

## The End

began around 165c.e. when the first distinguishable apocalyptic literature was manifested by a devout Hebrew scribe named Daniel. Born out of the oppression cast by the ferocious rule of Antiochus IV, The Book of Daniel was chronologically the final book written as a part of the canonical Hebrew Bible (Harris 289). This esoteric apparition featuring Daniel's interpretations of the fantastic dreams had by King Nebuchadnezzar has spawned countless similar works. "Apocalyptic thinking" has found its way into the Western psyche, shaping belief systems that stand strong to this day. The Greek *apokalypsis* is best interpreted as "an unveiling, an uncovering, and a stripping naked of what is normally hidden."

Apocalyptic literature is grounded in eschatology, as it deals with the study of "final things." Prophetic in nature and assuming a linear historical perspective, apocalyptic writing describes one event after the next, thus culminating at the "End of Time" (Kyle 18). Stemming from these "end-of-the-world" concerns, eschatology also depicts "the ultimate fate of individual persons: *death, posthumous judgment, heaven and hell* along with "the belief that people will experience an *afterlife*, typically through *resurrection* of the body" (Harris 285).

While much of this form of writing has been pseudonymous, many Christian ideologies (predominately based on the Revelation to John) have adopted the belief in The Apocalypse with the focus of the triumphant return of Jesus Christ. Literal interpretations of such accounts have led to an incredible amount of "doomsday" predictions, as prophetic calculations regarding "The End of Time" and The Messiah's return have been widely voiced. Through examining and synthesizing these widely-accepted Christian notions with those of world-wide cultures and philosophies, I will elucidate a contrasting stance: *apocalyptic literature is constructed metaphor for the unfolding process of Self-transformation.*

### The Seed: Logos

"Zen-Buddhism proposes that no knowledge is of any value unless it grows out of ourselves; no authority, no teacher can really teach us anything except to arouse doubts in us; words and thought systems are dangerous because they easily turn into authorities whom we worship. Life itself must be grasped and experienced as it flows, and in this lies virtue" (Fromm 40).

As the only being consciously aware of its existence, the human invariably discovers subjection to the physical laws of nature yet is unable to control or change them. With this awareness, humans are faced with the realization of the helplessness and constraints of phenomenal existence. The human being thus visualizes the end of this material existence: death. The human can not be freed

from the existential dichotomy: “[man] can not rid himself of his mind, even if he should want to; he cannot rid himself of his body as long as he is alive – and his body makes him want to be alive” (Fromm 22).

To overcome this dichotomy the *animal rationale* or, rational-human being uses *language*. “Truth” as expressed in language (Greek: *Logos*) must be a reflection of this perplexing dichotomy, as illustrated in the Revelation to John’s depiction of the “Son of Man,” who “from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword” (Revelation 1:16). The Zen wisdom shared above exemplifies the dangers of literal interpretation of such an ideology, as the rational-human is subject to *falling* into worshipping the language itself rather than its underlying meaning. Thus the Truth behind apparent existence is shaped metaphorically (Gk: *meta* : “beyond,” *phos* : “light:”) into dualistic language systems. The double-edged sword “life-death” must be carefully sharpened for one to pierce through material reality, in-turn allowing the Self-Apocalypse to develop.

### **The Ground: *Death***

“A grain of wheat remains a solitary grain unless it falls into the ground and dies; but if it dies, it brings a rich harvest.” ~Jesus, John 23-24 New English Bible

“The seed you sow does not come to life unless it has first died.”  
~St. Paul, 1 Cor. 15:36 NEB

The dying process is a metaphor for the most significant and absolute transformation that human psyche or “self” may undergo. When an individual’s identity or “self-concept” with which he or she has lived-in-the-world is at its end, he or she may feel as though their self or “ego” is dying. “Whatever I call ‘me’ is finished and dying; then, after a period of turmoil and uncertainty, there is the ‘rebirth’ of a new identity, a new sense of who ‘I’ am” (Metzner 136). This transformation affects the furthest reaches of one’s consciousness, for it comprises “the central organizing principle of selfhood” (Metzner 136). By exploring various cultures’ approaches to being-towards-*death*, light will be shed onto the apocalyptic self-transformative experience.

Western culture has developed a dangerous fear of death, for it is interpreted literally as a phenomenon that “happens.” Since no definitive definition of what death “is” exists, approaching “it” as a “thing” or “occurrence” is based on ignorance. Spiritual leaders insist this ignorance must be altered for authentic spiritual transformation to take place (Metzner 138). Once the individual transcends this difficult process, an increased understanding of self and existence follows, along with health and longevity, peace of mind and “inner freedom from fear” (Metzner 137).

Many of the described images of the “ultimate state of consciousness” realized during the unfolding transcendence of Self indicate a variation of ego de-struction, a complete death of the self and all its common associations. The Buddhist realization of *nirvana* as well as the Sufi’s supreme state of Being

known as *fana*, are both founded on the “extinction” or “dissolution” of desire and attachment. As is stated in the Tao Te Ching,

“Free from desire, you realize the mystery.  
Caught in desire, you see only the manifestations.  
Yet mystery and manifestations  
arise from the same source.  
This source is called darkness.  
Darkness *within* darkness.  
The gateway to all understanding.

Allen Watts, a brilliant thinker who dedicated his studies to synthesizing philosophies of the world’s cultures eloquently states,

“For the ‘death’ which must be undergone to behold the vision of God is the death of a false identity, and the withdrawal from the world which is required for liberation is withdrawal from the game that this particular person, so-and-so, is my one and only self. For the rest, the vast and splendid electrical fantasy of the universe may go on and on, the same old story repeated with inexhaustible genius for variety – color, music, intricacy of pattern, beauty and terror, love and tragedy, ducks on the dawn water, gulls sailing the gale, horned flames of the fire, and the wonder-jewel of the witnessing eye, all woven out of the endless possibilities of yes-and-no (203).

With the given examples, it is now clear that living *through* the metaphorical notion of death is the ground where the seed of Self is to grow *from*. To grow with strength and security, this now budding life must be nourished with care.

### **The Fertilizer: *Satan***

“There is a human tendency to overlook our own *obstacles*, to ignore them or deny their existence even when we have seen them clearly. Therefore, it is difficult for us to achieve and sustain spiritual clarity without someone other than ourselves leading us beyond our own ignorance” (Fadiman 57).

The etymological root of the English “Satan” is found to be Hebrew Shaytan which means “obstacle” or “stumbling block.” The commonly accepted conception of “Satan” today may be one that stirs fright in the hearer, for the evolution of this word has become an anthropomorphic construction of the human traits of deception, lying, slander, shame, tempter, the root of guilt and shame, or the evil being who strips away everything we hold sacred. For genuine Self-transformation to occur, one must come to the realization that he or she *is* the devil. The Sufi call this essential human characteristic the *nafs*, or “lower self.” The *nafs* is commonly interpreted as “ego” or “self” and is the facet in us that “leads us astray” (Fadiman 65). As expressed by Ralph Metzner,

“When we recognize the devil as an aspect of ourselves, then this deity can function as teacher and initiator: he shows us our own unknown face, providing us with the greatest gift of all—self-understanding. The conflict of opposites is resolved into a *coincidentia oppositorum*, the creative play of energies and boundaries” (135).

The familiar Christian interpretation as found in Revelation depicts the evil dragon as Christ's mortal enemy, the Evil opponent of Good who should be purged or eliminated before it corrupts the world. In some instances, the literal perception of the duality and conflict between good and evil may develop a defensive struggle or separation from the dark side of one's being, thus intensifying the aspects of one's self he or she is trying to repress (Metzner 127).

One of the most important aspects of the awakening experience is the wonder, the marvel, the perplexing process of existential enlightenment, and the bewildering experience in determining one's relation to the world (Fromm 94). Thus Satan in "his" infinite metaphorical forms as the great obstacles one faces time and time again, is to be welcomed as a part of the self that needs to be intently examined and understood. Turning from these obstacles will only present oneself with greater stumbling blocks in due time. When one learns *how* to ask the question, the final phase of the transformation begins. Fromm states, "One who has never been bewildered, who has never looked upon life and his own existence as phenomena which require answers and yet, paradoxically, for which the only answers are new questions, can hardly understand what religious experience is" (94).

### **The Blossoming: *The Kingdom of Heaven***

His followers said to him, "When will the kingdom come?"

"It will not come by watching for it. It will not be said, 'Look, here it is,' or 'Look, there it is.' Rather, the father's kingdom is spread out upon the earth, and people do not see it."

~Jesus, The Gospel of Thomas 113

When an individual has fully endured the difficult transformative process, a "new self" is "born." "Re-birth as *self-realization* is the replacement of the "small self" by the greater Self, the Spirit" (Metzner 153). The ego has now metaphorically died, thus allowing one to live in a world transformed into an enhanced state of waking consciousness. This "born-again" Self is of a childlike disposition that is "filled with the wonder, joy, and spontaneity of childhood" (Metzner 137). Jesus metaphorically fulfills these roles as being the ideal archetype for both the "radiant child" as well as the enlightened being that completes the full cycle of physical resurrection. As previously noted through Zen wisdom, a literal interpretation of the story of Jesus will find one worshipping an idea, a language-based ideological rationale that sees Jesus as being mutually exclusive from self. Perceiving the historical Jesus as a well-crafted philosophical metaphor for the process of self-transformation allows one to transcend the surface of words, seeing the message that underlies the narrative:

#### ***You be Jesus.***

The above quote from the Gospel of Thomas explicitly exposes Jesus' message. The "Kingdom of Heaven" is not a "place" one "goes to" after one "dies." Heaven is available before you, if you are willing to endure the discovering process of self-realization. The light, therefore, is not at "the end" of the tunnel, the light is *in-front* of the tunnel, to be shared in by each individual who has enduring faith. This understanding of faith is not in "holding on" to a

specific given ideological system or a book or a walled in building where Truth is found, rather faith is quite the opposite.

*The Truth can only be found within the depths of one's being, and to un-cover these depths, one must "let go" of the literally interpreted cognitive structures they have been handed. This notion of faith, while tremendously difficult to practice because it demands one to give up his or her rational belief system, will reveal what is hidden to the blind eye: Not only are You Satan and Jesus; You are everything that is, everything that was, and everything that will be; You are the All-One. When un-coverING Truth, you will see there is no End, for the very moment you are reading these words, you are living within the Eternal Moment, where each breath taken is part of the reciprocal totality of life that is eternally*

**THE BEGINNING.**