

## Deity, Mysterium Tremendum and the Omega of Gender

Egyptian stele Beth Shean (1300 BC)  
Holy Land

### The Literary Life of Yahweh.

The monotheist view is that God is revealed in history. That from some 'benighted' pagan beginnings, Abraham strode off in the night to experience a spermatogenic God for whom his seed would be dust under the stars. He was a God of sperm (p 459).

However the God of the matriarchs and patriarchs was not a single entity, but a male-female plurality. The fact that this God was an 'Elohim (God in the plural) including the male Almighty ('El sadday) and the primordial Female 'the deep' and 'the breasts and womb' is glossed away almost as soon as Genesis one and the image of male and female created in God's likeness is revealed (p 459). There is of course a political reason for this, in the fall of the Northern ('Elohistic) kingdom and the subsequent absorption of the northern texts into the Southern (Yahwistic) tradition of Judea.



However one has to concede in viewing the mythological epoch that the progenitor of the Biblical God is a pantheon, in the manner of old Canaanite El, Athirat the astral and particularly lunar deities and even Tiamat of the deep. It is these deities and not the mysterious God of the tetragrammaton which was worshipped by the tribes for many long centuries before the new cult of Moses emerged from the dislocations of the Exodus (p 470). Even afterward the Host of Heaven was commonly worshipped along with the Ba'alim, and Yahweh himself was associated with his consort Asherah and sometimes Anath also (p 491). One also has to concede that it was in the earliest mythical phase stemming from Eden itself and later Abraham's desert wanderings that God was closest and most personal in 'his' relations with humanity and that apart from a brief intimacy with Moses and a few revisitations to Elijah and the prophets God has receded from humanity even as 'he' has become monotheistic.

God is supposed to have revealed himself in history in a more cryptic and transcendental form to Moses as the 'Lord God' Yahweh Adonai - the nameless Ehyer Asherah Ehyeh 'I am that I am' (p 470), deemed by this abstraction to be the true expression of the Godhead, despite the prophetic tradition paradoxically moving ever further from intimacy with God. This God is then portrayed as God acting to realize himself in history - the True Creator of the universe - whose very word is divine law - also the God of covenant with his people in the manner of a 'demiurge', or legislator.

One has to remark at his point, why did God choose this time and place to reveal this? Why then and not now in the scientific age of nuclear and genetic holocaust? Why not from the very beginning, as the shamanism and fertility traditions attest?

*How odd of God to choose Hebrews!*

What kind of a universe is this, if cosmic symmetry-breaking leads to the chosen race

of Yahweh? What does it mean for the Lord of the universe to personally order the unruly tribes of the Exodus to lay waste to the land of milk and honey of Canaan? And to do this as the very act of 'his' self-manifestation? His greatest act? Would the Lord of the Universe really cast out Adam and punish Eve (p 731) for eating the knowledge of opposites? Why take away the fruit of the Tree of Life, if you are the lord of immortal life? The Gnostics had a point here when they said the Lord God was a demiurge. He was, as declared right there in Eden.

The truth of God in history is revealed very differently in the turbulent and very violent times of the exodus, from the slaughter by the Levites of the 3000 who worshipped the golden calf by Sinai, to the severe runnings through over sex at Ba'al Peor and the eventual death of Moses himself, 'apparently' at the hands of God, for not dedicating the springs of the Goddess at Kadesh in his name (p 474). This violence continues in the military Lord of Hosts who declares genocide on the nations (p 661) in giving the Hebrews the 'land of milk and honey' of the agrarian Queen of Heaven in Canaan. These events show we are still in a phase of primitive religion full of emotion and personal violence rather than philosophical or mystical insight.

Jewish people also justify the emergence of the Hebrew God by associating this process with the birth of an egalitarian democratic tribal consciousness (Gottwald), which is throughout the Bible somewhat suspicious of privilege and aristocracy, and which extols the ideals (of a spiritual 'elect') as 'equals' in the sight of a peerless abstract God of creation, who cannot be seen, touched or defined in any image or idea. Indeed he must not be made in any graven image (p 473), under pain of death.



Ancient Sinaitic script "Ba'alat" - Serabit el-Khadem (Pritchard 84, Flinders Petrie)

However Yahweh was, throughout the Old Testament, a jealous God (p 474) who urged his followers to destroy the nations and their own womenfolk if they strayed and who later at the hands of Hezekiah and Josiah annihilated his beloved consort Asherah who was burned among the ashes of her priests and priestesses on their altars (p 497).

Despite these all too human flaws, as a political and genealogical projection of culture, Yah whose Levite priests wore the crescent moon (p 470), was a truly exceptional God. He became the first truly literary God. In a sense the creation of Yahweh was a cultural revolution as profound as the information revolution today. As Marshall McLuhan said "The medium is the message," for Yahweh is very much the soul product of the Hebrew literary revolution. This revolution came as language moved from the pictographic to the phonetic through the Phoenician. Hebrew itself thus documents one of the earliest full religious literary traditions and for this reason has become our most poetic and fully-fledged cultural description of deity.

"No human character could be so fully without a past and still be human, yet we may see that by giving this inhuman character words to speak in human language and deeds to do in interaction with human beings, the writers of the Bible have created a new literary possibility. ... Once we realize God is dependent on human beings in this way, we may appreciate why, for him, the quest for a self-image is not an idle and

optional, but the sole and indispensable tool of this self-understanding. ... God, as the Bible begins is as yet unmade by any history and is therefore less than evident to himself. Though he is uniquely, a protagonist who gives life to his antagonist [humanity], he is also uniquely a protagonist who receives his life story from his antagonist.” (Miles 89)

Gezeh calendar (c925BC) (Pritchard 84)  
Student practising Hebrew

One of the key reasons for the awesome historical power of the Bible is the fact that it stands as a core literary cosmology in human development. There are of course many wonderful older detailed literary works such as the poetic courtship of Inanna (p 174), the lament for Dumuzi, the fall of Ur, and the epic of Gilgamesh, but the era of hieroglyphic and even cuneiform writing did not provide for the easy dissemination of literary works as complex as the Pentateuch to wider audiences outside high temple precincts. Religious expression thus had more of a cultic and even elite air.

The traditional natures of the ancient Gods and Goddesses often appear limited in scope as a direct result of the limitations of their literary expression. They are reviled as being worshipped in crude rites of fertility and sacrificial blood, as being vicious or terrifying in their aspect, but empty idols of stone and wood lacking any transcendent nature by comparison with the one true ethereal God of historical destiny YHVH Adonai - the Lord God. These differences are made possible largely by the literary tradition. It is through literature that the oral traditions of the tribal mythic era of Genesis became a written part of Jewish history, and it is likewise through literature that the nature of the Godhead becomes an historical saga through the ages.

The first phonetic scripts were developed by the Hebrew's neighbours, the Phoenicians. With the development of papyrus by the Egyptians, the stage was set for literary transformation. However, the Egyptians, who discovered papyrus, were slower to make a transition to phonetic script because of their elaborate hieroglyphic language. Hebrew and its sister languages were thus one of the first to develop phonetic script. Hybrid early forms have been found at Serabit in Sinai illustrating this transition. The script then evolves grandly through the succeeding centuries in a rich tradition, as illustrated sequentially in this chapter.

European languages such as Greek appear to have evolved a little later in history, accumulating vowels in addition to the pure consonants of Hebrew. Thus, while writings in the Pentateuch relate to the Exodus in the 13th century BC and the Yahwistic Eden story is often dated to the 10th century BC, historical evidence for Greek works from Hesiod to Homer generally date these to the 8th century BC, although they stem from older oral traditions extending perhaps back to the 12th century. Hebrew was thus placed at, or near, the origin of the phonetic scriptural transition. This facility was actively taken up by the Hebrews to record their religious tradition in a poetic



account of God acting in history.



Stele of Mesha, King of Moab (c850 BC) Holy Land (Pritchard 85)

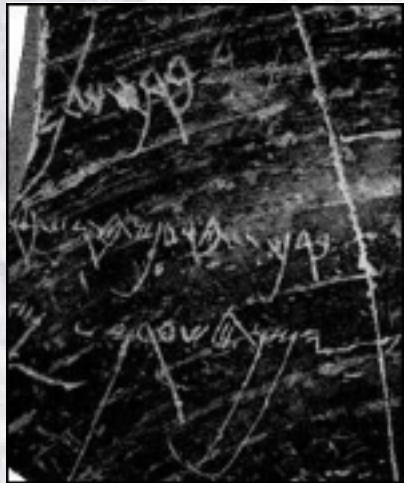
This gave the Pentateuch direct status as a primary religious work having authority over and impact upon its people and their history. The works of Greek mythology arise at a later date from pre-literate oral traditions of legend-telling. Although these likewise deal with issues of life and death and for example describe the Elysian fields, they are more pre-occupied with tales of irony in the 'family strife of the deities' and deal only partially with the influence of deities on human affairs.

While they are retelling tales of the old pre-literate deities, Yahweh, by contrast, leaps from his literary tradition with new and frightening vigor.

Although it is clear this historical view of God is a tradition stemming from Persia and the Zoroastrian cosmic renovation, it is equally clear that it is this literary tradition which transforms the simpler agricultural cycles of Canaanite myth into the long historical revelations of the Hebrew tradition.

Samarian ostracron from Jeroboam II (786-46 BC) - an order for grain

God can thus soar from a simple character such as the old Canaanite El or the repetitive agricultural cycle of Ba'al into a many-faceted God who is creator, destroyer, challenger, punisher, sustainer, counsel and an ongoing metaphor and political agent of the national psyche. Such a God is of course every bit as much an idolatrous being as the old stone deities so derided in the Bible's pages, for God now becomes a cosmic personality full of jealousy, anger, and emotional expectations over his people - a psychological, egotistical idol. He is also very much a projection of the political, cultural and particularly genealogical struggles in his society.



Jack Miles in "God" has given a resourceful portrayal of these many cultural dimensions of God. He would contend that even though such a God is a cultural entity responding to changing circumstances, he is nevertheless an expression of the soul of a culture which is giving expression to the oneness of God through this very process, like a thread of visionary fire weaving through the collective experience.

As the God of Genesis, he thus portrays the sequence of natures God has adopted, first as the 'Elohistic creator of man and woman in their own likeness and then as Lord

God the jealous demiurge who banished humankind from paradise. Later he takes this threat a stage further by calling up the flood of Noah. Then he becomes the clan ally of Abraham and his seed forever. Someone who is helpful in the destiny of the patriarchs and their offspring. A “friend of the family” as Miles calls him.

There is of course a major transformation of this idea of God in the exodus into a severe covenantal deity, who gathers in storm clouds on mountain tops like the older El, but who also communicates directly and forcefully with Moses from out of a cloudy pillar, and remonstrates with his people in antagonistic relationship with their faithlessness and disobedience. This God is now more abstract and not only does he have no image of stone but not even a name. He is referred to as Adonai ‘Lord’ while his divine name Yah is unspeakable.

“In the Book of Exodus, to which we turn next, the struggle between mankind and God over human reproductive power enters a new decisive phase. As this reproductive covenant between the Lord and Abraham, which tamed the creator/destroyer conflict in the Lord God, has generated a new provocation and a new conflict” (Miles). This is of course the response of the Pharaoh to kill the Hebrew male children.

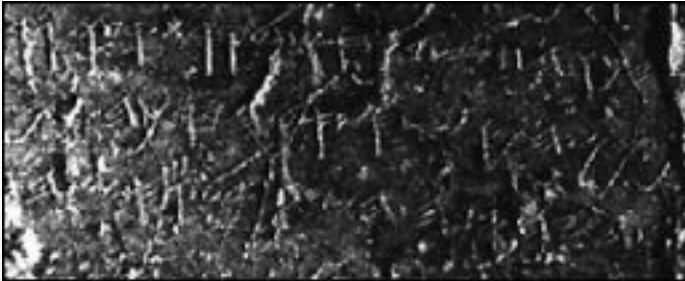


Fig 6: Siloam tunnel inscription Hezekiah (715-687 BC)

“One way to resolve the conflict, ... is under polytheism ... a God who was ‘of’ Abraham could coherently promise him superior fertility as well as possession of the land of the Kenites ... and so forth. ... The results would be settled on the field of battle ... the God of heaven could retain his universal jurisdiction by abstaining from battlefield alliance with the forces of either side. If keeping the God of heaven above the fray is one way to resolve the fertility conflict, another way is to turn God into the divine warrior. ... God's creation leads to man's reproduction, which leads to war, which leads to God's taking part in the war. ... War transforms him, and he becomes, permanently a divine warrior.” (Miles 91-2)

This statement of Miles leads to paradox because the god of Abraham clearly was just such a God. Moreover the Yah of the Exodus was and is likewise accepted by Miles as just such a divine warrior. Miles is trying to give the Lord God his *aksum* the accursed sooty cake (Malamat) and its eating to boot - the root monotheistic error. The God of the Hebrews cannot be the God of creation and at the same time the warrior God against the Kenites. There is a dangerous tendency on the part of all monotheists to equate political power with God's destiny - the tragic error of the divine warrior.

It is true that Rome was later converted to Christianity by the word rather than the sword, so defenders the God of destiny might argue that the Father has finally come into his own in the heroic act of the Son. This is however again a complex story of

cultural evolution in which Paul is frequently cast as the principal villain - the architect of a pagan heresy which incorporated by stages the panoply of Near Eastern beliefs from Isis to Mithra under an eclectic paternal umbrella.

One great difficulty of viewing the nature of God in sequence through the Bible, in the way Miles has approached it, is that, even the earlier sections of the Pentateuch have been extensively re-edited (redacted) at much later dates running through to the end of the exile. Really the Pentateuch as we see it is an exilic work reflecting a later much more sophisticated view of God, and one which reflects the political circumstances of a people 'in bondage' who have fallen from grace, ostensibly through disobedience to God and who paradoxically also inherit, through this very fall, the heritage of cultural diversity and sophistication that flowed out of Babylon and later Persia. Such a product would never have occurred without the relatively constructive dominion of the Babylonians and the frankly supportive attitude of the Persians. Had the oppressors really been the villains they are made out to be, as the Assyrians were when they deported the population of the ten tribes of the Kingdom of Israel, there would very possibly be no record of Yahweh and no Christianity either.



Ostracon from Lachish from the time of Nebuchadnezzar's campaigns (589-8 BC):

"...we are looking to Lachish for any signs my lord may give, for we can no longer see (the signals of) Azekah (cf Jer 34:7). (Pritchard 86).

In addition to this there is the serious problem that the nature of God has been refashioned,

firstly through Judean (Yahwistic) and later exilic filters in a way which has suppressed the diverse nature of the worship of the Old Kingdom, particularly the (Elohistic) North, and portrayed it as a heathen aberration of the Canaanites or of the 'nations' as espoused by the 'wives' of Solomon or Jezebel. The 'Elohim are relegated to the archaic fringe, the few remaining hints of evidence for Yahweh's consort linger only in indirect or derogatory references to the 'Elohistic Host of Heaven, the 'Grove' or Asherah, to the whoring ways of the Goddess and destruction of the sanctuaries.

God is thus portrayed as a lonely isolate and formless figure whose relationship with humanity moves from close intimacy to lofty distance. The archaeological evidence from Israel and Elephantine (p 491) attests rather that the Old Kingdom worship was more syncretic and more confluent with the cultural milieu than the Old Testament would indicate, that Yahweh consorted with the dreaded Anath (p 419) up to the 5th century BC and that the Lord of Hosts cannot really even be meaningfully considered except in the militarized caricature of the Lord of the Heavenly Host - the 'congregation' of the 'Elohim (Psalm 82).

What we are seeing in the Old Testament concept of God, however it varies from chapter to chapter, is thus very much the sophisticate transcendental deity of the exile. The difficulty with Jack Miles' portrayal in "God" is precisely this one. That he has run through the Old Testament in the Jewish sequence, portraying God as if He devel-

oped historically from Genesis to Daniel when we actually know the work is a heavily edited cultural and temporal mosaic.

Seal Tel-en-Nasbeh "Belonging to Jaazaniah servant of the King" see: 2 Kings 25:23 (Pritchard 85)

To detect the evolution of God in cultural history we have to paint a very different picture. We have to consider first Jacob's blessing of the tribes (p 459) as an indication of the 'Elohim of male and female deities, acknowledge the primal nature of feminine Wisdom from the proverbs (p 210), take cognizance that the Yahwistic description is the one we have been left from Judea after the fall of the Northern Kingdom in the 8th century BC, which has edited much of the Northern flavour out of history by contrast with the few Elohist passages it incorporated.



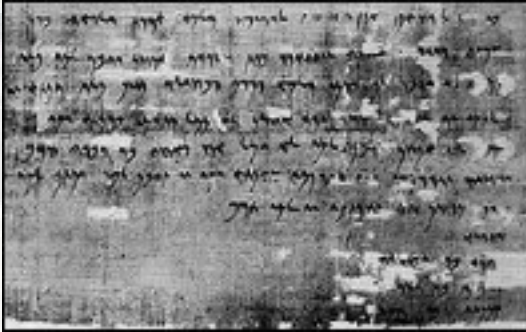
Another feature which is heavily glossed is the interaction between these founding deities and the movement that emerged with the Exodus. This is almost universally ascribed to as the foundation of Jewish religion and Mosaic law, but in cultural terms it represents radical novelty rather than cultural tradition. The deity is abstract and transcendental and Moses himself is a self-confessed Egyptian aristocrat (p 467) bearing with him the benefits of high Egyptian culture and education, just as the later Exilic literature bore the stamp of Mesopotamian myth and culture.

We now see only the confluence of these ideas in the Mosaic deity which accumulated in the later Yahwistic tradition after frank bloodshed and religious genocide by Moses' Levites during the Exodus, the death and possible murder of Moses himself during the conflict, the conquest of Israel, and the rise of the Davidic monarchy. Even then, it represents only one of many facets in a complex and often syncretic cultural landscape which had absorbed the urban Canaanites as much by treaty as by conquest (p 662). It is really the beliefs of one 'extremist' cult which we now see portrayed as the 'God of history'. While some writers attempt to simplify this picture to one of egalitarian cultural revolution by tribal covenant (Gottwald), the history attested to in the Old Testament's frequent outbursts indicates a thriving and diverse religious tradition in Israel, which was only finally suppressed, if at all, in the last centuries before Christ. Despite the purity of views professed in the Old Testament, the political situation remained fluid. The Northern kingdom had remained under pagan influence up until the time of the Maccabees and the Jerusalem tradition remained surrounded by older 'pagan' or pastoral/wilderness beliefs stretching across Arabia.

One point which can never be repeated too often in this context is that the visionary tradition soars in poetic allegory and dives to earth like the smoking firebrands of Shaar Yishuv (Isa 7:13) when appreciation for poetic allegory transforms into literalistic fundamentalism. While the prophetic tradition thrives on the such poetic writings as Isaiah, the editors who have shamelessly concatenated the works of many centuries under the authorship of one prophetic ancient as in Daniel and Isaiah inject hypocrisy into the very tradition they espouse, despite their prophetic poetry continuing..

Nevertheless, if we take the continuing portrayal in the Old Testament at its face value we do find a God of many dimensions. Returning again to Exodus, we notice the hallucinatory manifestation of God on earth to Moses in the 'blazing fire' of the burning

bush. The Bible frequently refers to angels as heralds of God, much in the way of Hermes in Greek tradition. These are traditionally in the patriarchal scheme assumed male, but it is deeply traditional and central Kabbalistic belief to ascribe all such manifestations of God to the Shekhinah - the feminine manifestation of deity on Earth. Like Hokhmah - primordial Wisdom, the Shekhinah or 'indwelling' is an abstract non-idolatrous manifestation of the feminine within the Hebrew tradition which has been all but suppressed from the Old Testament, although surviving in strength in the secret traditions of Zohar of the Kabbalah and permeating gnostic Haggia Sofia of Christian traditions.



Elephantine papyrus Aramaic (5th cent BC)

### The Apologist of "God" and the Tradition of the Female

Miles (290-302) acknowledges these historical roles of the Female, but allows the patriarchal tradition the poetic licence to retain the primordial pretension of the male creator God.

"The subtle emergence of Lady Wisdom as God's rival as well as his handmaiden or consort is

accompanied by a paradoxical reversal of the role that the Psalms assign to God. In the Psalms, God is the guarantor of justice in a world of karma without samsara - a world, that is, in which the good are rewarded and the evil punished within their own lifetimes or, at most, in the persons of their children or grandchildren. Not quite so in Proverbs, where God appears for the first time as the mysterious being to whom reference must be made and from whom recourse must be had when just the opposite occurs - that is, when the good are seen to be punished and the wicked rewarded. God continues to be honored as the creator, through Wisdom, of a world which enjoys in general an immanent moral order - a world, in other words, in which reward for the good and punishment for the wicked is on the whole a natural and therefore automatic outcome. God is not expected to ensure the functioning of this moral order by intervening ad hoc with rewards and punishments. These come about as the intrinsic result of mankind's cultivation, or otherwise, of human wisdom, a pursuit sometimes characterized as devotion to Lady Wisdom. God created the world through her, Proverbs says, and the world's normal and normally benign functioning is in her custody. God takes or is presumed to have taken a direct hand only in counterintuitive, unpredicted, unwelcome limit cases."

"In Proverbs' marriage of Torah and Wisdom, Torah - or at least the Lord whom Torah honors as its author - deepens Wisdom. But Wisdom also broadens and brightens Torah by discussing such matters as character formation and prudence, parts of human moral experience about which Torah is generally silent. The most surprising feature of this new synthesis, however, is that in it prophecy, about which Psalms maintains such a pained silence, is revived, after a fashion, as Lady Wisdom preaching on a street corner."

*Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: ...  
How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?*



*and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?  
 Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you,  
 I will make known my words unto you,  
 Because I have called, and ye refused;  
 I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded;  
 But ye have set at nought all my counsel ...  
 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;  
 When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind ...  
 Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer;  
 they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me:  
 For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord ...  
 Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way,  
 For the turning away of the simple shall slay them,  
 and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.  
 But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely,  
 and shall be quiet from fear of evil (Proverbs 1:20)*

“In prophecy as we have hitherto seen it, the events mentioned in [lines 1 and 2 of the last 4] would have been presented as punishment rather than, as here, mere comeuppance. Here the only punishment is self-inflicted; it is simply the predictable, built-in consequence of foolish behavior. Is it surprising that this clearest, largest eruption of the feminine into the relationship of mankind and God should turn out to speak with the voice of common sense? That will depend, obviously, on what you understand by “the feminine” and also on what you expect of a mother or a wife. Historical criticism has paid little attention to the possibility that Wisdom may be either mankind’s mother or God’s wife, but this is largely because historical criticism has generally taken her to be a personification of the wisdom of the male God and therefore, notwithstanding the feminine grammatical endings, ultimately male herself. She has been seen as a figure of speech loosely akin to the Word of the Lord in the endlessly repeated figure of speech “Then the Word of the Lord came to..... In fact, however, her identity is a good bit more complicated than that, for Lady Wisdom speaks not just for God but also in her own name about God and about her relationship with him. The word goddess probably does misrepresent her; but even taking her as allegorical rather than mythological, she should almost certainly be seen as the personification of human wisdom in the newly autonomous sense of which we were just speaking rather than as the personification of unfathomable divine wisdom. As such she may well be spoken of, metaphorically, both as God’s partner, even God’s wife (mankind cooperating with God), and as mankind’s mother (mankind caring for its own). And as both wife and mother, Wisdom wakes the echoes of Asherah.”

Miles (262-6) likewise gives expression to the paradoxes of the Lord Gods masculinity and His need to compensate by displaying the cryptic missing features of the female persona in the fatherly-motherly god:

“Very strikingly, it is amid these complaints that we hear God’s first completely unequivocal and unmistakable reference to himself as female: “And this again you do. You cover the Lord’s altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor at your hand. You ask, “Why does he not?” Because the Lord was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Has not the one God made and sustained for us the spirit of life? And what does he desire? Godly offspring. So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. “For I hate divorce, says the Lord the God of Israel, and covering one’s garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless.” (Malachi 2:13-16)

From the Dead Sea  
Scrolls (Holy Land)

“In Isaiah, God was the husband and Israel the wife of his youth, rejected but then taken back with merciful tenderness. Now, God is the wife, and Israel is the husband. This passage, very nearly the last word that the Lord will speak through a prophet, forces as no previous passage has done the question of whether



among the personalities that fuse in the character of God we must recognize a goddess. But before taking up that question, we should note the uniformly subordinate and disparaged character of women in ancient Israelite society. In announcing his judgment against sinful Israel, a judgment brought to a particular focus on the haughty and materialistic daughters of Zion, the Lord predicts a punitive anarchy recognizable by the fact that women will have taken power:

*My people - children are their oppressors,  
and women rule over them.  
O my people, your leaders mislead you,  
and confuse the course of your paths. (Isa- 3:12)*

Earlier, when a woman in the besieged town of Thebes fatally wounded the rebel king Abimelech by dropping a millstone on him from the town wall, Abimelech called his armor-bearer and said: “Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, ‘A woman killed him’ (Judg. 9:54). God’s and Abimelech’s attitudes toward women are one and the same. A woman ruler, a woman warrior- either is an insult and a disgrace.”

“Not all women are disparaged, of course. Jael the Kenite is praised in the Song of Deborah and Barak (Judg. 5) for driving a tent peg through the skull of the sleeping Canaanite general Sisera, Israel’s enemy and her own erstwhile ally. And in plotting successfully to take the throne of Israel away from David’s eldest son, Adonijah, and secure it for her own son, Solomon, Bathsheba is, at least by implication, judged quite positively. The same, of course, would go for Rebekah when she plots with Jacob to defraud Esau. Whatever a modern reader might judge of these actions (their masculine equivalents can, of course, easily be adduced), the Tanakh does not condemn them. They serve rather to demonstrate that women were at least sometimes powerful actors in ancient Israelite society. And wholly benign minor examples are not wanting, such as Hannah, praying for a son and then thanking the Lord with touching eloquence, or Abigail, trusting in the Lord and in David at once. The deeper question is not about whether women ever held power in Israelite society but whether, so to put it, there is a goddess inside Israel’s God. Is God female as well as male, a mother as well as a father, a matriarch as well as a patriarch, a wife as well as a husband, and so forth? Historical criticism has drawn attention to the fact that the ancient Canaanite god El, the sky god whose personality was taken up into that of the Lord God, had a

consort, Asherah, who bore monsters to battle El's younger rival, Ba'al, but was also, very generally, a goddess of fertility and motherhood. By identification with El, Israel's God could, so to speak, have inherited Asherah; and a few verses (a very few, to be sure) survive in which Israel's God seems to be described as male and female in successive lines - thus, by implication, as a divine couple. Deuteronomy 32:18, a verse in the Song of Moses, is often cited:

*You were unmindful of the Rock that begot you,  
and you forgot the God who gave you birth.*

The verse may originally have ended 'and you forgot the tree who gave you birth,' rock and tree or stone altar and wooden pole standing for the divine couple El (Yahweh) and Asherah. If Yahweh and Asherah were once a couple, however, they seem to be a couple no longer. Yahweh, the Lord, is without spouse, and the text of the Tanakh invariably links Asherah with Ba'al rather than with him. Speaking rather loosely, Yahweh may once have shared Asherah with El; but if so, then when Yahweh became a celibate, the bereft Asherah ended up with Ba'al." [See (p 491) for archaeology].

"But just as a divorced man will have a different inner relationship to women than a man who has never married, the Lord's relationship to Asherah and to femininity may not be at an end simply because she is no longer his consort. The natural object most often associated with Asherah is the tree or its representation the sacred post. Thus, Jeremiah 17:1-2:

*The guilt of Judah is inscribed with a stylus of iron,  
Engraved with an adamant point  
On the tablet of their hearts,  
And on the horns of their altars,  
While their children remember  
Their altars and sacred posts ['asherim]  
By verdant trees, upon lofty hills.*

The Hebrew noun 'asherah (plural, 'asherim), meaning "sacred post," in this passage is also the goddess's name. Stone and wood, as paired representations of god and goddess, are standard in Canaanite religion and are mocked as a pair at Jeremiah 2:27

*They said to wood, "You are my father,"  
To stone, "You gave birth to me."*

In fact, Israelites gone culturally Canaanite would probably have said to the stone, "You are my father," and to the tree, "You gave me birth." The reversal may be intentional mockery. It is noteworthy, however, that in the cult of the Lord God, stone, the masculine element, was fully acceptable in the form of the stone altar. Wood, in the form of the pole or asherah, was unacceptable; yet the text makes it clear that, endless denunciations notwithstanding, the asherah remained in use as a piece of cult furniture set alongside the Lord's stone altar."

"As a comment on the character of God, what does this state of affairs suggest? It suggests that at whatever point the Lord God became asexual (or ceased to be sexual), he did not - at least not immediately - fuse with his erstwhile consort, becoming in the process equally male and female, an ambi-sexual being, but rather divorced his consort and attempted to exclude the feminine from his own character. The exclusion of Asherah must not be seen as, on the Lord's own part, anything less than a violently emotional revulsion. In the Lord's eyes, Israel's worst crime, the crime that finally provokes him to destroy Jerusalem and then to blot out even the remnant of Judah, is King Manasseh's horrifying decision to place a sculpted image of Asherah in the Lord's own temple (p 496):

The sculpted image of Asherah that [Manasseh] made he placed in the House concerning which the Lord had said to David and to his son Solomon, "In this House and in Jerusalem, which I chose out of all the tribes of Israel, I will establish My name forever." ... Therefore the Lord spoke through His servants the prophets: "Because King Manasseh of Judah has done these abhorrent things- he has outdone the wickedness all that the Amorites did before his time-and because he led Judah to sin with his fetishes, assuredly, thus said the Lord, the God of Israel: I am going to bring such a disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that both ears of everyone who hears about it will tingle. I will apply to Jerusalem the measuring line of [conquered and destroyed] Samaria and the weights of the [annihilated] House of Ahab. I will wipe Jerusalem clean as one wipes a dish and turns it upside down. And I will cast off the remnant of My own people and deliver them into the hands of their enemies." (2 Kings 21:7-14)



Letter written during the Bar Cochba rebellion

"And Yet despite the Lord's overwhelming revulsion at the thought that a goddess should be permitted to cohabit his House with him, he remains the creator who said "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" and who then proceeded to create a female as well as a male. What may be for historical criticism no more than a fossilized scrap of mythological language is for literary criticism an inextinguishable characterological fact. The human

male alone is not the image of God, only the male and the female together. And this duality in the image must somehow be matched by a duality in the original. It is this fact that requires us to speak of the exclusion rather than the mere absence of the feminine from God's character. And it is that exclusion which lends pathos to the asherah as a liturgical fossil, an opaque object with an all-but-forgotten goddess's name, symbolizing his worshipers' memory of what he once was or yet might be."

"The asherah underscores the reason why asexual, though useful and probably unavoidable, is an inaccurate word for the Lord. The Lord is not a neuter or neutered being, much less an abstract or impersonal principle, a world soul or vital force. He is an otherwise male being who has no parents, wife, or children and no sexual relations of any kind. A destroyer as well as a creator, a warmonger as well as a lawgiver, a remote ruler as well as an intimate friend, he comes into being by addition or combination, as the precipitate of several earlier divine personalities. But subtraction also plays a role in the formation of the Lord's character. His identity is crucially defined by what is denied or taken from him."

"The question is has femininity been subtracted from him? The best answer seems to be Yes, but not entirely, and, by yet another unforeseen reversal in his history, his denied femininity will be reasserted. The Lord God with the asherah standing beside his altar is rather like an extremely virile man carrying a woman's purse. Whatever the

rest of his seeming character, the object is sufficient to raise a question.”

“This much conceded in advance, it would nonetheless be a mistake, notwithstanding all the tenderness in many passages of prophecy, to say that at this point in his story God is both mother and father, both female and male. The maternal imagery in a verse such as Isa (66:12-13) is transparent: ‘Behold, I will extend prosperity to Jerusalem like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall suck, you shall be carried upon her hip, and dandled upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem’.”

“But it is only imagery. On balance, it is altogether less noteworthy that God occasionally uses maternal imagery when speaking of himself to the prophets than that for so very long he avoided paternal as well as maternal imagery. With the single, salient exception of 2 Samuel 7, both kinds of parental imagery are all but entirely absent from Genesis through 2 Kings. Starting with Isaiah, God begins to speak of himself fairly freely as both a mother and a father, but rather than see the return of the feminine at this point, we should recall that this freedom of expression comes amid a veritable explosion of metaphorical language in which he speaks of himself as husband, lover, shepherd, redeemer (metaphorically, a ransom from slavery), and much else. The thrust is undeniably toward tenderness and gentleness; but particularly since Near Eastern goddesses are so often utterly ferocious, that thrust does not in and of itself bespeak feminization.”

The Lord God ... is only analogously a father. When he begins to speak of himself as a mother, he is also only analogously a mother. The metaphor he chooses to use of himself at any given point will always reflect what he wants to say of himself at that point, and different metaphors may follow rapidly on one another. Thus, in Malachi 2, just before God speaks of himself as Israel's wife, Malachi speaks of God as Israel's father: “Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create US?” (Malachi 2:10).

Miles' description is fair comment on the traditional view of the feminine within God, but it is nevertheless a subtle apology for the continuing primacy of the male principle of the transcendent creator godhead. He is subtle to deny Wisdom her divine nature relegating her from gnostic essence to mere common sense, imminent but merely the product of humanity's providence Likewise he questions the historical reality of the Asherah as a central motif which has been overlaid by later redaction of the Yahweh-only movement. A male principle which not only denies but physically destroys the embodiment of the female, and cauterizes her from literature except in those traces we find slipping between the lines of the redactionist pen, or caught transfixed for a moment in the obdurate ravings of the prophets against the whoring ways of the goddess cannot be so quickly discarded from the historical heritage as apologists for the Christian, or Yahwistic tradition, would like. The remnants of the Asherah in the Old Testament and at Elephantine and other places (p 491), the primordial nature of Wisdom (p 210) and the subtle flowing of the Shekhinah (p 645) and her Christian manifestations as Sophia (p 212) and the Holy Spirit (p 936) remain central to the very meaning of God realized on Earth.

### **Christian Compromise: The Triune Loving Father God of Divine Wrath**

There is a further twist to the nature of deity as expressed in Jesus' very personal relationship with Abba, the God the Father who becomes the forgiving God who does not exact ‘an eye for an eye’ but preaches ‘love your enemies’ provided all accept the word of Christ. However there is an ultimate contradiction. To Christians, the true

nature of this God was only revealed as kind fatherly figure by the gruesome sacrifice of his only begotten son - a sacrifice blamed for the next two millennia on the Jews, despite his death by Roman crucifixion. A God who kills for love? Then why blame the Jews? This myth that the Christian God is love is immediately rendered hollow in Jesus' own slaughter. It echoes on down through history, not just as a jealous God but a God of martyrdom, Crusade, holocaust and Inquisition (p 623), which stems from the very compulsion which Luke 14:23 invested into the marriage feast: "And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled", reinforced by the curse of anathema of 1 Corinthians "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha."

This is of course the other side of God - Satan the Devil - God's awful partner in fate in the male combat myth. This is a tragic paradox for Jesus because, although he is both courting and provoking the devil, it is actually the father who sacrifices him on the Cross for his 'love of mankind'. The whole deal thus includes not just God but the whole evil empire scenario and all the pain and conflict this brings. The dark versus the light. Not a whole (Holy) Earth but original sin. Why couldn't God and Lucifer get along? Was there something unhinged about God's 'creation'?

The Christian compromise is of course riddled with gender contradictions. The unspeakable aniconic nature of Yahweh is replaced by a father figure more like the Ancient of Days - a reborn 'El whose hair is white like wool. The Son is likewise elevated from the practical redemption of the flesh and blood Jewish Mashach to an eschatological divine saviour. The mother is however consigned to a limbo stunningly identical to Semele (p 617), a mortal mother of a divine son assumed into heaven as an act of grace by the Father God. Mary is portrayed as a Hellenistic virgin circumcised to deny sexual pleasure, elevated to semi-divine status and partially identified with Artemis to reinforce moral prudery (p 420).

There are many episodes to this relationship between God and the Female. Gnostics tell a bizarre variety of tales, some of which cast the very Lord God into the role of a [wicked] demiurge who has seized control, while other works tarnish Sophia with the desire to bypass the primal creation with her own defunct works (p 769).

In the doctrine of the Trinity we have a Medusa's godhead - no longer the inscrutable transcendent, but a political compromise worked out at a meeting to represent God in terms a particular group of bishops found suitable to their doctrine at the time. The elusive Feminine aspect, which is and has been all along the manifest embodied reality, the Shekhinah, Sophia, Miriam and the Asherah in her different archaic and aniconic forms is now finally subject to complete gendercide. Just as the Virgin Mary was also said to have been circumcised, the Holy Ghost is deemed neuter. This is the ultimate travesty of the 'Elohim. The Father and Son remain 'corporeal' - anthropomorphic, while the feminine face is dissolved into the neuter 'rapture of the depths'. It is also a great irony that the Christian world is divided between a Catholic path which embraces the feminine, yet treats her as a chaste virgin half-God to retain control over her reproduction and pleasure, and a Protestant path which embraces women priests yet clings to a stark uncompromising view of a transcendent God of order - a male eunuch equally deprived of his genitals in the attempt to demonstrate transcendence beyond gender. This is the false transcendence of dominion over nature, which ultimately reduces the world to fire and brimstone at the hands of man.

Only in the realization of the Tao - the complementary nature of gender in the natural cosmos shall any resolution of this tortuous history reach fulfillment.

## Modern Transcendent Theology and Gender Paradox

Theologians of Christianity and Islam too have throughout the centuries made various forays to shore up the view of God as inscrutably beyond gender, as 'He' is beyond all dualities and divisions. In the way of the *via negativa*, once the layers of 'cultural relativism' the onion are all peeled away, we may come to the core of divine illumination common to all paths - 'towards the one', as the Sufi Pir Vilayat Khan termed it, but only by peeling away God's cover too. The defence of the 'God transcendent' exposes the deep sociobiological and cultural double-think shoring up an incomplete and distorted vision, which stresses transcendence over immanence, divine order over the verdant chaos of natural living diversity, and often casts white against black and good against evil in typical male combat mythology ending in Armageddon. God can never become complete while transcendence is stressed over immanence, heaven over earth, soul over nature and male over female. Until the "two become one" God remains a lie - a distortion of reality. The God of cosmogenesis and of quantum mechanics is a God of complements, wave-particle, chaos-order, and female-male. Until we can embrace chaos and enter the void we will never understand the totality and will forever fight 'evil' with dark hate, being consumed by the very forces we are struggling with, and doing irredeemable damage to ourselves and to the divine creative process along the way.

Quantum reality and particularly the uncertainty principle poses the ultimate question about the cosmos back to humanity. This is the nemesis of the Newtonian ideal of determinism. Is free will actually a reality after all? In the bubble of quantum uncertainty all classical predictions are off. Is this the loophole which makes free-will possible? If so what is then the role of God's cosmic design back at the beginning? If we are truly capable of free will, then is the universe still in a state of becoming not fully revealed and only gradually becoming so, through our conscious involvement in space-time? What is the nature of God in such a universe and what is the role of nature in the supposed 'cosmic design'? Although some Christians have hailed this step as a breakthrough from the mechanical prison of the Newtonian model, it remains very unclear whether the Christian concept of God is the rightful benefactor of such a causality-violating holistic universe as this.

"The Classical physics seemed to bolt and bar the door leading to all freedom of will; the new physics hardly does this; it almost seems to suggest that the door may be unlocked if we could only find the handle. The old physics showed us a universe which looked more like a prison than a dwelling place. The new physics shows us a universe which looks as though it might conceivably form a suitable dwelling place for free man, and not a mere shelter for him- a home in which it may at least be possible for us to mould events to our desires and live lives of endeavour and achievement." - James Jeans (Lindberg and Number 430)

Although the world of nature and human consciousness may seem fragile and insignificant, by comparison with the vast and terrifying forces of the big bang, galactic collisions, black holes and the heat death (p 26), life is immortal on geological time scales, and has been around on earth for a full third of the universe's own lifetime. One can with increasing awe realize that the cosmic symmetry-breaking at the birth of the universe actually finds its complete interactive resolution only in the elaborate macromolecular interactions we find most elegantly expressed in the conscious human brain, the most complex and sensitive cosmological arrangement known in the universe today (p 74) - entitled the 'three-pound universe' (Hooper and Teresi).

The natural world is thus not an inferior flawed place of decay of God's divine works, but the divine embodiment of creation. In nature we find our physical immortality in loving relationship and give expression to the creative divine will moving on the face of the deep - a deep full of the terrifying forces of black holes and supernovae, and natural tooth and claw, yet destined to unfold life and love in cosmic evolution, thereby giving the spirit/body, in consciously and biologically realizing itself, its true glory. The natural world is also wilderness and diversity in a way which makes a mockery of any narrow interpretation of moral law. The ecosystem requires plants and animals, carnivores and herbivores. There is no final confrontation between good and evil, but fruitful coexistence of life and death.

This highlights a particular flaw of academic Christian theology. Throughout, despite the simple call that God is love and the vision of the saints and mystics, God has been a transcendental and almost clockwork creator God. As science has progressed, theology has endeavoured to capture a relationship with reality. It has found itself most at home with a mechanistic Newtonian view of the universe, because of the scheme of divine order this envisages. It is also a view in which God has dominion as creator, but is a mechanical universe which is endlessly running down from this divine creation point. This is somehow more necessary than an ongoing creation in which we as living people and nature herself are actually God unfolding the universe in time too, a view which it is noted the Sufis understand constructively (p 676).

The reason for this flows from the whole Biblical mythology, from the sabbatical creation dumping the biota fully-fledged on a flat-Earth planet, and extending through the scorched-earth policy of God in Eden (p 731), in which nature is trodden under foot and the whole world is turned into a purgatory in which man and woman suffer sweat and pain struggling to overcome the diaspora of nature. Despite the shadowy Tree of Life, howering in prophetic limbo until the apocalypse (p 780), nature is the mere chaff of the divine plan oozing, evil from the wilderness and a relationship with God which just keeps slipping further away.

Given this perspective it is not hard to understand why monotheism has had as difficult a time coming to terms with nature as the embodiment of the divine and particularly with the idea that life itself is the creative process as it has with the Copernican revolution in which Earth just became a peripheral place rather than the centre of God's cosmic design. Because God is transcendent and eternal - removed in time and space, the evolutionary nature of the universe as on-going creation presents a particular problem. Hence evolution has almost universally been opposed, because in the creationist view it is not just the literal 6000 years of biblical creation that is at stake, but also the idea of a deterministic universe set out like an engineering project by a 'designer God'.

This brings us to the nub - did God create the universe? What does this mean? How is this tribal figure, fomenting wrath at the Midianite woman in Ba'al Peor (p 475) somehow also the divine creator of the universal unfolding? Why should the two be identifiable in any way? The answer is of course social history. Jack Miles tries to get around this by conceding it, yet inferring that somehow, despite these social and political realities, God is lurking behind all the descriptions of 'himself' remote and superlative, yet in everyone's minds and hearts. This is indeed the Jungian view of evolving archetype (p 370). But is this God, or is it Love or the Holy Spirit? Why do we need 'God' as a term in the cosmic equation? Is this God male? Why is the Father God anyway? Maybe the equation doesn't need this term or maybe it needs a different kind



of term as Buddhists claim.

Liber de intellectu, Liber de sensu, Liber de nichilo - Charles de Bouelles 1510 (Lindberg and Numbers)

I take the following position. God is a living cultural archetype in the human stream of consciousness. There is an underlying reality, but the reality is rather different - more different than the term God can accurately describe. Monotheism, in arriving at the one God formed a syncretic hybrid, half-way between the unspeakable mystery of mysteries, which evokes the universe and living consciousness and the gendered 'Elohistic male and female deities. Moses was trying to relate to the unspeakable in the burning bush and took off his shoes and said it was the nameless mystery (p 467), but what came out of the tradition next watering hole in Sinai was a jealous God of tribal and social male identity.

### Not to Blasphame the *Mysterium Tremendum*

The 'Elohistic God/Goddess is real and natural. Nature is gendered and this gendering runs all the way to the foundations of reality in the complementation between mind and body, wave and particle. In the 'Elohistic form, our complementary-self is fully-represented in the envelope of our being, from verdant nature to transcendent mind. The Kabbalistic Yahveh-Shekhinah is likewise another way of conceiving complementarity in terms very similar to the Tao. This provides a more abstract form of the God/Goddess as transcendent-imminent psyche-embodiment principles. Beyond this lies the unspeakable *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*<sup>1</sup> - referred to indirectly or not at all - the 'way that cannot be told' - the Holy Spirit moving on the face of the deep.

The monotheistic idea of God is a confusion of these 'Elohistic and 'unspeakable' natures, which has lost the natural gender complementation of the 'Elohistic godhead, becoming only a male God of order, which is neither fully integrated with the unspeakable ultimate. 'He' is still 'jealous', 'angry' and 'loving' by coercive degrees. Theologians go to great pains to remould this syncretic figure to fit the cosmos, as a creator God, but he can never naturally fit the liberation of the wilderness and balks, demanding religious covenant with dire threats, fomenting about the evil snake lurking in the grass and unable concede to evolution its rightful share in the divine creative process. Despite its secular pretensions, modern science has been as deeply immersed in this religious fallout (p 784), as evidenced by the late discovery of chaos



1. *Mysterium* points to the otherness of the holy; *tremendum* to its overwhelmingness in relation to human finitude; and *fascinans* to the lure that draws individuals out of and beyond themselves (Otto R 1917).

(p 1), half a century after quantum theory (p 9) and relativity (p 12).

One important observation about male combat myth between order and chaos and God and Satan is that it is an extension of sociobiology into cosmology and theology. The natural condition of male competition is thus blown into a fundamental confrontation between opposites - good and evil - dark and light. The difficulty with this approach is that these opposites and indeed all forms of evil result ultimately from the second law of thermodynamics - the disruptive influence of entropy. But the evolutionary condition and biodiversity itself is a complex system at the edge of chaos. Chaos is thus necessary to the transformation of order and indeed an increasing entropy universe is essential to the existence of life as an island of negentropic increasing complexity. Reverse increasing entropy, the ultimate Christian justification for original sin, and life has no niche to exist. Likewise it is only through mutation that we came to evolve. We thus have to again accept the law of complementarity. We can't treat the second law as evil, so neither can we disease nor misfortune. The idea of an evil force in opposition to God is a fallacy arising from male combat. Healing this is holy matrimony - the 'other' is made 'self' in complementary relationship.

Central to this healing is a vision of 'conscious relativity' that, regardless of the heat-death, the universe is, through the garment of biological evolution in space-time becoming self aware also in an eternal sense across space-time. Nip the bud of the evolutionary unfolding of diversity in selfish capitalist short-term exploitation and this flowering shall never come to pass. To say the later heat death reduces all to ruin anyway misses the entire point of the complementarity which makes the conscious moment of samadhi, in which our very incarnations, stemming from the ultimate source out of which emerges both the physical universe and the conscious spirit come to fruition, not just in the enlightenment of the self, but in weaving the garment of the biological and cultural flowering in space-time, our historical destiny revealed. To this end are we born, and for this cause do we come into the world.

This requires completely reconceiving the nature of evil. The original Zoroastrian idea was of ignorance or confusion as darkness, rather than a directed evil force. Compassion and empathy don't just come automatically out of kin and reciprocal altruism. It requires conscience and social transformation for the 'love ethic' to come alive. It requires thinking even of criminality in new ways, because criminality is to law and society as chaos to order, as parasite to ecosystem. Healing this natural condition requires removing the conditions of corruption that abet violence. One of the motivating factors for criminality is injustice and inequity. In a truly compassionate, equitable society there is far less room for exploitation and less incentive for criminal advantage. In a free society there is likewise little room for oppression. Open, trusting, honest relations in freedom minimize jealousy and strife.

The Islamic Allah and the Christian God of the Reformation share an abstract nature, but retain moralistic and retributive aspects of divine wrath, including the Day of Judgement and dire human punishments such as the death penalty, which are the prerogative of a demiurge, despite the devoted efforts of Jewish, Islamic and Protestant scholars to portray God as the ultimately transcendent deity beyond all representation. As long as there is confusion between social morality and cosmology, we are not dealing with the divine condition, but with human tradition. God is an instrument to divide humanity from the divine, by setting up a rigid model of forgiveness and retribution to ensure we do not simply commune with the ultimate mystery but worship God in humility as a subject - God's unquestioning serfs.

This dilemma of God and the void is neatly highlighted by the Buddhist view of a Godless cosmos in which both compassion and self-realization is nonetheless possible. One can of course criticize the Buddhist cosmology too, especially in terms of its moral causality, which is also in frank conflict with the wildness and diversity of the natural order. Should all carnivores be reborn as rocks for their sins?

What we are slowly reaching towards here is an acknowledgment that God has never been the ultimate mystery of mysteries, but is rather, as Carlos Castaneda has said, a salt shaker on the mesa of the *tonal* - a human cultural representation of the divine, imbued with whatever social, political and moral motifs a given society chooses to place on 'him', unlike the *nagual* (p 157) or *mysterium tremendum* residing in the chaotic abyss of the unspeakable.

*"Warriors know that man's idea of God is one of the most sturdy aspects of the human inventory which binds the assemblage point to its original position"* (Castaneda 1984 258).

*"Warriors know that God is an item of the warrior's personal tonal and the tonal of the times; God is not the nagual; what man calls God is the mold of man; the mold is our God because we are what it stamps us with and not because it has created us from nothing in its own likeness; ... the mold of man cannot under any circumstances help us by intervening on our behalf or punish us for our wrongdoings ... seers know that belief in the existence of God is based on hearsay and not on actual seeing."* (Castaneda 1977 157).

This emphasizes a crucial point - God is not the ultimate mystery at all, but a means society uses to maintain the ordered description of reality and to enforce social conformity. God is a means to prevent natural evolutionary change by maintaining a fixed view of cosmic morality and divine law.

This becomes very clear when the Islamic view of God is considered. The Qur'an portrays al-Llah as a fully abstract deity of creation, unrepresentable in any iconic form under pain of death. The truth is that al-Llah and al-Lat used to be God and Goddess as attested by the ancient inscriptions of Sinai. This abstraction would appear at first instance to take al-Llah very close to the Buddhist vision of the cosmos as divine causality, but the life and Qur'an of Muhammad are a personal vision full of moral prescriptions for society, which although they may have been well-intended at the time, and tolerantly interpreted during the flowering of Islamic culture, have subsequently become a vehicle for fundamentalistic rigidity, which defends and enforces violence, and death fatwah arbitrated by the mullah's whim.

"There is a VERY BIG difference to what is done in the name of Islam and what Islam enjoins in the Qu'ran and the Hadith. We must be very clear about that. The punishment for murder is death. No doubt about that. The punishment for adultery is stoning to death and for fornications is the whip. That is what Allah ordains for His creation. We hear and we obey. We do not base our judgment on western whims and fancies." This is defended because it requires a due process of law. "Islam does not allow the spilling of blood without a cause that is justified by the Qur'an and the Sunna. ... One can only ask Allah to guide the ruler in the correct path. That is the extent to which Islam propagates non-violence. He has to resort to the prevailing legal authority." However this is divine law, or shariat, which is open to the interpretation of individual mullahs and it is their divine right to issue death fatwahs. "In fact there is not a single country in the world today that has implemented Islam 100% according to the Sharia. What's needed to be done is to implement one and see the results. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) established such a state in Madinah and it was most successful. This state had Christians and Jews living in them and everybody was treated justly. We can surely emulate that today if only we wished" (anon).

This statement comes in complete contradiction to the facts: 700 Jews were summarily beheaded (p 628). They never even opened the gates of Medina to the Quraysh, they just talked to both sides. Muhammad gave the judgement to a dying man . What justice is that? He said kill them all. Muhammad didn't need to commit this genocide because the Sakina of hundaybiyah made the whole 'jihad' unnecessary. When he did enter Mecca 'peacefully' he brought death. "Sarah was a famous slave singer who aimed her barbed words against the Moslems. She was among those whom Mahomet ordered to be executed on the day of his victorious entry into Mecca (p 654). ... Thus women who dared to give voice to their protest or opposition could be exposed to cruel punishment. Their hands might be cut off, or their teeth pulled out, or their tongues torn from their mouths" (El Saadawi 1980).

*"To kill one's enemies in the name of God is to blaspheme the Holy Spirit" - Chris King*

This generally places God in the role of a male arbiter of order as opposed to the verdant chaos of the intimate imminent manifestations of the divine in mystical experience. Similar critiques can be made of all orthodox Christian dogma, including every statement starting from the apostles' creed and crowned in its oppression with the declaration of the Inquisition (p 638) and every dogma since, from not ordaining women, through banning contraception to papal infallibility. Such statements have nothing whatever to do with God. They are purely about a male culture protecting its reproductive rights over women and particularly the perpetuation of the church as an institution. In this sense the church has truly become the anti-Christ (p 641) for it has circumcised and circumscribed the innate freedom of the Holy Ghost, to control humanity through fear, through torture in the name of the divine love of Jesus.

This brings us closer to the ultimate and utterly devastating mystery of mysteries. Beyond the limited cultural representation of God is a deeper more dangerous truth, one which can never be tamed by human culture or device. It is this ultimate mystery from which we all come, to which we all return and which we all seek in every tradition on Earth. This mystery has been approached by all cultures and spiritual paths. It is the mystery which Buddhism and shamanism approaches as closely in samadhi and the vision quest without the need to invoke God:

*"Whoever blasphemes against the father will be forgiven, and whoever blasphemes against the son will be forgiven, but whoever blasphemes against the holy spirit will not be forgiven either on earth or in heaven (Thomas 44, cf: Matt 12:31, Luke 12:10, Mark 3:28).*

The Holy Spirit remains the ultimate enigma of Christianity - totally undefined to this day - waiting for the liberation. Remote and yet intimately present. Uncircumscribed by any doctrine or ritual - free and wild as the shamans vision quest is. One could say she is the Shekhinah, the abstract feminine, or the *nagual* but we are dealing here with the abyss. John 14:26 even claimed the ghost as male: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father (Abba) will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

When we peel the layers of the onion completely away, we have nothing but the void as the name *via negativa* implies - the 'countless' way that cannot be told. This is the way which is common to all existence, emerging from the cosmic origin and manifest in all conscious life - the way of the Tao of the Buddha-mind, of the shaman's vision quest, of the burning bush of the Holy Spirit. While any of the layers of cultural imperative remain we have religious authority imposed upon the immanence of individual illumination and the mystical forever sequestered like the female as an inner mystery cult, suspect in its excessive and personal 'intoxicated' mystical vision.

It is only by removing all these layers we come ultimately to the source, to the well-spring, the 'fertile ground' (p 947) of being. And it is in this ground we all share in our incarnation. It is this ground we call on in our innermost selves without any moral edict or religious dogma. This is the living ground of love incarnate. It is something which we all possess once we turn to it and something no one can give us or take from us, even those who would seek to kill us for our faith to maintain the moral order:

*"That which you have will save you if you bring it forth from yourselves. That which you do not have within you [will] kill you if you do not have it within you." (Thomas 70)*

This reality is wild and verdant, compassionate and peaceful. It is the perennial philosophy and the way the truth and the life. Not one way but every way. In every woman, every man and in the innocence of the child.

I invite you all into the Holy Spirit as equals in incarnation. This is your natural destiny as co-creating participants. This is the union which Jesus foresaw:

*"I and my Father are one." ... The Jews answered, saying, 'For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God'. Jesus answered, 'Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?' (John 10:30)*

This does not mean that we become automatically enlightened. Greed and selfishness thrive in ignorance. It is only through soul searching that we can truly learn to love, but love we can, not through moral edict passed down to us by the church, but from our natural inner source of living truth, our original virtue, woven into our emotional being in the loom of evolution and giving expression to the will of the holy spirit of the cosmos unfolding in space-time. I am thus asking you to embark on a difficult and exciting journey, in which you cast aside all assumptions, including God and mechanism, in reaching to the fire within - True Love.

If you choose to see the Holy Spirit through God as an act of choice, please realize that the feminine face or Shekhinah is the indwelling manifestation or embodiment, of equally sacred status, and that matrimony is the immortal condition.