

EXPLORING THE NOTION OF DEATH AS AN INTERMEDIATE PHASE: A JUNGIAN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

In Buddhism, spaces and places have their own life energy. In Chinese it is called “Chi”, the Tibetans, call it “Lung” and in Hinduism it is, “Virya”. A space has the ability to provide us with abundance of life and sacred energy and also on other continuum this very space can become a confined prison. This paper is an attempt to understand the notion of death as in intermediate phase through the Jungian interpretation of the Tibetan myth, Tiyu: Earth Prison. As consciousness passes from one stage to the next in the after life, it is this transition that fosters realization. The myth brings to light the process of transformation.

Keyword: *Death, Chi, Consciousness, and Transformation*

TI YU: EARTH PRISON

“The concept of a hell, an underworld where evil spirits go after death did not exist for the Chinese until the introduction of Buddhism. Before the idea of hell was proposed, humans sought immortality, which allowed them to reside in paradise. The introduction of the notion of hell - Ti Yu, “earth prison” - was accompanied by a new pantheon of Gods. Some were directly associated with the Indian Gods and some were original to China – an example of the ability of the Chinese to incorporate and expand an important mythological canon.

The Hindu Yama, king of the underworld, became Yen-lo in China. Yen-lo’s domain was not solely for evil spirits; in fact, all spirits entered through the gates of hell before proceeding to their destiny.

There were various stages that a soul had to go through. First, souls were met at the gate by demons demanding money for admission. Second, souls were weighed on a huge scale – the good were light and the bad were heavy. Third, the souls were ushered into the Bad Dog Village, where the unblemished souls were weeded out from the corrupt souls. Fourth, they were paraded in front of the reincarnation mirror, which reflected images of their future forms. Fifth, they were brought to a terrace where they could glimpse the family they had left behind. Sixth, they were led across bridges – the evil walked over narrow bridges and the good were paraded over elaborately decorated and sturdy bridges. Seventh, they came to the wheel of law, where a drink was offered to erase all previous memories.

There were several different messengers from hell who catered to Yen-lo. Two were Mu Mien and Niu T’ou; Mu Mien had a horse’s head and Niu T’ou had an ox’s head. Another two were the ghostly messengers *Wu-ch’ang kwei*. Of these, the first ghost is the male, Yang Wu-ch’ang, who collects those who die before the age of fifty. The other is Yin Wu-ch’ang, the female, who collects those who die after they reach fifty.

Some tales depict a deity who is even more powerful than Yen-lo. Ti-tsang Wang, or earth womb king, is the absolute ruler of the underworld. It is believed that he brought solace to those souls condemned to suffer and often delivered them from their earth prison.

P'an Kuan, the registrar of hell, is often depicted holding a book with the names of the deceased listed. His position was passed on to Chung Kuein".

HYPOTHETICAL INTERPRETATION

Life in itself is a process in progress towards our becoming. Like Carl Jung says, "Life is an energetic process like any other. But every energetic process is in principle irreversible and therefore unequivocally directed towards a goal, and the goal is a state of rest. From the middle of life, only he who is willing to die with life remains living. Since what takes place in the secret hour of life's midday is the reversal of the parabola, the birth of death. Not wanting to live is identical with not wanting to die. Becoming and passing away is of the same curve" (Shamdasani, 2009). The universal law of nature; to live, to become and to pass away, binds earthly beings in various forms. Life encapsulates beings into earthly existence. Our existence is an ongoing manifestation of actions and reactions. The consequences and repercussions of our actions, both conscious as well as unconscious culminates into the notion of our reality. However this reality also consists of the notion of death, which is equally a part of life and belongs to its domain.

Death, however, is not an end to this process of becoming. It is a continuation to life, an interim, wherein this becoming is discerned. Judgment herein is an individual and a collective discernment of our very being, wherein life bestows the many possibilities and avenues of living. Death is an intermediate phase of this discernment process according to the myth. Death brings renewal of the soul and calls for a new beginning.

Tiyu, the earth prison is a realm of the afterlife, wherein the soul of the deceased travels to undergo various tests to discern their becoming. Yenlo is Yama, the Chinese God of death and the underworld. All spirits have to indulge in highly detailed stages of screening to pass into the phase of rebirth. Like in most of the world cultures, which believe in the after death realm, the Chinese funerary belief systems was influenced by Buddhism during the Han dynasty. In the present days, it is popularly known as Han Buddhism. The assimilation of Buddhism by the Chinese brought about a new beginning and a revolution in shaping the cultural domain, which included the performances of funerary rights and also the concept of life and death.

According to Buddhism, spaces and places have their own life energy. The Chinese called it "*Chi*", the Tibetans, "*Lung*" and in Hinduism it is, "*Virya*". A space has the ability to provide us with abundance of life and sacred energy and also on other continuum this very space can become a confined prison. The likeness to how we experience life and perceive things is highly subjective. Our subjective lives, our freedom to experience such experiences can however also confine us. The feelings, the various emotions we experience, the choices we make in life to our very body and mind can to some extent become a mere prison, which captivates and confines us to act and behave just as mere earthly beings.

The concept of the earth prison herein is an analogy according to the Buddhists, wherein our individual existence in this realm is a confined concept of what we call life. Life is a time period provided to beings in order to attain realization of entitlement and to liberate oneself from this cycle of life and death, which is a confinement of the soul. Enlightenment is the only form of liberation. As an embryo or a seed breaks out from the womb it is also our very nature to try to attain freedom from containment and move forward to experience the very essence of the expanse of life.

The Stages:

First Stage

The soul in the first stage reaches a gate where the demon demands money to enter the realm of the afterlife. This stage is the first step into the differentiation of existence, from what one was to what one is approaching towards. It is a bifurcation, which is drawn to exemplify the borders of existence between the known and the unknown. It symbolizes a space of transition between one world to the other. The process of birth is a gateway to life and coming into this world of earthly existence. Egyptians believed tombs to be mediating gates to the afterlife. Reaching the gate herein is a first step to the mortification of bodily existence.

“In ancient Egypt a doorway in the tomb was built to allow free passage in and out to the soul” (Ronneberg, 2010).

This is a soul's first initial step on their route to initiation. This experience of the threshold is sacred. It is the only brink where communication and transaction unfold. It is the vestibular cosmic space of the underworld where the soul makes their grand entrance from one world to another. The Buddhists consider doors as sacred spaces, which are ingresses. They connect the pathways of different realms of existence. Hence, such portals are always guarded with prayers of protection and symbols of worships. The soul moves its residing force, when life ceases and at the gateway to the afterlife the demons demand for money. Herein, the demons of the underworld are taking into account the deceased persons accumulated value. He demands for a look into the soul's flow of energy. Monetary gains are exemplified herein, where money is symbolized by libidinal energy and its values and how much of the soul energy does the individual possess to move ahead and to become anew.

Second Stage:

The second stage commences with the performance of the ritualistic ceremony of psychostasia, wherein the souls of the deceased are weighted. The weighing of the souls is directed towards the notion of justice. Just like, the actions of the corporal being is put forth for justice in the realm of earthly existence, so are the souls put to a final test of justice in the afterlife, where the gods of the underworld weighs one's soul.

This act of weighing is an act of restoration. It is performed to reinstate balance and equanimity. The balance of energy is re-established when the heavier souls are separated from the lighter souls. This forms the second stage in the process of discernment, wherein the good is distinguished from the bad. Such a ceremony in the afterlife was also accounted in the after life beliefs of the Egyptians, where the God Anubis presided over the soul's judgment by weighing their hearts. Earthly beings living in the world of the familiar live in relation to one another. Buddha propagated the concept of dependent origination. Living beings are individuals who live in communion in this microcosmic earthly realm. The weighing of the souls is a reminder of the individual's relation with the cosmos at large.

Third Stage:

The Bad Dog village according to the Buddhist is a realm of determination and subsequent categorization. This stage is the third level of distinction. The souls herein are analyzed and the unblemished are separated from the others. Dogs are considered to be symbolic guides according to the Buddhist in the afterlife world. They are considered to be protectors of the soul. Temples have the images of lion dogs outside the entrance, which are supposed to guard and guide our soul in our journey towards realization in the after life. Humans have mastered the act of taming and domesticating dogs for the purpose of guarding. Dogs have always been known for their acute acumen of senses, which surpasses supernatural beliefs. According to the Buddhists they possess the ability to sense beings from other realms. They have an uncanny way of finding lost things and have a nature to dig deeper. Dogs have been man's constant companion and form soulful bonds. Man connects with these beings based on pure energy. They have the ability to understand the energy that humans resonate. The Bad Dog village in this myth is a realm where the dogs in the underworld dig deeper into our souls to decipher our karmic accumulations. They act as a guide who makes us conscious of what lies in the deep unconscious aspect of our soul.

Fourth Stage:

The presence of the mirror forms an impressive representation of the soul's becoming. The mirror herein forms the only witness to the real self and the only form which will project on to the soul the reality of what they were to what they would become once again. Mirror represents the symbol of clarity where the soul sees for the first time the entity of their being. It reflects the effects and consequences of the phenomenon life. Looking into the mirror according to Tibetan Buddhism is an act of cleansing. The souls in the after life and cleansed of their previous forms and made to look ahead to their next form of rebirth. The Tibetans follow the ritual of “*divine ablution*”, which is called “*khrusgsol*”, in Tibetan. The ritual comprises of pouring water over the reflections of various statues and paintings if worship called as “*thanka*” paintings. It is performed to purify the divine and the true essence of the images, which the mirror reflects. The water forms the sanctified and holly waters, which captivates the absolute essence of the divine (Beer, 2003).

Fifth Stage:

In this stage they revisit their self, which they used to be for the last time. It is a final culmination of an individual's life span. Man lives his life to the utmost of his capability, however the eventual contemplation resides in this stage of the after life, wherein the individual and the extensions to their being, their family and loved ones are revisited. It is in this moment that the deceased is visiting his inner sanctum, the house, which is the self and the external realities of life that they have created.

Sixth Stage:

The rite of passage is demonstrated herein, where the souls traverse the bridges depending on the weights of their karma. The souls pass through a change over and an evolution as they step into the reality of existence. As bridges bring different landscapes together it binds together the landscape of the spirit realm and the human earthly realm. Travelling the bridge of death leads the souls to the landscape generated by their karmic actions. The good walked on wide, decorated bridges and the evil on narrow ones. This realm of differentiation is a path towards new ground whether it is wide or narrow, good or bad, the bridge decorated or perilous is to lead one towards liberation eventually. Man's deeds and actions lead their soul to face the bridges of death. One chooses to live in a life of merit or other wise. A life of merit could be a difficult path to tread and a life of selfishness and self-satisfaction is generally comforting leading one through wider paths of pleasure. However the bridge of death balances the karmic actions of Man and restores the universal energy.

"Enter through the narrow gate for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

The myth presents us with the soul crossing the bridge towards newer grounds. This is a common feature in most of the cultures, which is endowed with a prophetic belief system. The concept of the Last Judgement and the cross over of the soul shares an affinity to Judaism, Christianity, Islamic and Zoroastrian doctrines. The Zoroastrian notion of the after life comprises the presence of the *Chinvat* Bridge, wherein the actions of the souls are weighed. The good souls are taken to heaven and the bad souls according to their misdeeds are made to walk on narrow bridges and taken to hell eventually. "The Iranian *Chinvat* Bridge separates the two worlds and must be crossed by the soul, it leads to the Mount of Judgment and is guarded by two dogs. Bridge symbolism also includes man as mediator, the central or axial position between heaven and earth, hence the hierophant and the Roman Pontiflex" (Cooper, 1978).

According to Buddhism, Man himself is a bridge and only he can transcend from one world to the next. The human body is given importance over the other earthly beings, as only man can be the mediator to the landscape of the divine.

Seventh Stage:

The wheel of law represents the metempsychosis of the soul. In Buddhism it forms an integral symbol of the *Ashramangala* and is called the *Dharmachakra*. In Tibetan it is called the "*Cho ki khorlo*". It represents innately the Buddha himself and his teachings. Buddha's teachings are called the Dharma wheels and his first preaching came to be known as the turning of the wheel of law. This *Dharmachakra* is Buddha nature itself and it represents the inner wheel of the individual. The Buddhists call it the *Ghankhil* or the wheel of joy. The wheel of law is a consummation of the stages of the afterlife wherein the soul has to forgo all the past memories. Life starts anew with the drink of the holy water, wherein the soul is replenished once again with life.

The seven stages of the after life symbolize progress and karmic changes. The soul as it passes from the first stage; through to the final seventh stage restoration of the cosmic cycle of life and death reaches its fulfillment. The number seven is highly vibrational in its essence and is considered to have spiritual powers. The seven stages of judgment transform the soul. Yenlo's messengers Mu Mien and Niu T'ou are mediators of the after life. They are spirits of the underworld who have the head of a horse and an ox. The horse and the ox both are solar and lunar symbols, which represent growth and fertility. These beings have the divine spirit of the horse and the ox, which represent their vital requisite force. Horses and ox's are animals, which have been an integral part of Man's culture and civilization. These animals of toil have been with Man from the beginning of life and agricultural growth. They symbolize the cosmic power and are the bringers of death and deliverance. According to the Buddhists the horse and ox are the symbols of life and death wherein they determine the souls passage of life. Horses are considered to be the wind energy and represent the sky. In Celtic mythology the horses

where considered to be the messengers of God. In Norse mythology, Odin had the privilege to ride his horse to collect the souls of the dead. They are considered to be psycho-pomp in shamanistic belief system, wherein the head of the horse is considered to be the container of life force (Cooper, 1978). The presence of these spirit animals in the after life is a symbolic representation of how life and death are closely bound.

Wu-ch'ang kuei means, “black and white impermanence”, which comprises of two deities of the afterlife. Their vital duty is to gather the souls of the deceased. The myth mentions the gender of the deities as the male who gathers the souls of beings before the age of fifty and the female deity who gathers the souls of the beings after the age of fifty. The life span of a man herein is divided. From conception to birth as man matures through his mental and psychological age, he slowly evolves. The subjective life experiences of the individual take the human race closer towards spirituality as they age. The first half of life is predominantly worldly, wherein man is trying to learn, perceive and act in this gross world of existence. However it is only when one comes to age in the second half of life that he becomes more in touch with one self. One's conscious life comes to an understanding of the unconscious and what lies in the unknown slowly dawns upon them. Man's initial phase of life is driven by the libido and is generally masculine in its essence. Only towards the later phase of one's life does one come closer towards spirituality and a deeper understanding of the feminine aspects of the self.

The two deities male and female are mere representations of the dual aspects within us. It leads to the evolution in our life and eventually death. These deities remind us of the impermanence of life. According to Chinese folklore the two deities are black and white. The black deity gathers souls who will not get any liberation and the white deity indulges in ratification of the souls and is a peacemaker. These deities herein indulge in a process of creation and restoration of balance. They are the aspects of inner identification of one's actions, be it good or bad and the subsequent abiding force of self-amendment.

The Chinese religious philosophy revolves around the belief of a dualistic cosmology, which forms an intimate and integral part of their culture. They believe in the coexistence of two fundamental cosmic energies of the *Yin* and *Yang*. This is an elemental belief structure of Confucianism as well as Taoism. The *Yin* and *Yang* are the forces, which are conflicting as well as attracting forces, which define the existence of elemental beings, from the micro to the macro. The *Yin* and *Yang* are represented in the form of opposing and coexisting energies like that of the masculine and the feminine. These forces are interconnected and interrelated, the coexistence of which issues forth life. Life and death is also a concept of the dualistic cosmology, wherein the Chinese Buddhists believe that the conjunction of which generates further life force and as such the world and the cosmos at large come into being.

Ti-tsang Wang is Ksitigarbha, a Bodhisattava who works for the benefit of all living beings. His name means “Earth womb”, or “Earth Store”. He is worshipped as a deity who helps beings during times of great suffering and turmoil when one's soul experiences darkness. He is the deliverer of souls from hell and restores the process of rebirth. The Earth womb is the *Matrix*, the realm wherein the souls transformation proceeds and emancipation is granted for all the previous experiences and actions. Herein the souls, which are perishing in hell are given a chance of extrication, wherein Ti sang rescues them only to be put forth into the *Matrix* of ones causal existence. The Earth womb is the space wherein life geminates, however it is also the very dark space, the unconscious seat of existence. Man's experience of the objective world is a fractional aspect of the world within him. For man he is the center of the world, wherein his emotional and relational aspects of the outside are mere aspects of his unconscious realm. The world within him is thus categorized as different realms of existence in life and in the after life. The Earth womb is the body, the very vessel, which begets life and the world of our experiences. “The Earth womb is the symbol of the archetypal feminine, wherein she is not just a deliverer of life but also a container, which can also cease and put a pause. It contains all the opposites, which usher's life and its essences, the concepts of earth and heaven and hell, night and day, life and death” (Neumann, 1972).

CONCLUSION

The seven stages are the individual's conscious understanding of their unconscious culmination of experiences, which is brought to light in the after life. This myth is a narration of the death processes which fore casts the continuity of the soul. As the soul ascends through the various stages, the myth provides us with an understanding of the human soul and how it seeks for a new beginning.

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