

# The Mountain and the Cave<sup>1</sup>

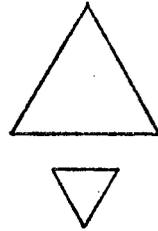
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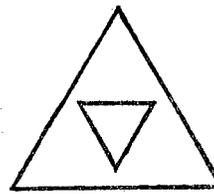
WE have seen<sup>2</sup> that there is a close relationship between the mountain and the cave, inasmuch as both are taken as symbols of the spiritual centers, as are also, for obvious reasons, all the "axial" or polar symbols, amongst which the mountain is in fact one of the most important. In this respect the cave must be considered as being beneath the mountain or inside it, so as to be also on the axis; and this reinforces the already existing link between these two symbols, each of which is, in a sense, the complement of the other. It must be mentioned, however, so that we can "place" them in their exact mutual relationship, that the mountain is more "primordial" in its significance than the cave: it is so in virtue of being outwardly visible, we might even say of being the most visible object from all sides, whereas the cave is, on the contrary, an essentially hidden and closed place. It can easily be deduced from this that the representation of the spiritual center by the mountain corresponds to the original period of earthly humanity, during which the truth was wholly accessible to all (whence the name *Satya-Yuga*, the summit of the mountain being thus *Satya-Loka* or the "place of truth"); but when, owing to the downward march of the cycle, this truth was no longer within the scope of more than a fairly restricted " lite" (which coincides with the beginning of initiation in its strictest sense) and had become hidden from the majority, the cave was a more fitting symbol of the spiritual center and therefore of the initiatic sanctuaries which are its images. By such a change, the center could be said not to have forsaken the mountain but merely to have withdrawn from its summit to its interior; on the other hand, this same change is as it were a "reversal", through which, as we have explained elsewhere, the celestial world, indicated by the elevation of the mountain above the surface of the earth, has become in a certain sense the "subterranean world" (although in reality it is not this higher or inner world which has changed but the conditions of the outer world and consequently the relationship between the two worlds); and this "reversal" is shown in the respective figures which represent the mountain and the cave, and which express at the same time their complementarism.

As has already been mentioned,<sup>3</sup> the first of these two figures which represents also the pyramid and the mound which are symbolically equivalent to the mountain, is an up-pointing triangle; the figure of the cave is, on the contrary, a down-pointing triangle, being thus the inverse of the other. This inverted triangle is also the figure of the heart,<sup>4</sup> and of the cup which in symbolism is generally assimilated to the heart as we have shown especially in connection with the Holy Grail.<sup>5</sup> Moreover these last symbols, and others like them, from a more general point of view, refer to the passive or feminine principle of universal manifestation, or to one of its aspects,<sup>6</sup> whereas the symbols which are figured by the up-pointing triangle correspond to the active or masculine principle, which all goes to bear out the complementarism in question. On the other hand, if the two triangles are placed one beneath the other, which corresponds to the situation of the cave beneath the mountain, it will be noticed that the lower triangle can be

considered as the reflection of the upper triangle (fig. 1); and this idea of reflection is most apt as regards a symbol that is derived from a primordial symbol, in accordance with the already mentioned relationship between the mountain and the cave as successive representations of the spiritual center at different phases of the unfolding of the cycle.



(Fig. 1)



(Fig. 2)

It may seem strange that the inverted triangle should be represented in the figure as being smaller than the upright one whose reflection it is and whose equal in size it should therefore presumably be; but such a difference of proportion is not unusual in symbolism: thus, in the Hebrew Qabbala, the *Macroprosopé* or "Greater Countenance", has as its reflection the *Microprosopé* or "Lesser Countenance". Moreover, in the present case, there is a more special reason: we have recalled, in connection with the relationship between the cave and the heart, the text of the *Upanishads* where it is said that the Principle, which resides at "the center of the being", is "smaller than a grain of rice, smaller than a grain of barley, smaller than a grain of mustard, smaller than a grain of millet, smaller than the seed that is in a grain of millet", but also at the same time "larger than the earth, larger than the atmosphere (or the intermediary world), larger than the heavens, larger than all the worlds together";<sup>7</sup> and in the universe relationship between the two symbols which we are now considering, it is the mountain which corresponds here to the idea of "largeness" and the cave (or the cavity of the heart) to that of "smallness". The aspect of "largeness" refers also to the Absolute Reality, and that of "smallness" to what is apparent in relation to manifestation; it is thus perfectly normal that the former aspect should be represented here by the symbol which corresponds to a "primordial"<sup>8</sup> condition, and the latter by what corresponds to a subsequent condition of "obscuration" and spiritual "envelopment".

In order to represent the cave as being situated inside the mountain (in its heart, we might say), we need only bring the inverted triangle inside the upright one, so that their centers coincide (fig. 2); the inverted triangle will then have to be smaller than the other so as to fit into it, but apart from this difference the resulting figure is clearly identical with the "Seal of Solomon", where the two opposite triangles likewise represent two complementary principles, with all their different applications. On the other hand, if the sides of the inverted triangle are made equal to half those of the upright one (we have here made them somewhat less, so that the two triangles can be seen altogether detached from each other, but in fact the entry to the cave must clearly be on the surface of the mountain, which means that the triangle which stands for it ought actually to touch the outline of the other),<sup>9</sup> the smaller triangle will divide the surface of the larger one into four equal parts, one of which will be the inverted triangle itself, whereas the three others will be upright triangles; this last consideration, as also the question of certain numerical relationships connected with it, has no real bearing on the theme of this article, but we will no doubt have occasion to come back to it later.

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<sup>1</sup> Symboles Fondamentaux de la Science Sacrée, ch. XXXI.

<sup>2</sup> In The Heart and the Cave (see the last number of this journal).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Not unrelated to this figuration is the fact that the Arabic word for heart (galb) denotes that it is "inverted" (maqlūb) (Cf. Titus Burckhardt, Du Barzakh, in Etudes Traditionnelles, décembre, 1937).

<sup>5</sup> In ancient Egypt the vase was the hieroglyphic of the heart. The "cup" of the Tarot corresponds also to the "heart" in ordinary cards.

<sup>6</sup> In India the inverted triangle is one of the chief symbols of the Shakti, as also of the primordial waters.

<sup>7</sup> Chhāndogya Upanishad, Prapāthaka 3, Khanda 14, shruti 31.

<sup>8</sup> Dante represents the earthly Paradise as being on the summit of a mountain, which confirms this situation as being that of the spiritual center in the "primordial state" of humanity.

<sup>9</sup> This same figure shows that if the mountain be replaced by the Pyramid, the pyramid's inner chamber is the exact equivalent of the cave.