

Six Ways to Imagine the Unimaginable

*Part V of *The Enigma of Consciousness**

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Introduction to Part Five

When we push the essence of interreligious dialogue to its deepest places, we discover that different geographical places on the planet developed in their classical periods different basic ways of framing their religious talk. This can be examined by attempting to describe the primal metaphors that underlie these different types of religious thought. There have been at least six quite distinct primal metaphors. Describing them is a challenging task and my efforts here may be open to oversimplification, big misunderstandings, and even strong arguments. But the importance of this basic vision is worth the risks of sharing this admittedly elementary beginning on a highly complicated study worthy of many lifetimes of work by scholars wiser than I.

Also, our understanding is complicated by the fact that all six of these primal metaphors are now becoming consciously heard and used in all parts of the planet. We live in an interreligious era. Every large city houses bits of almost every cultural creation from the entire planet. This fact is, however, one of the reasons why this discussion is important. Being religious today in a responsible way entails expanding our view of what religion is.

In the following chapters I will often look back historically in order to clarify the essence of these six primal metaphors. We can often see a primal metaphor most clearly when we view it before that culture was impacted by the primal metaphors from other sectors of the planet.

Chapter 22

Six Primal Metaphors for Religious Formation

My interest in world cultures began under the tutelage of Joseph W. Mathews as he, other colleagues, and I were teaching International Training Institutes all across the world. It was plain to us that being a Christian in India or Japan or Africa was different from being a Christian in Europe or America. Christians have tended to bring to nonwestern cultures a Westernized form of Christian witness that implied contempt for nonwestern cultures. This has tended to make Christians in these nonwestern cultures needlessly alienated from the religious wonders of their native places. As part of our attempt to promote a form of Christianity that was respectful of all cultures and religions, we attempted to understand these world cultures in relation to their quite different ways of giving form to the basic religious impulse.

Mathews came up with a model of six basic cultural areas, each of which is rooted in a uniquely different way of giving religious form to profound humanness. He characterized these six cultural symbols as "Ur-images." In this book I have defined "image" in a particular way, namely as the mental recording of multi-sensory reruns that is common to all animal life. That understanding of "image" was not what Mathews was pointing to with his term "Ur-image." Rather, his Ur-image was a very basic kind of religious symbol. So, I will use the term "primal metaphor" rather than "Ur-image." There is something poetic about the term "Ur," (reflecting as it does an ancient city by that name), but perhaps "primal" is more clarifying. And "metaphor" is also quite descriptive of the cultural form that Mathews had in mind.

Mathews saw six distinct cultural areas of the planet, about which our reading and our visiting indicated were geographical expanses with a similar primal metaphor: (1) Sub-Asia – especially India and its close surrounding places, (2) Arabia – from the old Babylonian Empire that is now Iraq through Egypt to the rest of North Africa. (3) Europe – the upper Mediterranean all the way to Scandinavia and Ireland. (4) The Orient – China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and adjacent places, (5) Sub-Saharan Africa – the wide variety of ancient cultures dating back to the primal origins of humanity, and (6) The Americas – before European settlement. There have been questions raised about this model, such as: Is there a seventh primal metaphor characterizing some of the Pacific Islands? But I will go with Mathews' six-primal-metaphor model, recognizing that it is a model – a very useful one for making the basic point that religious formations have developed in different ways in different places with different primal understandings of what it means to be profoundly human.

The insights that I will share in the next six chapters are only sketches for a research project that could take generations to complete, and that is clearly beyond my competence. I have not studied and do not have time to study in the remaining years of my life what would be needed in order to do an adequate job of fully exploring these topics. I do, however, experience enough intuitive wisdom about these cultures from my readings and my visits and conversations to propose this basic hypothesis that can at least encourage further research. I am willing to go out on a limb about this, because I am convinced that this topic is important for every person living on this planet of thoroughly interacting cultures and religions.

My basic hypothesis is that a unique and primal cultural metaphor has conditioned the development of the resident religions of each of these six geographical areas. This metaphor has been largely unconscious or simply taken for granted by most members of these cultures. We now live for the first time in an era of human history in which many of us have had encounters with these various peoples and can therefore

understand and need to understand the basic differences in these six zones of human religious formation. We now have a need to become more and more aware of how significantly different the formations of religion have been in different parts of the planet. And we need to know that the taken-for-granted primal metaphor of our own culture turns out to be a human creation, not a “truth” appearing from some universal realm. We can hold that the primary essence of being human is everywhere the same, and yet see that our ways of understanding, nurturing, and enacting that primal humanness have been and still are fundamentally different from at least five other regions of the planet. When we are confused about those differences, we can become arrogantly oppressive, supposing that our taken-for-granted cultural uniqueness is the universal by which other cultures are to be judged. Such unconscious oppressiveness is one of the roots of our malice toward one another that we surely need to overcome. So I have dedicated these chapters to calling attention to these very deep cultural differences.

Here is a poetic summation of the Chapters to follow:

Chapter 23. The Primal Metaphor of Sub-Asia–**Uniting with the Infinite Silence**

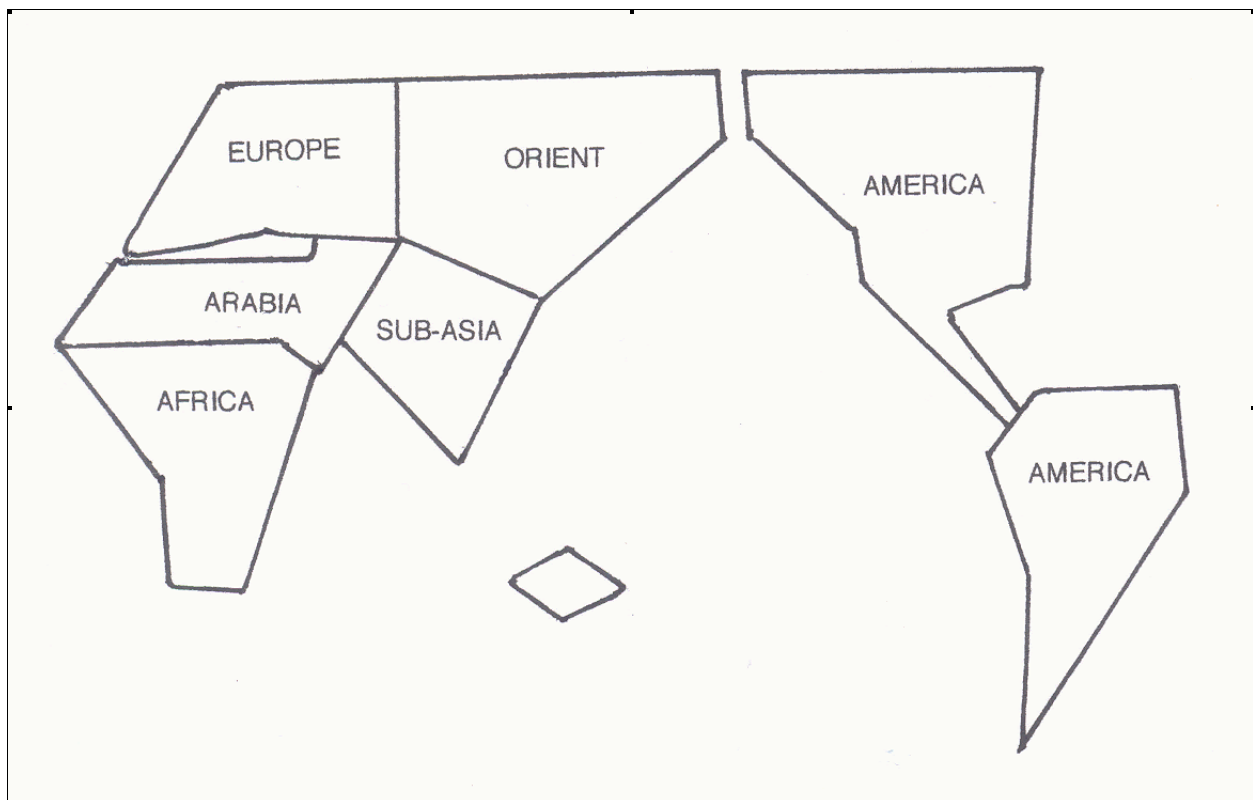
Chapter 24. The Primal Metaphor of Arabia–**Intimacy with the Eternal Communicator**

Chapter 25. The Primal Metaphor of Europe–**Ordering the Absolute Wonder**

Chapter 26. The Primal Metaphor of the Orient–**Balance within Inclusive Community**

Chapter 27. The Primal Metaphor of Africa–**Attunement with the Final Rhythm**

Chapter 28. The Primal Metaphor of Native America–**Designing the Unstoppable Flow**



Chapter 23

The Primal Metaphor of Sub-Asia

Hinduism and Buddhism are not the only religious formations that originated in Sub-Asia, but they are the largest ones. They have spread, especially Buddhism, to other areas and adapted to those cultures while carrying with them the inner logic of the Sub-Asian metaphor for approaching Final Reality. I am naming that metaphor, **Uniting with the Infinite Silence**.

The Hindu saying, "THAT I AM." is one of the clearest expressions of this primal metaphor. THAT (Infinite Silence) I (Profound me) AM. THAT (Eternal Brahman, beyond all temporal passing things) and I (the Atman or Great Self) AM. In other words, THAT and I are of one Reality. In the final realization of myself, I experience a union with the Infinite Silence. I am one with that Absolute Stillness beyond all the busy, noisy things of life. Part of what this means is a highly exalted view of personal being. My essence cannot be understood as a psychological pattern or a sociological conditioning. I am a Mysterious Part of that equally Mysterious Whole. In this sense, I transcend my culture, my body, my biology, my personality, my ego, my whatever I have typically referred to as "my self." The route to experiencing this essential "me" entails a detachment from all these temporal things. This freedom from all things enables a consequent "return" or "engagement" in all temporal things in a free and nonchalant fashion.

Buddhism perfected methods of sitting in alert silence and stillness, watching the inflow and outflow of the living breath as well as achieving awareness of the coming and going of sensations, thoughts and feelings. The final aim of this intense concentration was to experience the union of the concentrator with this Infinite Silence/Stillness. This means experiencing an "I" that is something more than my coming and going sensations, thoughts, and feelings. I am that Silence. I am that Stillness. I exist not merely in the temporal comings and goings, but as one with the entire cosmos of Every-Thing-Ness, indeed the Stillness beyond all that moves or sounds. The Hindu foundation for Buddhism is clearly retained. Buddhist enlightenment resonates with the experience pointed to by the phrase "THAT I AM." Many Buddhist teachers teach that their "enlightenment" is an experience of "no self." But this "no self" does not mean having no inner life or no responsibility for living my temporal existence. I find it clarifying to view "no self" as an expression of the loss of everything we normally take to be our self. We are not our ego. We are not our personality. We are not our social conditioning. We are not our reputation among humanity. We are a mysterious at-one-ment with Being as a Whole.

I am not attempting to give a complete description of the vast variety of Buddhist and Hindu practices and reflections, but simply to note a metaphor that is operating in this complex set of ancient religions originating and functioning within this Sub-Asian cultural zone.

Uniting with the Infinite Silence can be understood as a conscious experience in the living here and now. This experience is Timeless. This experience is wholly NOW. The Infinite "THAT" and the deep "I" are both Timeless. The realized no-self or Atman SELF is Timeless. In the depth experience pointed to by the metaphor **Uniting with the Infinite Silence**, the temporal world stops. I exist in the NOW. The past is only memory. The future is only anticipation of not yet. In this NOW I am liberated from both memory and anticipation. I live in Freedom, and within this Freedom I return to my temporal world. I have memories and anticipations. I have a body with its sensations, emotions, and thoughts. But I am living within a liberation or detachment

from the temporal flow. I live in the temporal flow as a non-temporal union with the Timeless.

With the aid of many competent Buddhist and Hindu teachers, this basic motif for religious practice is making an enormous impact on Europe and the Americans. These revitalized forms of Sub-Asian practice are challenging Westerners to inquire beyond the psychological and sociological views of themselves into a grounding in conscious experience that is more basic to who they are as human beings.

As we will see, this primal metaphor is also a human creation, and thus it is finite and limited like all the other primal metaphors. It is a primal metaphor that is no better than the other primal metaphors. But it is a powerful and useful metaphor, and its current revival of clarity challenges all religions, from whatever zone of culture, to pay attention to the depths of consciousness that this metaphor encourages. Every area of the world deals with the enigma of consciousness, but Sub-Asia specializes in a research of consciousness. In being so focused Sub Asia has pioneered treasures that can deepen all the other heritages. Many Westerners are already experiencing an important deepening through their respectful dialogue with this zone of inquiry.

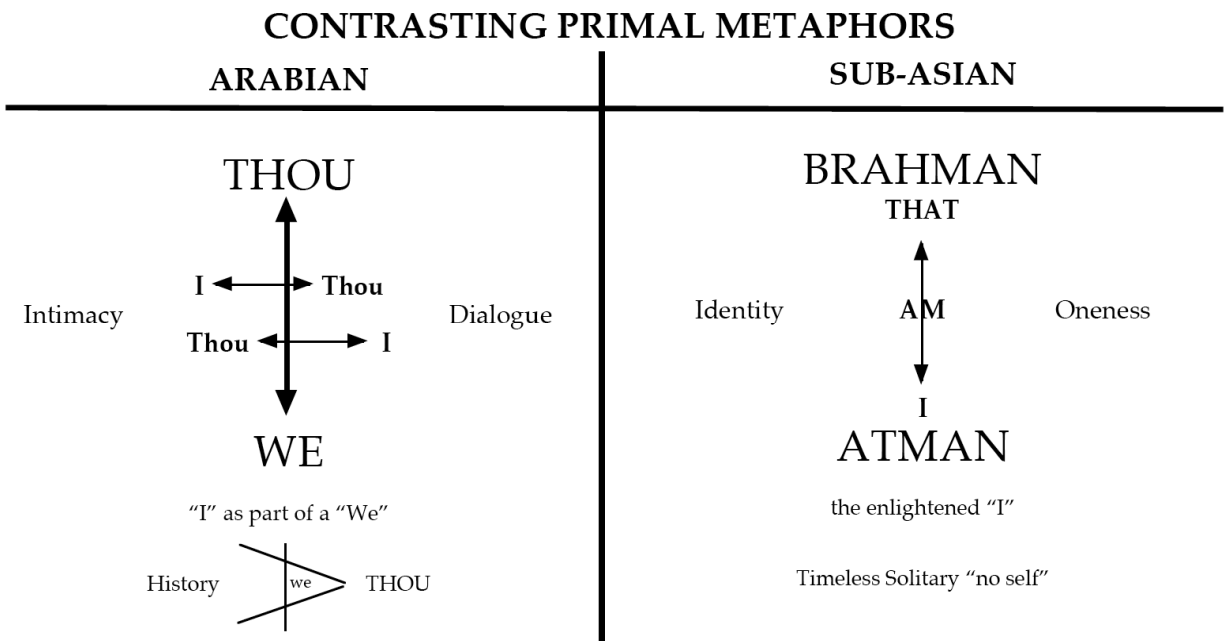
Chapter 24

The Primal Metaphor of Arabia

Arabia is the cultural geography that initiated Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. All three of these religions have traveled beyond their place of origin, and they took their Arabian primal metaphor with them. The primal metaphor of Arabia is distinctly different from the primal metaphor of Sub-Asia. I have chosen the name **Dialogue with the Infinite Communicator** to illuminate the contrast with the Sub-Asian **Uniting with the Infinite Silence**. The Arabian religious formations are characterized by a more passionate attention to the details of history and an emphasis on interpersonal relations among humans and between humans and Final Reality.

Arabic stories sound something like this: "In the beginning the Infinite Communicator Spoke and the temporal cosmos appeared." Every aspect of temporal reality is the Speech of this Infinite Communicator. "In the beginning was the Word." This Word is not a set of Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, or English words. It is the speech of the Infinite. We can state the nature of this Word in a starkly paradoxical manner: this Word is the Speech of the Infinite Silence. How do we experience this Speech? We experience it in the events of temporal history. Our birth is a first Word to us. The presence of the entire natural world is a Word to us. The ups and downs of social history are all Words to us. The end of society is a Word to us. The end of our own historical lives is a Word to us. This is how Reality is visualized: a conversation: Thou-I-Thou-I-Thou-I-Thou. This is a temporal picture. It is not timeless. It is a dialogue taking place through time. Time is important in the Arabian primal metaphor; it is where Final Reality is met and responded to. Time is where we fall away from our loyalty to Final Reality and where we are restored to the family of those who are devoted to Final Reality. This is the metaphor of Arabia. Time has a meaning not given to it in the Sub-Asia primal metaphor.

The following diagram lays out some contrasts between these two primal metaphors:



Notice the emphasis on solitary identity in the Sub-Asia primal metaphor compared with the emphasis on intimacy (I-Thou and WE-THOU) in the Arabian primal metaphor. By "intimacy" among humans I mean the experience of looking into the eyes of another human being and seeing a conscious being looking back. Of course, Sub-Asian cultures are not oblivious to intimacy experiences, but in the Arabian cultural antiquity this intimacy experience became basic to its primal metaphor. The relations among humans and between humanity and Final Reality are drawn as an intimate dialogue through time. The Almighty "Thou" calls us into conversation. Too often in our scientific age this metaphor has been dismissed because its interpreters have understood it literally. Of course, Final Reality is not a big person who inserts Hebrew, Greek, or Arabic words into our passive heads. "Dialogue" is a metaphor for understanding the actual eventfulness of our lives. We are called out of Egypt to be an un-Egyptian experiment in social law and communal life. We are taken into Exile to learn that our devotion is not limited to simple nationalism. We return to our Promised Land to reestablish our treasury of living wisdom for all nations. This deep communal and historical emphasis of ancient Judaism is also present in Christianity and Islam. I have used the terms "We-Thou" in the above diagram to signal this primary emphasis on being a people – a people of God, a Divine Kingdom, a Holy Commonwealth, a communion of saints, a "We" commissioned by this "Thou" to bring healing to all peoples.

But in spite of these fundamental differences in emphasis between these two distinct cultures, members of these two cultural groups can speak to and understand each other. Indeed, they possess some important common ground. Both primal metaphors have enabled deep clarity on the "FACT" that whatever is born and dies is not Eternal – that temporal "things" are not worthy of our absolute devotion. Our nations come into being and go out of being. Our families come into being and go out of being. Our own bodies come into being and go out of being. Our feelings come into being and go out of being. Our thoughts come into being and go out of being. Our personalities are developed by us and die with our bodies. Indeed, our view of who we are may die sooner than our bodies. We may see in this present moment that our personalities are finite, built by ourselves, a pattern of habits that imprison us. We may see now that in our profound depths we are more than our personalities, more than the egos that our personality habits imply that we are. Sub-Asian Buddhists may speak of realizing our "no self." Arabia speaks of dying to self in order to find our True Self. Both groups of religious traditions imply that what we truly are is beyond personality and ego – and beyond all the temporal relations that comprise our ongoing historical lives. We are Eternity-participating beings.

Also, both primal metaphors include a strong emphasis on freedom. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all witness to an awareness of imprisonment in the patterns of finite selfhood as well as an awareness of the possibility of realizing our deep freedom – the freedom to break out of the habits of the past, the freedom to choose freedom as our mode of operation rather than continuing in our addictions to what we desire or want to flee. The Arabian saint sees that each of us, instead of embracing this freedom that is our real lives, have been enslaved to the temporal in two ways: (1) we are attached to things that are passing and (2) we flee from the fullness of life and its responsibilities. The deep self, the true self, the essential soul of a human being is a boundless freedom that is not determined by our circumstances, our bodies, our emotions, our thoughts, our habits, our personality. We can access that freedom or we can lose that freedom into an incarceration in personality patterns that we have invented and with which we identify and passionately defend.

“Plant your feet firmly therefore within the freedom that Christ has won for us, and do not let yourselves be caught again in the shackles of slavery.”¹ This was a core teaching of the apostle Paul. According to the original witnesses of the Christian breakthrough, our estrangements from Reality have formed a prison of bondage. The meaning of the Christ happening in our lives is that this bondage has been broken open; we can walk forth as free beings. We have “idolized” things that are born and that die, and thereby lost our loyalty to both Eternity and our time-embodied lives. But when we have died with Christ (the profound human) and been raised up into this profound humanness, we manifest a freedom from our estrangement from both time and Eternity. Similar teachings about freedom appear in Judaism and Islam.

After such “liberation,” we find that both Arabian and Sub-Asian cultures describe the freed person returning to live freely within the temporal flow. That does not mean a full control of the flow of temporal events. We still face limitations as part of the external realities of life. But this inner freedom is a freedom to accept limits as well as to engage in possibilities that have a limited but relevant and surprising impact upon the course of events.

The contrast between the primal metaphors of Arabia and Sub-Asia is most vivid in how this temporal living is pictured. Sub-Asia emphasizes a sort of timelessness that tends to minimize the significance of specific temporal events, while the Arabian sensibilities tend to see each temporal event as a Word or Communication with the Final Reality that calls “the hearer” into the freedom to respond to that Final Reality in the flow of history. Arabian worshipers see themselves called to make history. Sub-Asian sensibilities focus on liberating individuals from the karma of history.

Both of these emphases are meaningful, and these two cultures are learning from one another (made possible by this interreligious era). For example, a number of contemporary Buddhist teachers now advocate an “engaged” Buddhism that seeks to enthusiastically define justice and social action. In Christian circles it would sound strange to speak of an engaged Christianity, for Christianity, at its prophetic best, is always engaged in history. In Christian circles we sometimes speak of a contemplative Christianity that helps to ground our social action in our true beings. But in Buddhist circles, they need not speak of a contemplative Buddhism, for such a focus is assumed.

Seeing that both the primal metaphors of Sub-Asia and Arabia are metaphors rather than literal truths brings the “dialogue” between Sub-Asia and Arabia into a deep level of lucidity. Like viewing light as both *wave* and *particle* in the domain of physics, *dialogue* and *union* in the domain of religion are two inventions of the human mind – neither of which can fully comprehend the human participation with Final Reality. Light is neither *wave* nor *particle*; it is both. And Final Reality is more than a “Thou” with which we *dialogue through time* and it is more than a *timeless union* in which the ordinary self disappears. Our experience of Final Reality is both of these perceptions, and it is more.

¹ Galatians 5:1; J. B. Phillips translation

Chapter 25

The Primal Metaphor of Europe

When I speak of the primal metaphor of Europe, I am thinking of the Greek or Athenian-impacted Europe. Europe has now become the home of many primal metaphors, so I am really focusing upon the Hellenism that drove the Alexandrian and Roman Empires. In the ancient Athenian city-state, this primal metaphor had already reached sophisticated expression in the teachings and writings of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Greek Playwrights, and others. Like all primal metaphors, this metaphor has roots that disappear into antiquity. The Homeric and pre-Homeric literature was evolving this metaphor. When we look carefully into this emerging flurry of creativity, we find a primal metaphor that has most to do with order and chaos, with reason and mystery. I will name it **Ordering the Absolute Wonder**.

The Westward spread of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam carried the Arabian primal metaphor into Europe and combined it with the European metaphor to such an extent that it is not easy to sort out the ancient European metaphor in its pure form. Also, Plato and Aristotle wrote sophisticated philosophies that may cloud the simplicity of the ancient metaphor that these philosophers assumed. Nevertheless, the following description will surely resonate with European people and with European migrants to the Americans. For all these lands are now deeply characterized by this basic way of relating to Final Reality. The explosion of contemporary science was spawned and nurtured by a society rooted in the ancient primal metaphor described in this chapter.

The key dynamic we need to notice here is the tension between chaos and order. Does Final Reality have an order, or is chaos the essence of things? And what do we mean by order? And what do we mean by a lack of order? Clearly the human mind has evolved with a capacity to conceive patterns in our experience of nature and use our awareness of those patterns to enhance our survival potential and our well-being. So there is, we might guess, a Final Pattern toward which our human patterning may be trending. Scientists like Newton and Einstein have thought so. Einstein's patterns were seen by him and by the generations that followed him as a more valid approximation of the way physical things work than what was previously envisioned in the Newtonian system. In spite of such vast changes in scientific knowledge, it has seemed to most scientists, as well to Plato and Aristotle, that the cosmos is intelligible or is in large measure intelligible. So many people have postulated a Final Intelligibility toward which obedient, thoughtful, human inquiry can trend.

Yet there has always been a minority report, currently stated in this sentence endorsed by many contemporary physicists: "The more we know about nature, the more we know we don't know." Thomas Aquinas, that great synthesizer of Aristotelian and Hebraic wisdom, posited an Eternal Law, but went on to claim that this Eternal Law was beyond the capacity of the human mind to grasp. This implies that Mystery or Chaos is the real essence of things and that order is simply what the human mind can put together as wisdom about an overwhelming Reality that the human mind can never hope to encompass.

But whatever has been the optimism or pessimism about the human mind's capacity for some sort of Universal Intelligibility, chaos and order, mystery and reason have been the preoccupation of this segment of the planet.

Europe and Arabia, Athens and Jerusalem

Through the centuries, Christians as well as Jews and Muslims have sought to synthesize the Arabian metaphor of **Dialogue with the Infinite Communicator** with

the European metaphor of **Ordering the Absolute Wonder**. Christianity arose in a sea of Hellenistic Judaism. By the end of the first century, New Testament writings like John's gospel and letters were using Greek metaphors and addressing Greek culture directly. Toward the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth, Augustine synthesized the "ordering" of Plotinus' Platonism with the historical import of the I-Thou dialogue emphasis found in Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Thomas Aquinas constructed another synthesis in the 12th century, when his religious order was learning Aristotelian-impacted philosophy arriving from the Muslim world. At that time Europe had forgotten Aristotle and followed Augustine's preference for Plato and Plotinus. Thomas was attracted to Aristotle's manner of finding order in the empirical data of material happenings. He assumed that the natural laws that Aristotle discerned could be reconciled with the more Hebraic elements retained in the heritage of the Catholic Church.

Thomas's synthesis was not sustained by all of those who came after him. Some have made **Ordering the Absolute Wonder** paramount and dismissed **Dialogue with the Infinite Communicator** as superstition. Others have gone in the opposite direction, fighting with science whenever it seemed to contradict with what they thought they knew from their **Dialogue with the Infinite Communicator**.

This war between fanatics of Western science and fanatics of Western religion has persisted to this day. I call them "fanatics," because there need be no irresolvable conflict between **Dialogue with the Infinite Communicator** and *Ordering the Absolute Wonder*. Each of these primal metaphors can be seen as poetic expressions drawing attention to experience, rather than seen as literalized systems of rational beliefs.

Today we are experiencing some fresh synthesis of the wisdoms of these two primal metaphors. We know more clearly than some generations have known that Mystery surrounds us and only grows deeper as we learn more. Furthermore, natural reality in its deepest and broadest scopes is so unimaginable to the human mind that even order-loving research scientists are carried into experiences of extreme wonder at the shocking Mystery of it all. So, the best of research science can be viewed as a religious practice and as including a religious perception in terms of the definition of religion that we have been elaborating. An openness to deep Awe before the truly Awesome has happened in the very heart of science.

In the more Arabian side of Western culture, literal understandings of Final Reality's "Speech" are being abandoned under a bombardment from the sciences. For example, a literal creation of the Earth in seven days has been given up by all but the most belligerent defenders of magically revealed knowledge. Western religious thinkers are learning how to distinguish mythic expressions of contemplative experience from literal statements of scientific fact. Such thinking sees the creation story not as a scientific theory or a rigid dogma but as a story about the goodness of the natural world and its Mysterious Source. The creation story is now widely seen as a poem about that first Word of the Infinite that brings nature and humanity to be. The response of humanity to this first Word is symbolized in the story of Adam and Eve naming the other creatures. The Infinite Silence "speaks" the existence of these creatures, but they do not have names until humanity names them. This I-Thou dialogue continues in the story of a "fall" in which illusions, forbidden by Reality, are eaten (taken in) by humanity. We can understand these stories as stories about our actual lives only if we understand these ancient stories as mythic tales rather than literal science or factual biography.

When such innovations in science and in religion are thoroughgoing, there is no conflict between science and religion. And it is also true that **Ordering the Absolute Wonder** and **Dialogue with the Infinite Communicator** are primal metaphors that can exist side by side as two complementary modes of accessing Final Reality. Our

Athenian and Jerusalem roots can mingle together as two perspectives on the same Final Reality. We can thank science for showing us some of the wonders of this "creation" as well as acknowledging the Mysteriousness of nature's Source. We can recast our Hebraic/Arabic inheritance with an understanding that "Yahweh," "Allah," or "God" mean nothing more or less than a devotional dialogue with Mysterious Reality. "The Mind of God" is likewise a poem pointing toward our awareness that any Intelligent Design of the cosmos is unknown and unknowable to our mind while nevertheless present to us as Awe in our enigmatic consciousness. Our personal experience of Reality and our I-Thou dialogue with Reality reveal to us an ever-expanding sense of amazing richness.

The combination of these two antiquities has taught us that Reality is experienced by human consciousness as an impenetrable Blackness. That Blackness may shine with Awesome Power and provide those who experience it with a Peace that passes all understanding, but encompassing that Blackness with the human mind does not occur. We can love that Blackness and even celebrate our perpetual ignorance, an ignorance that persists no matter how deep our actual experiences of Reality become. And this same love of Reality can also fully embrace the pursuit of knowledge, but with the awareness that our knowledge is forever partial.

In such an enriched and limited way, **Ordering the Absolute Wonder** remains for many European and American citizens today a viable and powerful primal metaphor for relating with Reality. But the viability and vitality of this metaphor is only operative if we remember that this exalted ordering is only a poem, a metaphor about a Mystery that the human mind never encompasses.

Europe and Sub-Asia

The metaphor of **Ordering the Absolute Wonder**, which found its first glory in ancient Greece, had little contact in ancient times with Sub-Asia's **Uniting with the Infinite Silence**. These two primal metaphors seem quite opposed to one another. Europe has emphasized the intelligence of the human mind and the intelligibility of Reality while Sub-Asia has emphasized states of consciousness that transcend the human mind, states of being that are entirely transrational. For Greece, truth is a discovery of the Mind of Reality through the openness and action of the inquiring human mind. For Sub-Asia truth is a participation in the transrational Unity of Reality, the mind being only a tool for describing this experience. Sub-Asia emphasizes the inward look of consciousness upon itself, and Europe emphasizes the outward look upon the objects of this world. The European primal metaphor has also encouraged an emphasis upon the inward magic of mind to comprehend outward things as well as its own mental functioning. Europe has spawned a love of wonder that witnesses to transrational experience, but this was seen to happen alongside its basic thrust for practical truth. Sub-Asia has not entirely neglected practical truth; but the truth that mattered was the result of an inward inquiry that finally dissolved inward and outward perceptions into an apprehension of the Oneness of what is Real. This relativized the whole of practical life. Reality and consciousness merged into a shining Blackness of Absolute Mystery and a Silence or Stillness of Absolute Peace. From this enduring and cleansing "place," the Sub-Asian "sage" returns to the practical realms of endeavor and lives there in a fresh and free manner.

As a member of the Arabian/Athenian synthesis, the Western "saint" never leaves the temporal world, but sees a sacredness that is filling all of nature because of its Source in a Final Sacred Mysteriousness. Every rock, river, mountain, and historical event becomes intimate Speech from this Vast and Shining Blackness. This vision inspires the inquiring mind to speak back with new creations of order.

Chapter 26

The Primal Metaphor of the Orient

Uniting with the Infinite Silence, **Dialogue with the Infinite Communicator**, and **Ordering the Absolute Wonder** are three unique and distinguishable primal ways of approaching Final Reality. There are others. The cultures of China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Laos, and a few other places share another unique primal metaphor. I will call this region “the Orient” and name this primal metaphor **Balance within the Inclusive Community**.

When we call all of Asia “the East,” we tend to overlook the vast difference between the primal metaphor of the Oriental cultures with the primal metaphor of Sub-Asian cultures (**Uniting with the Infinite Silence**). The primal metaphor of the Orient focuses on communal life, on the yin and yang of communal interactions, on saving face within the communal whole, on communal type relations with nature and the Final Community-ness. **Uniting with the Infinite Silence** focuses on transrational concentration upon states of consciousness within the solitary individual. Sub-Asian cultures tend to structure communal life to assist that solitary quest. In spite of strong community expressions, Sub-Asian persons are hermits of solitariness compared with life styles of the Orient.

The primal metaphor of Oriental cultures existed before the coming of Sub-Asian Buddhism to the Orient. Buddhism brought with it the Sub-Asian primal metaphor and affected the Orient greatly, but Oriental cultures did not give up their primal metaphor. Rather they adapted the practices of Buddhist meditation to their oriental cultures. So Buddhism in China, Japan, Tibet, etc. turned out quite different from the original Sub-Asian Buddhism. In order to explore the uniqueness of the Oriental primal metaphor, we need to examine the Confucian religious practices and especially the Taoist religious practices that preceded the arrival of Buddhism.

The religious practices of the ancient Orient focused on styling or balancing communal life in a way that fit the *WAY* that the Whole Community of Reality is balanced. For example, as I, a male human being, confront female humans, I am to style my life in a way that honors the truth that men and women share a common humanity. Similarly, humanity as a whole is part of a large community that includes nature. One cannot honor humanity without honoring nature, and one cannot honor nature without honoring humanity. We have here an inclusive perception of Reality in which all life is a polarity of *taking in* and *putting forth*. There is the *yin* of taking in and the *yang* of putting forth. Humanity can be seen as a type of yang to nature’s yin. And men can be seen as a type of yang to women’s yin. In a full honoring of the *WAY* of Reality male yang is not better than female yin. And women are not without their yang, and men are not without their yin. A rigid, hierarchical, or conflictual ordering of these relations is moderated by this yin-yang vision. Of course oriental cultures, as well as Western cultures, have managed to be quite patriarchal and nature-demeaning. But such behavior is a departure from the depth wisdom of the primal metaphor of oriental cultures.

Our contemplation of the following familiar icon may assist us to reflect further on the essence of the primal metaphor of the Orient.



The white color is the yin, and the darker (often red) color is the yang. We see a spot of yang on the yin side, and we see a spot of yin on the yang side. We see that the yin and yang are the same size and are contained within a circle of wholeness that is incomplete without both complementary parts. One cannot be a yang quality in defeat of the yin quality, for the yin quality is part of the larger whole within which the yang exists. Each yang and yin exist together and nowhere else.

The stylistic subtlety of this depth awareness is manifest in the etiquette practice known as “saving face.” In order for my own honor to be saved, I need to include a saving of the honor of the other in my actions. We can also observe the power of this ancient metaphor in the secular and often anti-religious quality of Mao’s communist thought. Mao’s strategic thinking differed from Western communism by beginning with an appreciation of the whole situation of the society. Then he sought to see what he called the contradiction within that whole. He sought to know what two main forces were operative and which side of that polarity needed to be advanced next. We can guess that some of the unique power of Maoist thought reflects ancient Taoist wisdom.

In the primal metaphor of the Orient, the community of nature is present within the community of society, and the community of society is present within the community of nature. This whole drama is my being. I find my full truth only by styling my living to reflect this primal communal polarity. We can see an obvious relevance for our current ecological challenges. Instead of ruling nature, contemporary society might move toward honoring nature as an equally important partner.

Taoism carries this manner of visualizing into its perception of Final Reality. The Infinite WAY, the Wholeness within which all parts cohere, is called the “*Tao*.” The Tao is the WAY Reality operates. Here is part of a poem about this Infinite WAY.

Being and non-being create each other.
Difficult and easy support each other.
Long and short define each other.
High and low depend on each other.
Before and after follow each other.²

The following portion of a poem by Chaung Tzu indicates that the Tao is not a set of moral principles or metaphysical ideas, but a word of devotion that points to the same basic experience of Final Reality that other cultures have pointed to with Allah, Yahweh, Brahman, and so on. In all these cases, Final Reality is an awesome shock or break with human beings’ more ordinary sense of reality.

Tao is beyond words
And beyond things.
It is not expressed

² Michell, Stephen; *Tao te Ching: A New English Translation* (New York: 1988, Harper Perennial) page 2

Either in word or in silence.
Where there is no longer word or silence
Tao is apprehended.³

Such poems have to be read a few times before the truth of their transrational logic breaks through. This Oriental sense of the transrational mysteriousness of Final Reality overlaps with the sense of transrational mysteriousness emphasized in Sub-Asia's **Uniting with the Infinite Silence**. Both the Oriental and Sub-Asian primal metaphors challenge those of us who are embedded in the Arabian and Greek primal metaphors. Transrational consciousness has not been easy to understand or accept as valid by the more rational emphasis present in the Greek primal metaphor, **Ordering the Absolute Wonder**. Similarly Arabia's hearing the Word of Majestic Reality and speaking back is a different emphasis than we find in the Orient or Sub-Asia. Let us examine these comparisons more fully.

The Orient and Sub-Asia

Balance within the Inclusive Community differs from **Unity with the Infinite Silence** in this way: the Orient focuses on transrational communal balancing and Sub-Asia focuses on transrational solitary inquiry. Buddhism changed significantly when it migrated to the Orient. It turned from being a practice primarily for solitary monks and nuns into a religious practice for the whole people. In the Oriental context Buddhism became an element of the whole culture. It melded with Taoist insight and Confucian practicality. In Tibet the central authority of the entire political realm was centered in a head figure who was selected in early childhood and spent his life with monks who trained him for this job.

Nothing like this took place in India, where Buddhism remained a solitary practice alongside various forms of Hinduism and other religious practices. In Sub-Asia, **Uniting with the Infinite Silence** prevailed as the basic mode of Buddhist practice. Indian Hinduism was influenced by Buddhism, but Hinduism remained a separate spectrum of practices. The overall culture simply accepted Buddhism as one more practice within this loose mixture of religious possibilities. Though village life everywhere is deeply communal, in Sub-Asian religious practice, the solitary person and his or her personal journey remained the emphasis.

But in China, Taoist and Confucian practices melded with Buddhist practices. Before the advent of modern communism, the typical Chinese person practiced all three religions. We can assume that Buddhism became a sort of "Yang" to the "Yin" of Taoist and Confucian practices that preceded Buddhism's entry into China.

Similar fusions took place in other Oriental places. For example, Japanese culture melded Buddhism with its ancient Shinto heritage as well as the Taoist and Confucian qualities it had already absorbed. Zen Buddhism might be described as a Shinto, Taoist Buddhism. One of the gifts of the Oriental primal metaphor, **Balance within the Inclusive Community**, is its capacity to make all things whole in some appropriately balanced way.

The Orient and Greece

The Greek primal metaphor, **Ordering the Absolute Wonder**, shares with the Oriental metaphor an emphasis on social responsibility. For example, both Plato and Aristotle were keenly concerned with social ethics. But the Greek emphasis had to do with idealistic designs and with living from comprehended truth and principles.

³ Merton, Thomas, *The Way of Chung Tzu* (New York: 1969, New Directions) page 152

Balancing the inseparable parts of a whole society was not the essence of the Greek style. Aristotle's finding a middle way between extremes is something different from yin and yang. Plato's finding roles for all types of people in an overall ideal society is also something different from Oriental balance. Instead of an emphasis on complementary balancing, the ways of Greece and Rome tended to be highly conflictual – doing away with established errors and conquering less wise cultures. Quite early in the story of Greek culture, Alexander the Great took Greek truth to “all the world” through military conquest. Another example of this more conflictual style is the vigorous intellectual conflicts among Christians and between Christians, Jews and Muslims. These conflicts too often took on needlessly violent forms.

The Orient also makes social changes, has conflicts, and wages wars, but a different style of conflict resolution flows from their primal metaphor. There is a hope or ideal of “saving the face” of an opponent and thereby making the opponent a workable part of the concluding whole. As we in the postmodern West have become more clear about the limits of rationally formulated truth and about the ambiguity of all decision-making, we have experienced more openness to the wisdom of the Orient.

The Orient and Arabia

The Arabian primal metaphor, **Dialogue with the Infinite Communicator**, shares with the Oriental metaphor an emphasis on social responsibility and communal life. The Arabian We-Thou dialogue with Final Reality was spelled out as a People of God living in history in dialogue with the Final Actor of history. This was a strong emphasis on community, in the sense of a peoplehood, a We-response to the Whole of history. This People of God, in their better moments, saw themselves as being true to themselves in order to lead all humanity in being true to themselves. They saw themselves as formulating a realism and justice on behalf of all. This was a calling from the Final Majesty that they encountered in the events of history.

This emphasis on time and history differs from the Oriental emphasis on balanced spatial relations among the parts of a society. It is perhaps fair to say that the descendants of the Arabian metaphor have felt more congenial with the solitary mysticism of Sub-Asia than with the strange societal face-saving and peacemaking of the Orient. The artistic delicateness, the subtle teachings, the enigmatic deliberating has seemed off-putting to those who feel called to preach the searing Word to a sleeping world in order to open them to take on a new life.

Nevertheless, as postmodern Christians, Jews, and Muslims become more clear about the ambiguities of all decision-making and the need for flexibility in the application of their inherited laws, mores, and principles, the Oriental style attracts them. Members of European and Arabian originated cultures can begin to see the relevance of the Orient's potential for flexibility within overarching commitments to the whole realities in which we all live. At the same time, the descendants of the Arabian primal metaphor also bring their gift of aggressive truth-telling to whatever stodginess may be present in the over-politeness of the Orient. We might view Mao as an example of embracing some of the best, as well as the worst, of the European and Arabian experience and introducing it into China.

Chapter 27

The Primal Metaphor of Sub-Saharan Africa

Africa is the birthplace of our species. The Primal Metaphor of Sub-Saharan Africa is the oldest of the six. It has to do with the motions of the body and the motions of the inner being. It has to do with drumbeats and dances. It has to do with the primary energies of nature, with the way an antelope moves or a lion moves or an elephant moves or a human moves.

Intimacy with the Infinite Communicator and **Ordering the Absolute Wonder** are the primal metaphors that have characterized the cultures we often call the West. **Uniting with the Infinite Silence** and **Balance within the Inclusive Community** are the primal metaphors that have characterized the cultures we often call the East. The cultures of Sub-Saharan Africa are clearly something else, driven by a quite different primal metaphor. I will name this primal metaphor **Attunement with the Final Rhythm**.

The contrast of the primal metaphor of Sub-Saharan Africa with the above four is stark. A Greece-influenced Europe was preoccupied with the intelligibility of Final Reality; Arabia was preoccupied with a We-Thou dialogue with Final Reality, Sub-Asia with states of consciousness; the Orient with communal balancing. Sub-Saharan Africa was preoccupied with whole body vitality and with the Final Vitality to which our bodies can be attuned. All five of these preoccupations exist in some measure in all cultures, but the primal metaphorical material in each of these five sets of human cultures employs a different basic preoccupation.

The Christian West painted halos around the heads of its saintly exemplars. If Africa were to indicate saintliness with a halo, it would have to be painted around the entire body. The movement of limbs, the torso, the head, the blood, the breath, the sensations, the emotions, all these moving parts and the interactions between them constitute the "place" of human authenticity. In this primal African sensibility, Final Reality is raw movement, raw vitality. Rhythm, the rhythms expressed in drumbeats, are a religious method for awakening this whole body vitality and enabling a push toward an ecstatic union with the Inclusive Vitality of the cosmos. If the French philosopher Descartes could say, "I think, therefore I am," a reflective African shaman might say, "I dance, thereby I be."

Some of the oldest known paintings of humanity appear in French caves. In spite of their European location, those paintings probably reflect the ancient Prime Metaphor of Africa. On the uneven walls of one cave, expressively painted animals seem to move. Two bison fight each other. The place is almost alive with motion. This cave was not where people lived. It was a place for ritual. It breathes the Awe of a place of worship. It may give us a hint of 30,000-year-old Africa.

We can further understand the essence of the Sub-Saharan African Primal Metaphor by comparing it with the other four primal metaphors already described.

Africa and Sub-Asia

Attunement with the Final Rhythm and **Uniting with the Infinite Silence** have an underlying compatibility with one another. Both seek ecstasy beyond the mind, beyond the body, a trans-body, trans-mind union with what is fully Real. "Ecstasy," in the sense meant here, is not a jazzing up of ordinary life. It simply means an out-of-body type of awareness and also an out-of-mind type of awareness. Africa and Sub-Asia both see the practical usefulness of the mind, but view Final Reality as more irrational

than rational, more beyond comprehension than intelligible, more an inward realization than a practical result, more a here and now experience than a program for living.

The noisiness of African music and the stillness of Sub-Asian meditation allude to the contrast between these primal metaphors. Sub-Asia has a reserve that is wild underneath, and Africa has a wildness up front and overt. Yet if we contemplate deeply the experience of African ecstatic dancing, we can discern a stillness about it. And if Sub-Asian dance dramatizes stillness, it also dances that stillness with an intriguing vitality. If we contemplate deeply the experience of Sub-Asian meditation, we can discern a wildness, an *Emptiness Dancing* as the writer Adyashanti titles one of his books.

Africa and Europe

Attunement with the Final Rhythm and **Ordering the Absolute Wonder** are Primal metaphors that are almost opposite to each another. Hellenized Europe views the body in the context of the mind. Sub-Saharan Africa views the mind in the context of the body. Europe pushes the limits of the mind to find Final Reality. Africa pushes the limits of the body to find Final Reality. It is difficult to see that the same Mysterious Wonderfulness is found in both cases. Africa returns from Wonder to a more realistically active dance of living. Europe returns from Wonder to a more realistic intelligence for living.

But in real life, the body and the mind are not separate; they are two parts of one wondrous being. The Africans that Americans imported as slaves were held in contempt – their culture seen as primitive, naive, worthless. Nevertheless, it has happened that the US slave culture integrated Protestant Christianity and African culture into a musical explosion that has restored the rhythms of the body to an arid over-mental Western culture. Millions of European Americas have been healed in the depths of their body/spirit by the cultural gifts imported with these slaves. Similar gifts made their way into Europe.

The designs of the mind have been altered by experiences of and reflection upon the rhythms of the body. And the rhythms of Western experience have been given expression by those who were forced to feel them most deeply. These experiences have forced many descendants of the Greek-influenced primal metaphor to take the Primal Metaphor of Sub-Saharan Africa seriously. Many Westerners now know that life is more than the life of the mind and that there are other-than-Western ways of accessing that profound “I Am” life.

Africa and Arabia

Attunement with the Final Rhythm and the Arabian primal metaphor, **Intimacy with the Infinite Communicator**, share a sense of the wildness of human life and the ultimate wildness of Final Reality. Unlike the Greek overemphasis on the mind, **Intimacy with the Infinite Communicator** is more preoccupied with will and freedom than with rationally formulated truth. This Arabian Infinite Communication is a personal address, aimed at awakening the heart with horror, repentance, love, and commitment. The voice of the human speaker can become the Communication of the Infinite when that Onrushing Reality amplifies the human voice.

In the Protestantism of Luther and even more so in the first and second Great-Awakenings of Protestantism in the Americas we can see a recovery of this Arabian voicing. If with emotionally grounded sensibilities, we read aloud the poetry of the Genesis stories, the Psalms, and the Prophets, we sense this quality of strong speech characteristic of the Arabian primal metaphor. The African slave communities of the

Americas were able to resonate with the emotional qualities of this strong speech in Evangelical Protestantism. They could feel the emotional depths of their African rhythms being awakened. They were able to put their Christian teachings into rhythmic songs. A deep integration of these two quite different primal metaphors took place. Perhaps the deepest interaction has been the identification of the sufferings of slavery with the suffering servant of Hebrew culture and the cross in Christian practice.

Similar experiences have happened in other ways in other parts of the world. I have not studied the story of the spread of Arabian Islam into parts of sub-Saharan Africa, but there is surely wisdom to be learned about both primal metaphors in that story.

My point in this brief overview is that the African primal metaphor has not been extinguished by the horrific mistreatment of African peoples. Rather it has resisted death and given life to all of its conquering peoples. Africa was the home of a primal metaphor that has standing with all the others. Africa was not only the birthplace of the human species; Africa has preserved and brought to intricate sophistication the cultural childhood of us all. As the various parts of humanity migrated out of Africa, we began to specialize in various aspects of our humanity and reshape our approaches to Final Reality. In doing so, our African origins were obscured. The whole-body vitality of Africa and its heartbeat of sensual and emotional rhythms is an ancient root that each of the other primal metaphors has in some measure carried along, but also in some measure lost. It is important for our entire human authenticity that humanity recovers the African treasure.

Africa and the Orient

The Orient has had less interchange with African energies than the other cultures described above. Nevertheless, the Orient carries with it an emphasis on intimate communal life that we also find in the African cultures. The family life, the village life, the group music of the Orient carries an echo of something also African. Both primal metaphors support the emphasis that people reach Spirit maturity together, not as hermits.

But there is also a vast difference between the qualities of communal life in African with that of the Orient. **Balance within Inclusive Community** is more practical and reserved than the wildness of African communal dancing and drumming and expressive living. **Attunement with the Final Rhythm** manifests a more open expressiveness of feelings and sensations, ecstasies, and rages. The Orient is more polite, more subtle and reserved, in the expression of its harsh and delicate feelings.

Nevertheless, both cultural groups seek a type of obedience to the way life is. African Attunement is an obedience to the Rhythm of the cosmos. Oriental balancing is an obedience to the Way Final Reality is balanced. Both of these modes of obedience are creative means of being communally workable societies. In each of these approaches to Final Reality, humans are seeking to find a personal and social peace, contentment, and happiness that heal the horrific perversions that are also found in all human societies.

Chapter 28

The Primal Metaphor of Native America

Many waves of people migrated to the Americas from the Orient. These migrations began 30,000 years ago or more. These earliest peoples were tribal nomads who lived before the practice of agriculture or the dawn of hierarchical civilizations. When Europeans arrived in the Americas many Native American groups were still living as nomadic tribes. Others were living in agricultural but tribal federations. The mode of hierarchical civilization had also been imported to the Americas. We don't know exactly when or how, but we do know that highly developed hierarchical civilizations existed during the last 2000 years. We know some of their names: Olmec, Mayan, Toltec, Aztec, and Inca.

We might ask if there was a single Primal Metaphor at the root of all these Native American societies. The differences between the nomadic tribes and the civilizations were great. Can we see a common metaphor beneath all this diversity? And if there is such a primal metaphor undergirding all of these Native American societies, is it unique or is it a variation on the Oriental metaphor? Or was a unique primal metaphor forced to leave Oriental geography and move to the Americas?

These questions have never been entirely answered for me. Native American societies do seem to lean more toward the qualities found in the Orient than toward any of the other primal metaphors. But the American societies are also different from China and Japan – more different than China and Japan are from each other. If the Native American primal metaphor is rooted in the same soil as the Oriental metaphor, it is a very old root with quite different leaves and branches.

Let us look first at an interesting myth that was prominent in mid-American civilizations. This will give us some impressions to work with toward answering these still unanswered questions. The story of Quetzalcoatl is the story of a fictitious animal that is both bird and snake. The Quetzal bird is a very beautiful bird with a long green tail. Coatl is the snake half of this mythic creature. The human society and its heroes are identified with this creature. One of the root meanings of this myth is that authentic life is a union of sky and Earth, of air and land, of flight and earthiness. We might view this as reflection of the sort of yin/yang “Balance” we encounter in the Orient.

Another interesting clue is the custom present in many of these societies of punctuating the calendar of their lives with wild celebrations. We have heard these celebrations called “fiestas” or “powwows.” In these societies the calendar of living holds a balance between carefully designed social patterns that are punctuated by celebrations that touch the chaos out of which these designs have been built, the chaos to which designs return. The typical drumbeat at a North American tribal powwow is another clue. Often we hear a heavy beat followed by lighter beats and this pattern is repeated monotonously. Two monotonous rhythms happen, the heavy beat rhythm and the lighter beat rhythm. This monotony eventually feels ecstatic. It reminds us of the monotony of the rise and fall of the sun, the flow of the seasons, the movement of the stars. Attention was paid in the early cultures of the Americas to all these flows of time. The social life was built upon a design of time. Here is my impression of the feel of these cultures: ric rac ric rac ric rac ric rac FIESTA ric rac ric rac ric rac ric rac FIESTA ric rac ric rac ric rac ric rac ric rac FIESTA ric rac ric rac ric rac ric rac ric rac FIESTA. The ric rac part of the calendar was where social order and its needful work got done, and then in FIESTA the entire social order was almost dismantled for an assigned time period. Classes, sexual order, various laws, were set-aside for a time. This pattern interests me as a ritualization of the nature of human society – a creation that could be different, a

useful order placed over the wildness of nature, an order not to be mistaken for the full Order of existence.

Native American sand paintings also express this theme. Elaborate designs are built on the ground out of various colors of sand, then after a short period of participation in the healing intent of such a design, the sands are scattered – returned to an original chaos. When we look deeply at such details as these, we also see a strong emphasis on communal life. We see this precious insight about communal life: the design of society is to be a healing presence; it is made by human hands; it is vulnerable to return to the original wildness. And there is respect for this original, chaotic wildness; it needs to be designed into our communal life and participated in as part of the Grand Design that nurtures us at all times.

I am going to name the Primal Metaphor of these Native American cultures **Designing the Unstoppable Flow**.

Native America and the Orient

The Native American primal metaphor is probably a close relative of the Oriental metaphor **Balance within the Inclusive Community**, but the common ancestor of these two primal metaphors predates the mystical sophistication of Taoism, Confucian styles, and Buddhist enrichments. In Native America we are tasting something more ancient. And the Native American primal metaphor provides us with an opportunity to view the historical depths of a primal metaphor and watch it change from its pre-agricultural period, its pre-civilizational period, its early civilizational period, and its continuing dialogue with modern expressions of all the other primal metaphors. If we attend a Native American powwow, sit in a sweat lodge with a Native American teacher, view Native American art, go on a vision quest, wander through the Mexican archeological museum, admire Inca stone work, or whatever we might do, we can amplify our wonder by meditating on the antiquity of this quest for profound realization. We can imagine its origins in ancient Asia and its existence among those first migrating peoples to the unfamiliar lushness of the Americas.

Native America and Europe

Since the arrival of European people to the Americas, a deep but tragic dialogue has taken place between these two primal metaphors, **Ordering the Absolute Wonder** and **Designing the Unstoppable Flow**. The descendants of Europe have frequently been charmed by the natural connectedness and communal graciousness of Native American people. European descendants have also been surprised at the passion with which Native American cultures have fought to preserve their culture and their communal ways of living. Native Americans can be very strong individuals – with strength rooted in and dedicated to healing ways that are communally manifest. Europeans are individualistic by comparison, quite alien to this Native American communal richness. Early Europeans misunderstood how deep was their cultural shock, how challenged they were by Native American cultures. Not all, but most of them turned their opportunity to learn something about being human into an attitude of contempt and genocide.

Both “Ordering and “Designing” imply a use of the mind, but Native American designing is about designing communal life amidst the flow of time in order to access the healing depths of a mysterious nature within which humans are living members. The European primal preoccupation is more about giving to the individual knower ways of finding intelligibility in order to live life under the guidance of such truth. This can mean a humbling before the Mystery of Life that is continually teaching us new

wisdom, but it can also mean imposing current doctrine upon nature and ourselves and then developing defensive measures to protect our current state of "truth." These more defensive forms of the European culture result in contempt for those who do not share these particular "certainties." In the actual historical encounter with Native Americans, some Europeans were willing to learn from these people. But far more Europeans felt that they needed to teach Native Americans European wisdom. Europeans were surprised at the resiliency of Native American communal life, the confidence they had in the wholesomeness of their ways of life, the willingness they had to teach these strange Europeans who were obviously ignorant of the wisdom of the Americas. But few Europeans were able to see the limitations of their stubborn individualism and thereby open themselves fully to the communal treasures within Native American heritage. This was tragic, but perhaps predictable, for these primal metaphors are quite different and integrating the wisdom of these two approaches to living is still far from complete.

Native America and Arabia

The Arabian primal metaphor, **Intimacy with the Eternal Communicator**, has, like the Native American metaphor, a strong communal emphasis; seeing "We," the people of God, in a vast dialogue through history with the God who rules history. But this communal emphasis is quite different from the Native American communal emphasis. The People of God are a vanguard experiment in realism and justice on behalf of all of humankind. Native American community is not a vanguard mission, but a stable place of residence on a piece of "sacred" Earth. This community includes all the animals and plants that comprise the wider community in which these humans reside. When Native Americans speak of "all my relations," they mean more than grandmothers, uncles, and cousins. They include the animals, the plants, even the mountains. And the Native American community is designed as a healing fabric for humans and their living companions of other species. The Arabian "People of God" type of community is more interested in history and in historical progress toward a destination of deeper union with the Final Reality.

Yet these two types of communal emphasis (at their best) do see a common enemy in individualism, egoism, crass nationalism, crass humanism, crass rationalism. In our times of intense ecological challenge, many of those who are committed to being the People of God understand that a true union with Final Reality includes a union with nature and a commitment to build societies that preserve and enrich the natural habitat. Indeed, such descendants of the Arabian primal metaphor can include in their vision of "Union with Reality" a union with geographical places that includes all the plants and animals and humans who dwell there. Such local, grounded, communal living can be embraced as an aspect of the "Kingdom of God" toward which humanity needs to move. This vision opens Western Christians, Jews, and Muslims to Native American wisdom as well as to some forgotten elements in the life of ancient Israel. The ancient scriptures of Israel are filled with deep connections with nature and a love of natural place.

Also, a significant number of Native American people have disentangled the essence of Christianity from the oppressive features that most Christian adherents foisted upon them. They are willing to integrate some elements of this historical realism with the Great Spirit within nature. So, some integration of the wisdom based on these two primal metaphors has taken place.

Native America and Sub-Asia

Native American history has had little dialogue with Sub-Asia. America's original peoples left Asia before the expansion of Buddhism reached the Orient. While there can be intense, solitary, mystic feelings among Native American peoples, this is not the core emphasis of their primal metaphor. Native Americas have emphasized the communal rather than solitary singularity. Sub-Asia's **Unity with the Infinite Silence** is a solitary emphasis before it is a communal one. The communal life of Sub-Asia is patterned to enable solitary realization rather than the other way around. For Native America the communal is primary; the communal enriches the solitary. Though both communal and solitary are present in all cultures, the emphasis of these two primal metaphors is almost opposite.

Native America and Africa

Native American history has also had little dialogue with Sub-Saharan Africa. Their first encounters with the African primal metaphor began with the African slaves brought by the Europeans. **Attunement with the Final Rhythm** and **Designing the Unstoppable Flow** are primal metaphors that do not easily attract each other. Each manifests wildness, but the wildness is different. The Native American drum develops a monotony punctuated by shouts and cries of liberation from this monotony. The African drum is complex, a thousand different heartbeats, emotional feelings, all teaming together in rich textures that can hardly ever be described as monotonous. Native American wildness is part of a communal regularity and reserve and courage punctuated by explosive energies appropriately placed in the ongoing communal schedule. African wildness is an exploration of the always-present vitalities of singular persons, communities, and natural surroundings. African community is rooted in joining the rhythms of these vitalities, rather than constructing a detailed, disciplined design.

Yet beneath these differences there is a common connection with nature, with sensations, with animal forms of consciousness, with the ongoing irrationality of Final Reality. Both Native American communal-nature designing and African natural vitalities can be seen as joined in a common challenge to any overemphasis on intelligibility, inflexible social order, or dogma that has lost contact with the Earth and our rich sensations, vitalities, and feelings that connect us to one another and to the Mysterious Overall that is beamed to us through the natural geography in which we are embedded.

Chapter 29

Spirit Completeness Beyond all Metaphors

So what does all this cultural analysis mean for our understanding of religion? First of all, it dramatizes that no religion or religious culture dropped down from the realm of Final Truth. No primal metaphor is the right one or the best one. All primal metaphors and all the religions they have spawned or will spawn are creations of human beings. Further creation is plausible. Further recognition of the gifts and the limits of each of these primal metaphors is possible. Further developments and elaboration within each of the primal metaphor zones of experience can happen.

Since no existing primal metaphor is the complete one, shall we invent something that includes the wisdom of all of these primal metaphors? Shall we invent a primal metaphor that works better and more inclusively than all of these? Not so fast! We need to recognize that each of these primal metaphors was developed and explored by millions of people over thousands of years. It is arrogant in the extreme to assume any of us has the personal depth even to understand the profundity of each of these metaphors much less the capacity to invent something that includes or excels them all.

But we can reflect on how the dialogue between these six zones of experience can take us where no people have gone before. We can intuit that there exists a profound humanness that underlies all of these metaphors and zones of culture. We can experience the joy of discovery as we dialogue deeply across the boundaries of these zones of religious creation and culture building.

I have heard people say that the cultural divisions on our planet are so deep that they can never be fully breached. I certainly agree that these divisions are deep. However, I have been encouraged by a number of experiences that make me more hopeful about breaching these differences than the more common view suggests. Here is one of those experiences:

I was teaching an eight-week, residential, religious program in Australia in which there were six Aborigine people from a traditional outback village. These people had learned English and other things from a Presbyterian mission, but their ancient culture was still very much in evidence. I am guessing that their primal metaphor is a form of the Sub-Saharan African metaphor that their ancestors had taken to Australia at least 12,000 years ago in a pre-civilization form, even a pre-agricultural form. This culture is very different from my own. At first I found many of their comments cryptic. Occasionally, it dawned on me what some of their strange talk meant. I was not sure that anything I was saying was getting through to them. Then one morning after I had given a talk on "The Land of Mystery," a tall, slender, very dark-skinned Aborigine man came to me and made this striking and memorable statement: "When you give a talk like that, I can hear you in my own stories." I had no idea what his stories were, but as I looked him in the eyes I knew that we had communicated.

This and a few other such experiences have convinced me that all these truly vast cultural boundaries can be crossed, even at the most profound levels – perhaps especially at the most profound levels. We live in an interreligious and intercultural era. We are all already hybrids. And we can all become wiser about our own profound humanness, as we listen ever more deeply across these cultural boundaries.

Here is the new vision that is happening to many of us today: that there is a profound humanness that is common to all humans, whatever their culture or their religion. We now realize ever more clearly these important awarenesses: (1) All our religions are human creations that are limited, and yet reach out for the same profound humanness. (2) All our primal metaphors upon which our religions are built are limited and yet are created by humans seeking to share among one another the same

profound humanness. (3) All the cultural formations and religions rooted in these primal metaphors are limited, partial, incomplete, yet each of these heritages of human invention reflects in its own way a considerable measure of the profound humanness that we all share.

Three Approaches to Truth and Six Basic Cultural Areas

In Part One of this book, we explored how there are three basic approaches to truth: the *It-approach* or scientific approach, the *I-approach* or contemplative approach, and two *We-approaches*, the intimacy approach and the commonality approach. All six of these major cultural areas use all three approaches to truth. And every primal metaphor is part of that culture's "I" approach to truth, part of the reflection upon our inner experiences of being human.

Nevertheless, another way to picture how these six primal metaphors differ is to notice how each primal metaphor leans toward one of the three approaches to truth. Here is a chart that suggests what those leanings seem to be:

Area	Primal Metaphor	Approach to Truth Lean
Sub-Asia–	Uniting with the Infinite Silence	– contemplative approach
Arabia–	Intimacy with the Eternal Communicator	– intimacy approach
Europe–	Ordering the Absolute Wonder	– scientific approach
The Orient–	Balance within the Master Community	– commonality approach
Sub-Saharan Africa–	Attunement with the Final Rhythm	– intimacy approach
Native America–	Designing the Unstoppable Flow	–commonality approach

What does this tell us about these societies? Here are some suggestions:

The complexity of the Chinese culture may be explored with such insights as these: the Confucius base of that culture emphasizes the commonality approach. Taoism provided some emphasis on the intimacy approach, which was well combined with the commonality approach. Buddhism, arriving from Sub-Asia, provided a deepening of the contemplative approach. The scientific approach was not absent in classical China, but it was profoundly strengthened by the impact of the Maoist revolution that brought significant aspects of European thought. All these enrichments have made China a very strong culture. If Chinese creativity brings all these approaches to truth together in a balanced mix, this culture will be even stronger.

Europe is a blend of the classical Greek structures of thought and Arabian influences that arrived through the spread of Christianity and Judaism and the fight with Islamic cultures. This means a strong emphasis on the scientific approach, enriched by the intimacy approach. The contemplative approach is most needed by European cultures and this approach to truth is now being added through strong encounters with and immigration of citizens, teachers, and teachings from Sub Asia. Most missing in European cultures is the commonality approach to truth emphasized in the Orient and by Native American cultures.

North America, as well as Central and South America, are now basically European cultures, but they have been enriched by the Native American emphasis on commonality. This gift can be much more fully adopted, especially in North America where it has been pushed onto reservations. In Central and South America, that Native American commonality emphasis has impacted religious, family, and neighborhood life, but it is still held in a second-place status. Further enrichment of all the American cultures from the Native American commonality emphasis is needed. Enrichments from the Oriental form of commonality would also be strengthening. American

cultures, more fully than European cultures, have received the gifts of the African emotional and body movement intimacy emphasis.

These ongoing enrichments taking place among the world cultures illustrate the importance of interreligious learning, dialogue, and cooperative mission to their respective cultures.

Concluding Comments on Primal Metaphor Research.

Everything said so far on this topic could be viewed as a mere scratch on the rock of the understandings that we deeply need. A lifelong study of primal metaphor insights could be outlined for each geographical area of the planet. And such study could be fine tuned for specific places – that is, Germanic Europe is different from Mediterranean Europe. Mississippi is different from New England. And strongly Native American Bolivia is different from almost every other place.

All six primal metaphors and all three approaches to truth need to be distinguished and carefully taught across the world in secondary and university classrooms as well as religious, civic, and business associations. Culture is not simply given from the past: it is also created in the present. And the unavoidable future of intercultural mixing across the planet is challenging every cultural enclave to open up hearts and minds to the enrichments of our entire planet-wide human experience.