

The Heart and the World Egg¹

by

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AFTER all the observations made so far² on the various aspects of the symbolism of the cave, there remains one further point of some importance, namely the relationship of this symbol with the "World Egg". In order, however, to make this entirely clear and to link it more directly with what has already been said, it is first necessary to deal with the symbolical connexions between the heart and the "World Egg". This link may at first sight seem surprising and appear to rest on nothing more than a certain resemblance in shape; but this resemblance would itself be meaningless without some deeper underlying relationship. That a link exists is shown by the fact that the omphalos and the votive stone (betylos), which are indisputably symbols of the centre, are frequently egg-shaped, as for example is the omphalos at Delphi;³ and this requires some further explanations.

The first point to note is that the "World Egg" does not represent the Cosmos in its fully manifested state, but in the one immediately preceding its unfolding; and if this unfolding is visualized as an expansion outwards in all directions from its starting point, the latter will of necessity coincide with the centre itself. It follows that the "World Egg"

¹ Published in *Etudes Traditionelles*, February 1938.

² See "The Mountain and the Cave" in *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Spring Issue, 1971

³ The Author has made a more particular study of these symbols in "Le Roi du Monde" where it was pointed out that in other cases they assume the form of a cone. This links them directly to the symbol of the mountain so that one finds here once again the two complementary images we have just discussed.

is "central" in relation to the "Cosmos"⁴ The Bible pictures the Earthly Paradise, which is also the "Centre of the World", as a circular enclosure, which can be regarded as the cross segment of either an ovoid or a sphere. It may be added that the essential difference between the two shapes is that the sphere, extending uniformly in all directions from the centre, is truly the primordial shape, whereas the ovoid corresponds to an already differentiated state deriving from the former by a sort of 'polarization' or doubling of the centre.⁵ This 'polarization' can, moreover, be regarded as taking place as soon as the sphere describes a rotary motion around a fixed axis, since from this moment the directions of space no longer all uniformly fulfil the same role; and it is precisely this that marks the transition from the one to the other of the two successive phases in the cosmogonic process symbolized respectively by the sphere and the egg.⁶

Having made this point, it remains only to demonstrate that what is contained in the World Egg is in reality identical with what is also contained symbolically in the heart, and in the cave in so far as this is its equivalent, namely the spiritual "germ" which, at the macro-cosmic level, is called in the Hindu tradition *Hiranyagarbha*, literally the "golden embryo".⁷

Now this "germ" is none other than the primordial *Avatar*,⁸ and we have seen that the birth place of the *Avatar*, and of its microcosmic equivalent, is precisely the heart or the

⁴The symbol of fruit has in this context the same meaning as the egg. We shall doubtless come back to it in future studies (see "Aperçus sur l'initiation" chapter XLIII) but it may be pointed out how that this symbol has clearly a connexion with the "garden" and hence with the "Earthly Paradise".

⁵ It is thus that in the geometry of plane surfaces the single centre of the circle is doubled to bring about the two arcs of an ellipse; this same doubling is used very precisely in the Far Eastern symbolism of Yin and Yang which is not unconnected with that of the "World Egg".

⁶ Regarding the form of the sphere, it may also be pointed out that in the Islamic tradition the sphere of pure, primordial light is the Ruh Muhammadiyyah (Spirit of Muhammad) which is also the "Heart of the World"; the entire "cosmos" is quickened by the "pulsations" of this sphere which is the Barzakh par excellence. (See on this T. Burckhardt's article in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, December 1937).

⁷ See *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta*, Chap. XIII).

⁸ This is also connected with the designation of Christ as "seed" in various scriptural texts, to which we may return on some other occasion. (See "Aperçus sur l'Initiation" chap. XLVIII as "Symboles Fondamentaux de la Science Sacrée, chap. LXXIII on "The Grain of Mustard").

cave. It might be objected that, in the text previously quoted,⁹ and in many other instances besides, the *Avatar* is specified as Agni, whereas it is Brahma who is said to enfold himself in the World Egg, called for this reason *Brahmânda*, in order to be born as *Hiranyagarbha*. But, apart from the fact that the different names refer simply to different attributes of the divine, which are always necessarily interconnected and not separate entities, it can be said more specifically here that, since gold is considered to be "mineral light" and "the sun of metals", the very name *Hiranyagarbha* marks it out as a principle of igneous nature. This together with its aspect of centrality, brings about its symbolical identification with the Sun which is, moreover, one of the images of the "Heart of the World" in all traditions.

In order to extend this application to the microcosm, it is enough to recall the analogy between *pinda*, the subtle embryo of the individual being, and *Brahmânda*, the "World Egg"¹⁰ *Pinda* as the being's permanent and indestructible "germ" corresponds also to the "kernel of immortality" called *luz* in the Hebrew tradition¹¹ True, the *luz* is not generally described as being situated in the Heart, or, at least, this is only one of its possible situations in its correspondence with the bodily organism and not the most habitual; but it is nevertheless found, among the other locations, exactly where one would expect to find it in the light of the foregoing, in the place where it is in immediate relationship with the "second birth". In fact these locations in the body, which are also related to the Hindu doctrine of *chakras*, refer to so many states of the human being or phases of his spiritual development. At the base of the spine where *luz* is located in the ordinary man, it is the state of "sleep":¹² its situation in the heart represents the initial

⁹ Katha Upanishad 1st. Valli, shruti 14.

¹⁰ Yatha Pinda Tathâ Brahmânda (see Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta, chaps. XIII and XIX).

¹¹ For further development of this point the reader is referred again to "Le Roi du Monde"; it is also to be noted that the assimilation of the "second birth" to a "germination" of "luz" is precisely reminiscent of the Taoist description of the initiatic process as an "inner birth of the Immortal".

¹² The snake coiled around the "World Egg" and sometimes shown coiled round the omphalos and the votive stone, is in this context "Kundalini" coiled round the "kernel of immortality", which is also linked to the symbolism of the "black stone". This "lower" position of the "luz" is referred to directly in the Hermetic

phase of its germination, which is properly the "second birth"; its situation at the eye at the centre of the forehead represents the perfection of the human state, namely reintegration into the "primordial state"; finally its situation at the crown of the head signifies the passage to supra-individual states. We shall come across the exact correspondence to these various stages once more when we return to the symbolism of the initiatic cave.¹³

Stop the working of your bodily senses, and then will deity be born in you.

Hermes.

formula "visita inferiora terrae, rectificando invenies occultum lapidem"(Go down to the depths of the earth where, by rectification, thou shalt find the hidden stone). This rectification is the "redressing" which, after the "descent", marks the beginning of the upward movement corresponding the awakening of "Kundalini". A complementary formula refers to the "hidden stone" as "veram medicinam" (the true medicine), identifiable also with "Amrita", the food or drink of immortality.

¹³ It is also to be noted that the term "golden Embryo" suggests a certain connection with alchemical symbolism, and this is confirmed by the correspondences referred to in the preceding footnote.