

## God in Three Persons: A Spiritual Odyssey

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“Behold, I show you a Mystery”

Apollos peeked his head out of his sleeping bag and saw the dawn light chase the stars away from the night canopy above him. He stared at the changing scene momentarily through the mesh opening at the top of his tent. He rubbed the sleep out of his eyes with his knuckles and scrambled shakily to his feet. The discarded covering lay in a heap towards the back of the small pup tent. He pulled the tent zipper upwards, opening the door to the outside world of nature.

Apollos crawled out of the dark blue tent, straightened up, and stretched himself out to his full six foot height. He looked towards the east and felt the morning breeze lightly brush against his bearded face. He had set his mental clock to rise before the sun and watch the day begin from the summit, which was a mere hundred yards from his campground. His long lanky legs carried him swiftly over the glaciated grey-white granite rocks to the top of the dome.

As he caught his breath upon reaching the elevated height of 8,122 feet, he searched the eastern horizon for the first rays of the solar orb. The snowy range in the distance looked like an interlaced chain of jagged crystalline peaks. This was the backbone of the state of California – the Sierra Nevada.

The first ray of light broke through the dark shadows just south of the tall pyramidal shape of Mt. Starr King. From the vantage point of Sentinel Dome, Apollos felt like he was at the center and on top of the world, looking out on the first day of creation as the ball of light ascended above the crystal snow line of mountains, making the entire sky seem a veritable Range of Light. That’s what the naturalist John Muir had called the mountainous range when he first set eyes on it, proclaiming the entire Yosemite Valley and its surroundings to be the greatest temple on earth.

Apollos gave homage to the light which flooded the hills and the valley by placing his feet together and stretching his arms out to his sides in a horizontal manner. With eyes closed he let the light flow into his inner being and warm the cells of his body with an effulgence that made his entire mind and spirit glow with an energizing force. He took a deep long breath from the surrounding air and drank into his lungs the taste of the pine trees. A cool current of electrifying fluid coursed up his spine into the awaiting reservoir in his brain. The top of his head felt like the mountainous range of light, and he saw in his mind's eye a crown on his head sending out rays in all directions.

He opened his eyes and felt like he had just bathed in the streams that cascaded down the walls of the Yosemite Valley. Apollos did not see the long dark cross shape behind him that was formed by his outstretched arms, a cross which seemed to stretch over the green hills clear across the western sky.

Directly behind him stood the lone windswept and gnarled pine tree on the summit, a Jeffrey pine that had lost its green needles and was left to stand bare upon the dome as a reminder to the onlooker that it had passed the test of time. It was a sentinel who stood watching as the elements of air, water, and fire swept over the land. It was a witness to the passage of time, somewhat like its southern neighbor, the towering and majestic *Sequoia gigantea*. The tallest conifer in the world was also the oldest, reaching upwards of almost 3,000 years.

Apollos tried to imagine the passage of the centuries that the old sequoia had seen in its lifetime. He saw it emerge from a three-inch cone at the end of the last ice age, while glaciers formed the immense grandeur and beauty of the valley and its surroundings by carving out the granite rock to make its own sculptured designs. He felt the tree soar 300 feet into the sky and look across the earth with its needle receptacles to sense the races of men and their civilizations coming and going upon the face of the earth.

The visionary's head seemed to spin, and he stumbled forward to a large circular rock and grabbed hold of it. He noticed a large circular brass plaque attached to the top of the rock. It was a 360-degree panoramic display of everything that surrounded the centrally located Sentinel Dome. The plaque had the names of all the surrounding landmarks inscribed on it. He tried to look in all four directions and identify the main features of the valley. To the west he saw Cathedral Rocks and El Capitan, to the north he saw Three Brothers and heard the Yosemite Fall, to the east he saw Half Dome, and to the south he saw Wawona Point, home to the giant sequoias.

When he looked back at the circular plaque, something strange seemed to happen to his perception, and his eyes started to water. *The circular shape started to slowly revolve, and he could barely make out what seemed to be four figures staring at him out of a cloudy surface: a bright red lion with a flaming mane; across it was a manly figure with an angelic face; next and to the left was a figure of a bellowing ox; and across from it was a soaring eagle. The figures seemed to correspond respectively to the four directions: east, west, north, and south.*

*And in a lightning-moment, directly in the center of the revolving wheel, Apollos saw a figure whom he immediately recognized and which caused him to cry out, "Oh, my God!"*

*It was his fiancée, Sophia. He saw through his blurry tear-filled eyes what appeared to be an anguished look on her pale face and a glance of fear in her blue eyes. He heard her cry out, "Help!" And then the picture before him went dark, and he stared in disbelief at the scene which had just flashed before his eyes.*

There was no time to lose. His solitary retreat would have to be resumed some other time. Apollos quickly packed his belongings, rolled up his tent, and descended from the heights, driving his well-used Mercury vehicle down curvy Glacier Point Road, thinking only of the young woman he had been courting for seven months. He recalled the first time he saw her; she had walked into his philosophy

class wearing a rose-colored skirt, and she sat in the front row. It was his first year teaching; he had just finished his master's degree in philosophy and was assigned a temporary associate professor position at the university. It must have been those legs with the firm thighs, which she displayed as she crossed her legs, that first caught his attention. After that, he had a hard time teaching Plato's Symposium. She had noticed him blush whenever she caught him looking at her muscular thighs.

The car turned on El Portal Road and started following the Merced, River of Mercy, whose waters mirrored the flowing of Apollo's blood, hurrying through the body as it made its way back to its source, the heart. Apollo was praying for mercy for his beloved fiancée, the love of his life, to whom he had proposed when she returned a second year as a devoted student. Sophia had stayed after class many a day, asking questions that stimulated conversations about the philosophical systems of great thinkers.

"Do you think the Socratic method of asking continuous questions is the best way to arrive at ultimate truth?" she asked one day after class.

"What do you think?" was his response.

They both had a hearty laugh whenever they tried that method of inquiry.

"Do you believe Hegel's spiral theory of life leads to a progressive evolution of man?" she asked on another occasion.

"Yes, I do," he replied in the affirmative. "I believe in the innate goodness of mankind."

"Then how about all the evil in the world?" she asked.

Apollo felt a surge of fear in his heart at the thought of the picture of fear he had seen during his morning meditation. 'How could such a fearsome possibility exist amidst the beauty of nature?' he asked himself. He tried to juxtapose the joy of communing with nature and the despair of struggling to survive in the physical world. He tried to think of the treasures of the visual and sensory forms of swaying waterfalls, perpendicular walls, fragrant flowers and

trees, singing birds, and numerous lakes to enjoy. In fact, he remembered reading that John Muir had actually counted one hundred and eleven lakes which were created by the receding glaciers within Yosemite National Park.

However, at the present moment nothing could erase the cry for help that echoed in his mind over and over again.

It was almost noon when he finally arrived in San Francisco at his small apartment near Brotherhood Way, a short walk from the university where he taught. He immediately knew something was wrong when he opened the door and saw overturned chairs and papers strewn all over the room.

“Sophia!” he called out. There was no answer.

He walked across the room to the bedroom. Some of Sophia’s clothes were lying haphazardly on the bed. She had moved in with him when summer vacation began; he had been planning to marry her on Midsummer Eve in honor of their mutual adoration for the romantic flair of the playwright-philosopher Shakespeare.

“Sophia, where are you?” he said out loud as if expecting her to still be somewhere hidden in the small staff apartment. He looked in the closet and found his answer – her suitcase was gone! And so was a slim selection of clothes hanging next to his. It appeared as if she was forced to pack in haste and was permitted to take only what she needed. But why? And where?

When he finally made his way to his desk, he saw something that he hoped would provide the answer to his “where” question. A single sheet of paper with bold red letters stared back at him with the following message:

When you enter the Dragon Gate  
And retrieve the Trident  
And face the Four Beasts  
And seize the Sacred Heart,  
Then Grace will guide your steps  
To a Twin view  
Of the Crossroads where  
You will find your treasure.

Suddenly, a gut-wrenching feeling forced him to look inside the top drawer of his desk. His unfinished manuscript was missing!

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Joshua emerged from the cave under the mount and looked across the sea. He stood for a moment and let the salty sea breeze blow his shoulder-length hair away from his face. He tried to bring back into his consciousness the lucid dream he had of a vast being standing with one foot on the land and the other foot in the sea. The picture materialized in the eye of his thought and he saw a being who seemed to stretch from the earth to the heavens. Encircling his body around his waist were rings with orbiting bodies attached to them. They appeared to be seven planetary orbs. In his hands the white-bearded being held a circular disk which he slowly spun around his shoulders with his hands. The disk had twelve pictures on it, with four of them having an appearance of real life to them: a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle.

A black raven flew overhead, and Joshua looked up to see in which direction it was flying. The raven landed directly above him on a juniper tree and dropped a morsel of bread at his feet. 'This must be a sign,' he thought. He picked the bread up and ate it. It tasted good and satisfied his hunger. He walked up the path away from the cave.

As he approached the monastic community, he heard the singing of the morning hymn. On this day the words intoned the sweet name of Asherah, the Earth Mother, whose nutritive forces provided food and nourishment for the body and the soul. He hurried up the stone steps to the temple building. He was met at the entrance by his confidante, the temple maiden Binah.

“Where have you been? You’re late!” said Binah in a reprimanding voice.

“I was at the cave of Elias, meditating,” answered Joshua in a condescending tone.

“Yeshua,” she said endearingly, using his Hebrew name, “You’re always meditating in that cave. Are you trying to ride the chariot of fire up to the heavens and leave me here on earth by myself?” Binah chuckled and smiled at Joshua in an understanding way.

“I’ve got to tell you about my dream,” he anxiously said, grabbing her hand as she turned to go into the temple.

“Can’t it wait? We’re going to miss the morning communion with our earth mother.”

“This is very important,” stressed Joshua. “I need to understand what I saw. You’ve always helped me understand my dreams. Anyway, I’m more interested in the evening communion with the heavenly father, where we contemplate eternal life.”

“You’ve convinced me,” conceded Binah. “Let’s go up to the bluff overlooking the sea.”

She grabbed his hand and they hurried together up the path past the purification pool to the place where Mount Carmel met the Mediterranean Sea. Their white robes, which were the required dress code by the Essenian Order to which they belonged, flowed behind them in the wind. Here, on top of the Carmel Range which extended fourteen miles southwest from the sea, was a verdant park filled with pine, eucalyptus, and cypress trees and bounteous lush natural vegetation. Carm-El was well named, for it meant Garden of God. Truly, it was a fertile terra rossa whose rich red soil was said to be used to create the first man.

Binah and Joshua finally made it to their favorite lookout. Two trees stood side by side near the bluff. As young children they used to come to this place to hug the trees. They used to pretend that they could feel the roots of the tree digging deep down to the ancient limestone, and the veins of the tree pumping water up to its limbs and leaves. They pretended that they could feel the same force of life

flowing through their body. Now that they were grown-up, a man and a woman, they still loved to embrace their favorite tree and establish a link with the stream of life. They looked like two pillars melded into the tree of life and its eternal source.

“Now, tell me your dream,” said Binah, after they finished their little ritual.

Joshua felt someone shaking him. “Wake up! It’s time to go,” he heard a voice say.

He opened his eyes wide open and stared straight ahead. His senses were trying to relay a message to his mind that he had just awoken from a deep dream. It seemed to him as if two bodies were trying to overlap and join together, as if one part of his body had been somewhere else and was now trying to relate to the present moment.

The first thing that he said when he became totally aware of his surroundings was, “Binah, where are you?” He heard a still, small voice inside his mind answer, ‘I am always with you.’ The second thing he said when he realized he had been on a tour with a group of people inside the cave of Elias was, “Who is Yeshua?” He distinctly recalled Binah calling him that.

He followed the tour guide out of the cave and barely heard her say to the group that had gathered outside the cave, “And now we are going to go see the ruins of an ancient monastery where the Essenes used to live and worship both the masculine and the feminine aspects of God.” He trailed behind in a cloud of reverie. He still felt like he had really been somewhere else. When he saw the ruins he suddenly realized that he had just seen the exact place as it had existed in its actual form centuries ago.

When the tour ended on top of Mount Carmel, the tour guide reminded the tourists that the prophet Elias had a school for the development of prophets on the very site where now stood a Carmelite monastery complex called Stella Maris (Star of the Sea), in honor of the new Earth Mother, the Virgin Mary. Joshua followed the group into the church and looked up at the dome, where he witnessed the

colorful depiction of Elias being swept up to heaven in a fiery chariot.

‘His face looks like the one I saw in my dream, or vision, or other world experience I had,’ thought Joshua to himself. The white-bearded face of Elias and the white-bearded face of the being, who appeared to be of celestial origin, seemed to be transposed in the mind of Joshua. Joshua felt an eerie warm glow surge up his spine as he craned his neck to look straight up at the dome imagery.

Joshua finished his tour with a stop at the gift shop, where his roving eye drew him to a book with an interesting title: The Ascent of Mount Carmel by St. John of the Cross. He bought the book.

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Paul’s feet trudged through the desert sands. His tattered sandals were worn down to their soles. His feet ached from the daily pilgrimage to which he had been summoned.

He remembered clearly the voice that had spoken to him out of the dark recesses of his mind, “Go to Arabia.”

Paul’s mind was tormented daily by his acts of cruelty toward a group of fellow countrymen called the Nazarenes. The desert heat compounded the guilt that he felt in his heart. Deep down in his soul he knew that their beliefs were non-threatening to the authorities of his day.

‘So why was he repulsed by their ways?’ he asked himself. He knew their teachings conflicted with his orthodox ways. They were strict vegetarians and even refused to offer animal sacrifices, absolutely no killing; he felt the animal offerings were an essential part of the temple worship. They believed in the transmigration of the soul from one body to another; he couldn’t believe that the dead

came back to life in another body, changing place after place, and house after house. They yoked themselves to a holy vow not to cut their hair or even drink wine, and they fasted in order to be made perfect through suffering.

His journey through the Way of the Wilderness was beginning to resemble the steadfast rituals of the sectarians whom he had denounced and tried to exterminate. He felt the Followers of the Way, as they called themselves, were nothing more than a heretical cult of wandering exorcists, who tried to cure people by casting out imaginary demons. Now he had to battle his own personal demons as he traveled the King's Highway on the edge of the Trans-Jordan plateau.

It was days since he left the environs of Damascus, where he had planned to destroy the Nazarenes and their spiritual center. Instead, he had encountered the ringleader of the Nazarenes, who was called by various names, including the Holy One and the Just. He had never expected this teacher of righteousness to have such an impact on him. When he gazed into the dark brown eyes of the long-haired Nazarene, who confronted him before he could enter their holy order, Paul was completely taken aback by the light which emanated from his face.

"The Light of the divine has appeared to you," spoke the gentle-voiced Nazarene. "If you wish to be initiated into the mysteries of our order, you must first travel the Way of the Wilderness for forty days and experience the dark night of the soul. Afterwards, you will be shown the true Light within your own soul."

Darkness overcame Paul at the sound of those words. He recalled them distinctly as he traveled day and night in a state of semi-darkness, as if his mind was trying to break out of a constricting chrysalis. He had been given a higher directive from a higher mind than his, and he felt the urgent need to obey it in order to escape the stifling darkness which was suffocating his very being. He had to break out of the darkness into the light.

He had been traveling on the desert road for thirty days now. He had passed by the upper Sea of Galilee and its

turbulent waters what seemed to be ages ago. He had descended to the area of the Dead Sea, following parallel to the Jordan River. As he approached the fortress city of Petra in the Arabian Desert, he was frightened half to death by a serpent which crossed his path. He recoiled from the sight of the hideous creature which had been cursed even by God.

He thought the serpent in the wilderness portended evil ahead, and he spent the last ten days of his journey feeling totally scared to death. He felt that the specter of death awaited him. ‘Had he come thus far only to face imminent death?’ he thought to himself. He came face to face with his greatest fear—death itself. He hadn’t even winced when he saw others die, or when by the authority of his governing body he had put to death innocent sectarians. The image of one particular young man stood out in his mind as a martyr to a faith that his zealotry was determined to eradicate.

‘Would he be willing to die for a cause?’ he mused within the confines of his solitary thinking. ‘Would he be willing to give up his dear life and the desire to enjoy all that life had to offer? Was this the supreme test that he had to face in order to escape the labyrinth of darkness and ignorance that had engulfed him like a net?’ At this point in his journey he felt totally abandoned, and he wanted to cry out for help. But he knew he couldn’t give in to despair, so he gathered up enough inner strength and courage to continue.

On the fortieth day of his pilgrimage through the wilderness, Paul completed his trials of mind and body and finally reached his destination: the holy mount. There was no smoke from its peak and no rumbling on the ground. There was a calmness that pervaded the area around the mount where the law was delivered to Moses and where the prophet Elias heard a still, small voice. In the tradition of his forefathers, Paul approached the mount and looked for a path to ascend to the top.

Before him appeared a cave which he had only noticed as he approached closer to the mount. There seemed to be a green glow emanating from the entrance, beckoning him to

come inside. He took off his sandals, sensing that he was treading on hallowed ground.

Inside the cavern he saw a great figure of a man, with a great Egyptian headdress with a uraeus upon his forehead, and a great golden throne upon which he sat. In his left hand he held a brazen caduceus, and in his right hand he held an emerald tablet that produced the green light which captivated his attention.

“Mercurius!” exclaimed Paul when he recognized the messenger of the gods who always carried his caduceus with him.

“Balinas, welcome to my abode,” said the illustrious being.

“Why do you call me Balinas?” asked Paul. “My name is Paul.”

“You will be called by many names, just like I am called by many names,” he answered. “You called me by my Latin name, although I am more recognized by my Greek name, Hermes, and my Egyptian name, Thoth.”

“Are you the true Light that was promised?” asked Paul, referring to the words of the Nazarene.

“Some think of me as the Soul of the World, and some think of me as the Light which dispels darkness. And others say that I am a personification of Reason and Mind. You take your pick.”

“I wish to have my darkness vanquished,” stated Paul, who resolved in his mind to be enlightened.

“You have chosen wisely, for that is the first step in the illumination of the soul,” said Hermes.

At once the Emerald Tablet was bathed in a green radiant light, and the winged caduceus began to vibrate and pulsate with a humming energy.

“The first principle is written on the tablet for you to perceive,” stated Hermes.

Paul peered into the vast depth of the tablet and saw three words:

Truth is One.

He saw the bulb on top of the central rod of the caduceus light up with a scintillating light.

Paul peered again into the tablet and saw the second principle appear:

All is Vibration,  
moving at different rates of motion  
according to the law of opposites or polarity.

Paul looked back at the caduceus and saw the white and black snakes encircling the central rod begin to move. In the crystal ball of the central rod he saw a circular shape resembling the oriental yin and yang, the white alongside the black, and the white in the black and the black in the white.

Again he looked at the tablet, and the third principle appeared:

Unity emanates forth duality,  
and duality produces  
the triune nature of all life.

He glanced back at the bulb, and he saw a point emanating into two lines, then being joined by a third line, producing a triangle.

The fourth principle appeared:

When the circle is squared,  
the material order of nature is unfolded  
through the elements of  
fire, water, air, and earth.

Inside the crystal ball a circle opened up and a square appeared with the cardinal points of the horizon placed around the images of fire to the south, water to the west, air to the east, and earth to the north.

Paul's attention was diverted from the familiar imagery back to the tablet:

The creative process descends  
as a force from above into form,  
and then ascends  
through a process of regeneration  
back to its source.

The crystal ball emitted a fiery ray of light descending from a point, and Paul watched as the light formed a figure of a man standing inside an image of a pentagram.

The tablet again demanded its share of attention:

What is above  
is like what is below.  
The microcosm below  
reflects the macrocosm above.

The bulb showed two equilateral triangles, the one below inverted and reflecting the upright one above. Then they moved together and interlaced themselves into a Star of David.

The tablet again glowed:

The pillars of wisdom  
are unveiled by ascending  
the seven steps  
corresponding to  
the seven planetary spheres.

The crystal ball showed a seven-stepped stairway, like a pagoda temple, and on the seven steps were placed rotating spheres of Saturn, the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, and Jupiter.

The tablet revealed the eighth principle:

All life spirals upwards  
as man travels  
the eightfold path.

The bulb showed an eight-spoked wheel with inscriptions on right thinking and living.

The tablet displayed the penultimate principle:

Humanity is the work  
of the Sun and the Moon,  
and the Great Work of humanity  
is Perfection.

Paul peered into the crystal ball and saw a transparent man with the image of Hermes' caduceus superimposed upon the spinal column.

Paul read the last and ultimate principle:

The ten archetypal forms  
are the basis  
of all existence.

Paul turned to look for the corresponding image in the crystal ball, but Hermes lifted the caduceus and said, "For this image, you must look into your own mind and soul. Close your eyes."

Paul closed his eyes, and he felt Hermes tap the skull of his head lightly with the top of the caduceus, and he instantly saw a bright light in his mind's eye; and in the center of that light he saw the tetractys of Pythagoras, formed of the numerical 1+2+3+4. And then the ten spheres seemed to reassemble themselves into another pattern, resembling the tree of life. The ten spheres glowed with the colors of the rainbow spectrum, and Paul felt the spheres pulsating within his own body, filling it with light in its manifold vibrations.

Paul was not aware of the passage of time as he watched the interplay of colors and the tree-like formation with the twenty-two paths that connected the spheres.

When he finally opened his eyes, Hermes was gone. On the back wall of the cave he saw four flaming letters in a vertical column:

Y  
H  
V  
H

He also noticed that when he closed his eyes again, he saw the entire sequence of events that he had witnessed in the cave. He realized that the words and images of the Emerald Tablet were etched in his mind and in his heart.

