

TIME FOR MYTHS

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Abstract

The paper mainly reflects on Yavapai belief and practice of narrating myths on autumn and winter nights. Presently such a tradition seems irrational, still attempt is made herein to appreciate the ways of the ancestors. Certain traditional beliefs and practices cease to have relevance for the younger generation overtime because we fail to decode the symbolic aspects of the ancient traditions. Symbolically there is some meaning in choosing the time to narrate the myths. As elders of the society, it is our duty to represent the ancestors, the culture and the meaningfulness of the past.

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the sun...” (Ecclesiastes 3: 1).

Time is an archetypal happening that infuse within the individual the collective experience of the pairs of the opposites in nature: “birth and death, sowing and harvesting, killing and healing, breaking down and building, weeping and laughing, mourning and dancing, casting and gathering, embracing and refraining, getting and losing, keeping and casting away, to rend and to sow, war and peace” (Ecclesiastes 3: 2-8).

Man lives in the *Matrix* of nothingness and fullness, in abstraction and density of time, emerging and dissolving experiencing the bipolar qualities of Pleroma. Time keeps man within its measure; therefore he is the keeper of time. Man measures time because he is time-bound in many departments of his life. With the movement of the sun, there is a time for everything.

To begin with, when the sun goes down, it is the time for myths: “Myths which day has forgotten continue to be told by night...” (Jung, 1989, p. 282).

THE SLEEP: NARRATIVE FROM MONGOLIA

Hatagin Gotovin Akin has gathered twelve myths on the Mongolian blue wolf and reflected on each of them. Each narration begins thus...

“As begin fairy tales, before going to sleep, before beginning a new chapter, let’s hear another tale about the wolf...” (Akim, 2008).

Reciting a prayer or saying ‘goodnight and sweet dreams’ is a common daily ritual. Interestingly, there are no songs to wake up children, but there are songs to put them to sleep. It is a common practice by the elders to share or read out a myth or a fairytale before children descend into sleep and ascend to the world of dreams. The world has mythical origin, so towards the end of the day it is good to return to the myths, immerse in the original order of things, and wake up again to resume life unconsciously unfolding from the narratives of gods, goddesses and supernatural beings. Time to sleep is both the end and the beginning of life’s realities in process till we sleep eternally.

Through the narration of the myths and participation in the supernatural deeds, we become the descendents of the deities in the glorious nature. Recollection of the myths (at the time of sleep or otherwise) is a, non-religious, natural way of showing reverence to the ancestors and the beings of heaven. As sleep renews the sleeper, the timeless myths speak anew in the never ending mutations of time and history. The physiological act of sleep is much more than an experience of the REM and the NREM states; it is the most intimate psychic connection with the other-psychological world: the world of ancestors, angels, demons and gods; the world of spirits; the world on the stage before the eternal fire that casts shadows we live by in Plato’s cave; the world of alternatives and deeper insights; a parallel world; the world that is surreal and empyreal.

Making children sleep is not like taking them to the edge of heaven; rather it is sending them to the underworld wherein Morpheus resides. Just before we set our children to sail individually on a boat in the river Lethe—as we hand them over into the lap of Goddess Lethe—, good thoughts to impress the tender minds, or tales of high adventure of the beings from the supernatural world, sound like a virtuous practice.

**THE SEASON:
BELIEF AND PRACTICE IN ARIZONA**

I

“Myths (ichyuka) were told by old men on autumn and winter nights, beginning in the Northeastern Yavapai month I (begins in September). Young people might request that stories be told. They were related in a large house or cave with a good fire burning. On one side sat the narrator, while his audience completed the circle around the fire” (Gifford, 1933).

One can imagine the community life and the transmission of its spirit in such a setting. The nights of the seasons of autumn and winter are consecrated for the narration of the myths because both the seasons belong to the period of maturing and the elderly, as spring and summer are more appropriate for the acts of the growing ones and the young adults. The early part of the agricultural year could be characterized by manifold movements; the latter being a period of retreat, there is a possibility of receptivity and thus handing over the wisdom of the ancestors. While spring and summer spreads the new growth, autumn and winter gathers. Autumn and winter are the seasons of gathering and gratitude. Each season brings about certain changes in man’s behaviour; it seems autumn and winter is a homecoming. Lent and Easter are as significant as Thanksgiving, Advent and Christmas. Marian and Rosary months encompass two

seasons. In all the seasons we work and rest. In each season we hope and pray. Each season has its beauty, charm and warmth.

In ancient Tibet, besides the professional story-tellers specializing in the folktales, the Epic of *Ling Gesar* and *Lama-manis* (minstrel/bard) on *Dharma*, the elders of the family inclined to practice the oral tradition after sunset. “In the evenings grandmothers or grandfathers told endless folk stories while the rest of the family sat by the fireside listening to them” (Chophel, 2000, p. ix).

Traditionally, the time and the season sanctioned for the narration of the myths is considered sacred because we recollect the gods and the other supernatural beings and events.

“...Myths must not be recited except *during a period of sacred time* (usually in autumn or winter, and only at night). This custom has survived even among peoples who have passed beyond the archaic stage of culture. Among the Turco-Mongols and the Tibetans the epic songs of the Gesar cycle can be recited only at night and in winter” (Eliade, 1964, p. 10).

In the Biblical creation myth, each day is ‘good’. Each season issuing from the adorning work of creation is sacred. It is sacred because myth is the narration of the heavenly beings and supernatural creatures. Stories of gods and goddesses are exemplars that manifests in the story of man, in his sacred and secular behavioural world. Myth is not a story beginning with ‘once upon a time’; myth is the story of the beginning. Myth and its time of narration is sacred because it brings alive the divine act of creation of the world and man. Sanctity of mythic events in the beginning are a part of our scriptural *lectio* or oral transmission from one generation to the next transcending any individual, social, cultural, historical or political constructs. Myths are givens in a race or community, thus they constitute the natural and the native soil of the *psyche* of the land and its people. Myths are not merely the narratives of the origin and extraordinary explanation of things in the world; they also inspire and translate into festivals and rituals, thereby instilling the celebration of life. Each cultic celebration is an incarnation of the time of the intervention of the sacred sanctifying and renewing the present. Deeds of the deities are recaptured in the festivals and the rituals which man repeats in every liturgical calendar to make his secular life sacred in essence. Yet another way myth celebrates the history and life of a race or community is by narrating or singing the adventures of its cultural heroes. While myths of the deities present ideals for us, the hero myths contain the instinctive drives, the changes and the quest to live onwards. All of these are above and beyond the blood stained history of a race, a nation, hence sacred. Finally, myths help man remember his deliverance, thus retaining the sanctity of his life. Myths document man’s deliverance from the evil or the demon, from the flood or the famine, from the plague or sickness. Many of the myths remind man about the origin of the divine physician/healer and bless him with the tradition of healing. As myths behold man, superimposing a sacred story upon his life, the time consecrated for their recollection and recitation is redeeming.

II

Belief and behaviour in the context of Yavapai myths should be kept in close proximity. When the elderly narrator has disseminated the myth, he gives the following instruction to the young

listeners: “You young men and women, get up before daylight, run to the stream and wash your face, because this is a ‘great’ story. If you do not, you will get crippled feet” (Gifford, 1933).

Myth shared and heard during the night time, and in the traditionally accepted seasons of the year, should be remembered when the day begins and it should become a part of the memory that perpetuates the process of living. Remembering a myth does not necessarily mean repeating it in act. The memory of the myth in one’s personal life conjoins with the collective memory of mankind: the collective unconscious is an archaic repository of infinite images and spectacular stories. Human memory is not merely about the things acquired during one’s lifespan; man also has the memory of the archaic and the archetypal vestiges of the past, the images that are contained largely in the myths, and the glimpses of which are experienced in the dreams.

If we teach our children to row the boat gently down the stream, young audience listening to the myths are encouraged to visit the stream to continue to live. In the act of living yet another day, the young one, having heard a myth, a ‘great story’, should feel the sense of renewal, baptize oneself in a manner of speaking by rushing to the stream to wash one’s face to wake up to the newness in consciousness received during night and not become psychologically crippled in the walk of life by forgetting the myth, a great memory, and not live by knowing only the mundane aspects of existence.

Existence is relative depending on the individual’s story. Myth being the memories of the time before time is a ‘great story’. Myth is a ‘great story’ because it is “a vital ingredient of human civilization” (Eliade, 1964, p. 20) pertaining to the religious and socio-cultural settlements. Myth speaks to us about the truths related to the world and the life of man. It is a personal matter whether we believe or not. Like Akim (2008) points out right at the outset before narrating each myth of the Mongolian blue wolf, “I tell you the truth in this fairy tale, but I can’t make you believe it”. Myth in-itself may not be the cornerstone of faith, but when it is a sacred narrative of the gods and the goddesses, one would be a general atheist not to believe in it. Believing in the myths does not make one pagan because religions, rituals, festivals and sprouting of life in the world are symbolically present in them. Believing in the myths is to accept answers to many enigmatic questions. Myth is a revelation about the ancestors, deities, creation, salvation, apocalypse and new creation. Myth enlightens the unknown aspects of creation and existence. Myth explains the fundamentals of the way the world and man is. Myth extends our imagination and the creation myths remind man of his creative potentiality: man is the co-creator in the image and likeness of his Creator. “For by virtue of the exemplary model revealed by the cosmogonic myth, man, too, becomes creative” (Eliade, 1964, p. 140-141). We return to the original stories of mankind to create new ones. Even though the Tower of Babel and Icarus fell, we still keep building new monumental structures to touch the sky, defy gravity, enjoy lofty ideas and sublimate.

Man is unconsciously living the myths; for the one who is trying to consciously interpret the myths, there is a time when the myth speaks. One should have the eyes to see the myths in the human realm. Imagine you are in the ancient world of Yahweh and you are aware of the Tower of Babel; imagine you are in the ancient Greece and you hear the story of Icarus. You are yet to have the mind and the vocabulary to interpret the myths beyond their literal and moral connotations. If myth is irrational, or redundant in modern times, does Pandora Box makes some

sense to anyone, especially after the origin of made-in-China Wuhan virus? Imagine you are aware of the way psychiatry/clinical psychology view the myth of Narcissus, still you follow the world-trends of taking selfies everyday, updating your social media accounts regularly, and you have all the time in the world to do so because it provides you with a sense of self-worth, purpose and job. Imagine you are not a Catholic priest in the medieval times, and still you unconsciously utter in English the meaning of the Latin phrase: *Anathema Sit*—in worldly passion condemn someone to a mythological place called hell; or in sadness or sex, you call upon the name of God whose myths are abundant and whose presence is for all times. Myths continue to speak to man with different meanings in different times. The *quantum* (Latin word literally meaning the amount) of consciousness keeps increasing with each generation, with each birth and death, and with the passing of each day, month and year. The experience of time and all that it creates and carries is invisible and concrete, fateful and knowledgeable, historical and mythological. Man continues to become human with more awareness and amenities to forge, fail and fulfil his being-in-the-myths.

Ever since Prometheus the Forethinker gifted mankind with fire and medicine, we are chained to him by myth and fate to labour, to suffer, and gain new consciousness and concrete constructions for living. Myths unconsciously infuse a quest to journey, to discover, and to receive a boon and blessing. “Myth assures man that what he is about to do has already been done, in other words, it helps him to overcome doubts as to the result of his undertaking. There is no reason to hesitate before setting out on a sea voyage, because the mythical Hero has already made it in a fabulous Time” (Eliade, 1964, p. 141). Myths always make us go beyond our everyday consciousness and existence.

Always living with the mundane, the time for myths gives due consideration to the truths that are timeless realities and things that are sublime. Myth gives a glimpse into the transcendental. Mircea Eliade (1964, p. 145) wisely writes: ‘Directly or indirectly, myth “elevates” man’.

III

Myths illustrate hylozoism and *Unus Mundus*: one world wherein everything that exists, lives; one world wherein deities and angelic beings frequent the earthly realm; one world wherein human and sub-human species are in intelligible communication and harmonious cohabitation.

“It was thought to be dangerous to tell stories in summer, because spiders, snakes, and bears were about and would hear the stories and in consequence bite people. In winter these creatures were dormant and did not hear” (Gifford, 1933).

The Yavapai belief is rooted in the age-old agricultural year in which spring and summer is meant for social and commercial engagements, while autumn and winter is a period for communal rest and retreat, and personal immersion.

The Yavapai belief that it is dangerous to share the myths in the seasons when the animals are not in hibernation is to be understood symbolically. The lunar animals—spiders, snakes and bears—, as a sample population, symbolize man’s instinctual life, which is predominating and preoccupying, and that which contaminates the primal images of the unconscious (Jung, 1989, p.

200-201). Myths are about the sacred strata of secular life. Myths establish the morals and the ideals to live by. Time when one is preoccupied with instinctual living, sublime matters are bound to bite: clash with the conscience, cause dissonance in conscious life. Time when instincts are in kind of latency period there is a possibility to channelize the *libido*—psychic energy—towards subtle matters and investments.

Life is seasonal, following the phases of the moon and the movements of the sun across the firmament. In time man arises to explore, discover, return, and retire until he is consumed by time. Myth as the primordial-present incarnates the sacred time in images: the primordial images speaks in thousands tongues, bringing now and forever in unison, revealing the beginning without a beginning in reconciliation with the causes going back to the Causeless Cause, as the first and final hour remain in a circle and the timeless becomes time.

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