who are members of a hierarchy of hosts of angels, and thus are not the highest deity. In order to give human microcosms the opportunity to develop themselves more splendidly, the plan of creation includes the possibility for them to follow a long path of experience, first of all descending from the heavenly realms to the earth and then rising from there to the heavenly realms following their numerous experiences. Involution and evolution In esoteric philosophy these processes of descending and ascending are called involution and evolution and for the most part take place outside time and space. 'Involution' means immersion in both subtle and coarse matter; and 'evolution', in this view, has to do with self-liberation from both coarse and subtle matter.

Therefore the word 'evolution' is used here in quite another sense than in the 'scientific' theory of evolution for which Charles Darwin provided the basis, which is limited to the biological aspect of organisms. By descent, or 'involution', we mean a decrease in frequency and taking on forms of a more material nature. And by ascent, or 'evolution', we mean taking leave of material forms based on a growing consciousness, thereby increasing in frequency. Involution is a more or less automatic process for a person. The evolution to which we refer, requires a conscious effort from an individual. As a comparison: one can slide down a long slide virtually unconsciously, but climbing the same slide can only be done with a strong body, concentrated attention and a considerable physical effort.

The fourfold earthly personality has come into being during the descent through four realms. The personality as we now know it from our experience of ourselves and of our fellow human beings has a physical body, an etheric body, an astral body and a mental body. This involution, this descent through areas with an ever-lower frequency, is guided by angels, as symbolized by the two guardians in the 'Hymn of the Pearl'. The four areas that the young prince traverses can be identified by the valuables that he receives from his parents for the journey: gold, silver, rubies and agates. He also receives a diamond, with which he can crush iron. That is what Ashtavakra calls 'the sword of consciousness'.

Before the prince descends, he has to leave behind two garments: the shining garment and the golden robe ('the glittering robe and the toga'). These garments represent the original soul and the original spirit-soul. They are of no use to him on his descent as his earthly personality-soul must be developed first. When a stable fourfold personality-soul has been constructed and the spirit-spark is awakened – i.e. when the pearl has been captured – this mortal personality-soul can then first work on the development of an immortal individualised soul and, subsequently, on an immortal individualised spirit-soul.



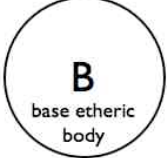




Worlds of experience

How can we depict the four worlds through which the prince has to descend in order to fetch the pearl? Here the Kabbalah can be helpful. Four manifested worlds of experience are distinguished in the tradition of the Kabbalah, and we can combine their descriptions with information about the descent and the ascent in the 'Hymn of the Pearl'. From top to bottom it concerns the following four manifested world of experience and correspondences, consecutively:

1. Atziluth, the spiritual world of emanation, gold, Maishan,
the eagle
2. Briah, the mental world of abstract archetypes, silver, Babylon,
humanity
3. Yetzirah, the astral world of concrete archetypes, rubies, Sarburg,
the lion
4. Assiah: the sensory material world of action, agates, Egypt,
the bull

After the unconscious 'descent' through these four worlds, the conscious 'ascent' through the astral world, the mental world and the spiritual world will follow. Esoteric philosophers such as Helena Blavatsky, Rudolf Steiner and Max Heindel depicted this involution and evolution as a process of development through seven spheres, much as shown in image 4.

image 4: the development of an individualised personality-soul in the hymn of the pearl

1. Atziluth the spiritual world gold Maishan eagle			
2. Briah the mentale world silver Babylon man			
3. Yetzirah the astral world rubies Sarbug lion			
4. Assiah de sensory world agates Egypt bull			

Their vision of the descent – of involution – which they derived from classical holy texts and personal research – accords with the descent as described poetically in the ‘Hymn of the Pearl’:

‘I quitted the East and went down, there being two guardians, for the way was dangerous and difficult, and I was very young to travel it. I passed through the borders of Maishan, the meeting-place of the merchants of the East, and I reached the land of Babel, and I entered the walls of Sarbug. I went down into Egypt, and my companions parted from me. I went straight to the serpent, I dwelt in his abode, waiting till he should lumber and sleep, and I could take my pearl from him. And when I was single and alone and became strange to my family, one of my race, a free-born man, and Oriental, I saw there, a youth fair and loveable, the son of oil-sellers; and he came and attached himself to me, and I made him my intimate friend, and associate with whom I shared my merchandise. I warned him against the Egyptians, and against consorting with the unclean; and I dressed in their dress, that they might not hold me in abhorrence, because I was come from abroad in order to take the pearl, and arouse the serpent against me. But in some way other or another they found out that I was not their countryman, and they dealt with me treacherously, and gave their food to eat. I forget that I was a son of kings, and I served their king; and I forgot the pearl, for which my parents had sent me, and because of the burden of their oppressions I lay in a deep sleep.’

The earthly personality

The genesis of the fourfold earthly personality being is outlined here in symbolic language. When the prince arrives in Egypt – symbol for the sensory world – the son of an initiate advises him not to interact with the impure ones who are completely captivated by the

sensory world and therefore have no knowledge about higher soul life, nor any desire for it whatsoever. So the prince is a stranger among the Egyptians. He dresses in an Egyptian garment in order to avoid drawing attention to himself, meaning that he receives a physical body at that moment. The gnostically sensitive person is often experienced as 'different' by his fellow men who are not – or not yet – conscious of the gnosis. It is therefore understandable that the Egyptians perceive the prince as a stranger. When the prince subsequently starts to think, feel and act like the Egyptians, and when he – in a symbolic sense – eats the food of the Egyptians, he falls into a deep sleep.

This sleep indicates his identification with the body and the personality and his fascination with the sensory world and its astral counterpart. This state of sleep in a spiritual sense can last a very long time. Many incarnations are involved, with each earthly life providing the necessary experience that will have to be gained. The microcosm can be viewed as a castle with more and more inhabitants – earthly personalities who, after the death of their physical bodies, leave traces behind in the castle in the form of karma. And so the essence of experiences from all earthly lives remain accessible in the microcosm.

The inner invitation

When the microcosm has reached a certain fullness of experience, then the slumbering spirit-spark can be awakened. At that moment the inner invitation is heard to return to the lost house of the father – the invitation that comes flying in like an eagle, symbol for the spiritual world. Although the journey home is relatively slow, it always requires a deliberate effort from the person. The journey can be shortened, however, by following the path of initiation. As Helena Blavatsky wrote:

There is a road, steep and thorny, beset with perils of every kind, but yet a road, and it leads to the very heart of the Universe. I can tell you how to find those who will show you the secret gateway that opens inward only, and closes fast behind the neophyte for evermore. There is no danger that dauntless courage cannot conquer; there is no trial that spotless purity cannot pass through; there is no difficulty that strong intellect cannot surmount. For those who win onwards there is reward past all telling – the power to bless and save humanity; for those who fail, there are other lives in which success may come.'

Helena Blavatsky is quite explicit about the dangers that a deliberately accelerated development involves. In the 'Hymn of the Pearl', the prince seems to have little trouble. How is that possible? Because he carries the pearl with him! That means that he is listening to the impulses coming from the spirit-spark. That means that he is going the path of initiation known as transfiguration, allowing himself to be led by the letter that guides him, symbolising the help of fellow pupils and human microcosms who preceded him.

Avoiding illusion

If the traveler would not be open for the help from the group and from the heavens, or only barely so, then he would indeed be exposed to extreme danger. For his ascent he must, after all, go through the polluted astral sphere of humanity in which he can easily get lost, considering all the illusion there. That sphere is referred to as Sarbug in the 'Hymn of the Pearl'. If a traveler on the evolutionary path of initiation succeeds in safely crossing the earthly astral sphere, he must still cross the mental world, which is not pure either. It is characterised by a Babylonian confusion and so is called Babylon in the Hymn of the Pearl.

Due to the focused attention from the spirit-spark there will be the help from the letter of invitation, and Sarbug (the earthly astral world) and Babylon (the earthly mental world) can both be safely avoided during the ascent. This ascent is possible because the focus of the person concerned is directed not at the personality- soul but primarily at the development of the soul and the spirit-soul, both of which offer protections. Yet precisely for that reason the three higher aspects of the sevenfold personality-soul will develop: the spirit self, the spirit of life and the spiritual being.

The three together are also referred to as the threefold ego. The prince, by virtue of guidance from the letter of invitation, arrives quickly at Maishan, the spiritual world of emanation, and there he receives the new garments. Subsequently the majestic finale of the 'Hymn of the Pearl' will follow, in which the traveler returns to the lost house of the father after a long path of experience, dressed in the soul (the shining garment) and the spirit-soul (the golden robe).

'And in its kingly movements it poured itself entirely over me, and on the hand of its givers it hastened that I might take it. And love urged me to run to meet it and receive it; and I stretched forth and took it. With the beauty of its colours I adorned myself, and I wrapped myself wholly in my toga of brilliant hues. I clothed myself with it, and went up to the gate of salutation and prostration; I bowed my head and worshipped the majesty of my father who sent me, – for I had done his commandments, and he too had done what he promised, – and there at his gate, I mingled with his princes, for he rejoiced in me and received me, and I was with him in his kingdom, and all his servants praised him. And he promised that to the gate too of the king of kings with him I should go, and with my offering and my pearl with him should present myself to our king.'