

God in Three Persons: A Spiritual Odyssey

555

επιθυμια (epithumia), Desire

ε 5

π 80

ι 10

θ 9

υ ...400

μ 40

ι 10

α 1

555

“We speak the Wisdom of God in a Mystery,
even the hidden Wisdom, which God ordained
before the world unto our glory.” -- I Corinthians 2:7

“Apollos!” exclaimed Sophia. Her flowery golden dress flowed behind her as she rushed into Apollos’ arms. Their lips met in a sweet reunion as they embraced each other.

“Sophia, my love,” cried Apollos as he looked into her sky-blue eyes and saw a reflection of his bearded face in her eyes. “I thought you were the goddess Athena, and you were a 40-foot statue that became alive and imparted wisdom to me.”

“And I thought you were Apollo, the god of light, coming in your solar glory through the eastern door of the temple,” said Sophia, whose arms held Apollos tight around his neck as she looked into his teary gray-blue eyes. “I saw you riding in a chariot of light to rescue me from the gloomy darkness of the past three weeks.”

“What happened? Who abducted you? Where did they take you? Why did they do this?” The questions poured out of Apollos like a bubbling brook. He lowered his arms from around her slim waist and took both of her soft hands in his firm hands.

“Hold on, not so fast,” laughed Sophia. “You’re full of questions. I’ll try to answer your questions as best as I can.” She made a cursory glance behind her in the direction of the columns of the Parthenon.

“Is there someone with you?” asked Apollos, who noticed Sophia’s anxious look.

“Never mind that for now,” answered Sophia curtly. “Let me tell you what happened first. Remember when you were at Yosemite for your spiritual retreat?” Apollos nodded with a sad reminiscence in his mind. “Well, someone must have confessed to a priest that you were teaching a heretical philosophy at the university. Remember when you were teaching the course on great Greek philosophers, and you included Apollonius of Tyana as part of the course?”

“Yes, I remember,” admitted Apollos. “Come to think of it, I believe I even mentioned in class that I was working on a manuscript about Apollonius, comparing the Greek philosopher with the Christian savior and the Apostle Paul.”

“Yes, you did,” remarked Sophia. “And that’s when a sensitive student with strong Christian beliefs felt uneasy and confessed to his priest about the troubling subject matter. And you can imagine what the priest did. He called his superior, and before long it reached the ears of the Vatican. The Catholic authorities sent their lackeys to find and destroy the manuscript before it became public. When they knocked on the apartment door, they looked like two priests in their Sunday clothing. They seemed cordial at first, but when I naively let them into the apartment, I found out that they were on a serious mission. They probably would have forced their way into the apartment either way, so I was basically helpless. Anyway, as you probably found out, the two men found your manuscript, and they forced me to pack a suitcase and leave with them for a designated location.”

“How did they come up with the scheme of the clues to notify me of where to find you?” Apollos interrupted. He didn’t want to say anything at the moment about the notes which he had recovered.

“That was my idea,” answered Sophia. “I knew, and they knew, that you would start searching for me. They didn’t want the police involved. So I told them I would write clues on the piece of paper that you found, and also on the cards in those red envelopes.”

“That was ingenious,” remarked Apollos. “Each of the seven clues was connected with a special place we had visited.”

“I thought you would like the romantic element in the quest to discover where they were planning to take me,” said Sophia, her eyes beaming with delight.

“But why Athens?” inquired Apollos.

“They wouldn’t tell me,” said Sophia, glancing back again in the direction of the columns.

“They didn’t harm you, did they?” asked Apollos anxiously.

“No, they were actually courteous, as long as I didn’t resist them,” explained Sophia. “The two men who flew with me to Rome actually were very talkative, and inquisitive.”

“Rome?” asked Apollos quizzically. “Why Rome?”

“They wanted to deliver me and the manuscript to a special liaison person who was handling the sensitive, and potentially explosive, case,” said Sophia. She glanced a third time over her right shoulder to see if anyone was coming. She knew that she was under surveillance, and she was hoping that she would have some time with Apollos before her private meeting was discontinued.

“Is that person watching you right now?” asked Apollos, who was beginning to suspect that Sophia was still held captive.

“Yes, he is,” confessed Sophia. “But he promised me I could have a private moment with you before he appears to explain what they want.”

“What do they want?” asked Apollos, who was exasperated with the entire situation.

“He wouldn’t tell me,” answered Sophia. “But don’t think of that now. Soon this bad dream will be over, and we’ll awaken and all of this senseless intrigue will seem like an illusion. I’m just glad that we’re finally together again, and that the nightmare of being separated from you is over. And of all things, on Midsummer Eve, the day we planned to get married.”

“I know,” said Apollos. “That’s quite ironical. Just to think that we could have been exchanging our marriage vows in a chapel right now instead of standing in Athena’s temple just holding hands.”

“Our love and dedication to each other go beyond any formalities,” consoled Sophia. “As far as I’m concerned, I’m already eternally yours.”

“And I am yours, to love and to cherish from this day forward,” vowed Apollos as he took Sophia in his arms again and solemnly kissed her.

When Apollos opened his eyes again, he noticed a dark figure dressed in black stepping out of the shadows behind a column. The ominous figure started walking towards them in a slow deliberate pace, as if he were stalking them.

“Is that the guy?” asked Apollos, as he slowly released Sophia from the long embrace.

Sophia turned around. Her face turned pale. “I promised him that you wouldn’t try anything drastic. In exchange he would provide us safe passage home after they get what they want. Please hear him out.”

“What am I up against, a grand inquisition?” remarked Apollos sarcastically. He watched as the bald-headed man with a goatee and mustache approached him. The burly man appeared to be in his mid-fifties.

“Professor Apollos,” said the man, whose medium-height almost matched Apollos’ height. “Glad to make your acquaintance. My name is Simon Petroma.” He reached out his hand to shake Apollos’ hand.

Apollos held onto Sophia’s hand without extending a hand in greeting. Something in the dark brown eyes of the black-suited man caused Apollos to mistrust him. A queasy knot formed in his abdominal region.

“What are you after?” asked Apollos bluntly. “You already have my manuscript. What more do you want?”

“I see you like to get right to the point,” chuckled Simon. “Well, to tell you the truth, someone in the Vatican is really interested in that little book that you mentioned in your manuscript. They thought it would be part of your manuscript. However, it seems that your unfinished manuscript was supposed to end with that little book, which you enticingly named, ‘The Key to the Initiated.’ That’s what they want to see.”

“So that’s what they’re after,” mused Apollos to himself.

“Weren’t you going to consult an oracle, like Apollonius did, to recover that ancient book written by the great philosopher himself?” asked Sophia, turning to Apollos and indicating in a clever way, by squeezing his hand, to go along with her idea.

“Ah, that’s right, dear,” said Apollos endearingly. “It seems as if the gods have smiled down upon us by bringing us to the land of oracles to retrace the steps which Apollonius took nearly two thousand years ago.”

Simon Petroma listened while Sophia and Apollos discussed what seemed like a plausible solution to the problem of the little book, which supposedly held the key to the magical arts; at least that was what Simon thought. The handsome couple didn’t know that Simon had been dabbling in the occult sciences, and that his perfidious mind was scheming to get the little magical book for himself.

“So it’s settled,” finally announced Sophia. “We’ll visit the oracle of Delphi, just like Apollonius did.”

“But the real oracle left centuries ago after the Byzantine emperor Theodosius the Great closed it down in the year 392,” remarked Simon skeptically.

“I will be the Pythian oracle,” stated Sophia, astounding both Apollos and Simon with her matter-of-fact proposition. “After all, this land is part of my heritage, and I am familiar with the spirits who still roam over this ancient land of the gods.”

“I didn’t know you were Greek,” said Apollos.

“There’s a lot that you don’t know about me,” said Sophia, “but which you’ll learn about as we travel the road of life together.” She hugged him in reassurance.

Simon was beginning to believe that Sophia could actually materialize the contents of the little book out of thin air. After all, she had correctly predicted that Apollos would arrive in Athens and meet them on Midsummer Eve.

“Shall we get started today?” asked Simon, who sensed urgency to his mission. “We could spend the night at a hotel in Delphi and then visit the oracle – I mean, have you play the role of the oracle – tomorrow. It will be St. John the Baptist’s Day, or as you pagans call it, Midsummer Day.”

“Sounds like a good plan,” chimed in Apollos and Sophia together as they looked approvingly at each other.

“Where are you staying?” asked Simon, as they started walking out of the Parthenon.

“I’m staying at the Hotel Hermes,” answered Apollos, who walked hand in hand with Sophia. “On Apollonus Street.”

“And we’re staying in separate rooms at the Adonis,” informed Sophia. “On Kodrou Street, which is only a couple of blocks from you.”

“I was going to stay there, but I thought the name Adonis was a bad omen,” said Apollos. “You know how I shy away from those Greek and Roman saviors who are dying and then rising again.”

“I know,” said Sophia, “but don’t forget that Adonis was a lover of Venus, and he spent half of the year with her, making the earth fertile and renewing the vegetation, while the other half he spent with Persephone, the goddess of the underworld.”

“Shall we walk back to the hotels down the Panathenaic Way through the Agora, or the shorter way over the Areopagus Hill?” asked Simon as they walked down from the Acropolis.

“I wouldn’t mind seeing the place where Apostle Paul supposedly stood on Mars Hill, or Hill of Ares, the god of war, and made his famous speech about the unknown god,” said Apollos.

They walked down the rocky hill, adjacent to the Acropolis, heading westward.

“It’s quite a coincidence that Apollonius was also here at about the same time, roughly 51 AD,” stated Apollos. “Apollonius lectured the Athenians on how the worship of the gods was to be conducted, whereas Paul lectured them on the worship of the one invisible God.”

“I think it’s curious that Paul’s appearance before the Council of the Areopagus was similar to the trial of Socrates, where he tried to convince the people to question their belief in the Greek gods,” stated Sophia.

“I find it paradoxical that Paul would quote the pagan philosopher-poets, Epimenides and Aratus, to make his point about the oneness of God,” stated Simon,

showing that he also was knowledgeable about the subject under discussion. “In fact, Minos addresses Zeus in that famous biblical quote:

‘They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one –
The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies!
But thou art not dead: thou livest and abidest forever,
For in thee we live and move and have our being.’”

“Well quoted,” said Apollos with admiration. “I was not aware that Paul was referring to Zeus when he was talking about God. Not that it matters, for both are just different names of the Supreme Deity.”

The three hikers descended from Ares’ Hill and climbed down the ancient rock stairs to the foot of the hill, where a bronze plaque set in a rock displayed the text of Paul’s sermon, from Chapter 17 of the Book of Acts, in Greek:

Εν αυτω γαρ ζωμεν και κινουμεθα και εσμεν, ως και τινες των καθ υμας ποιητων ειρηκασιν, του γαρ και γενοσ εσμεν.

Sophia began reading the 28th verse of the Greek text: “**En autō gar zōmen kai kinoumetha kai esmen ōs kai tines tōn kath umas poiētōn eirēkasin tou gar kai genos esmen.**”

Simon interpreted: “For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.”

“That was exquisite,” applauded Apollos. “So, you know Greek.” Apollos looked at Sophia with admiration as they continued walking down the hill.

“It’s my mother tongue,” admitted Sophia. “I haven’t used it in quite some time.”

“Here we are at Apostolou Pavlou,” announced Simon as they merged with the western pedestrian avenue named after Apostle Paul.

The pedestrian avenue merged with the southern walkway around the Acropolis. “Can you imagine Athenians naming a street after Dionysion Areopagitou, and even making him the patron saint of the city?” stated Simon rhetorically as they walked on the avenue of Dionysius the Areopagite.

“And just to think that he was supposedly a convert of the apostle after that Mars Hill speech,” informed Apollos. “And then centuries later we find out he was actually a late 5th century Christian mystic who copied a lot from the Neoplatonist Proclus.”

“Sounds like an example of interpolation in the scriptures,” noted Sophia. “That was the work of the editors – to cut, insert, delete, alter, reword – a process that goes on to this day with every new edition of the Bible that comes out.”

Half-an-hour later they arrived at the Plaka district, and they parted ways to go to their separate hotels.

“I’ll have a taxi at your door in about thirty minutes,” called Simon as Apollos started walking toward his hotel.

When the taxi pulled up at Hotel Hermes, Apollos was ready to go. He climbed into the back seat and sat with Sophia, who had changed into a plain dark blue dress.

“I liked you better in your flowery golden dress,” opined Apollos, noticing a change in Sophia’s mood.

“We have a slight change in plans,” remarked Sophia seriously. “We need to make a short stop at Eleusis. I need to initiate you into the Eleusinian mysteries before we proceed to Delphi.”

“What’s going on here?” asked Apollos, looking at Simon as the taxi weaved in and out of traffic to make its way out of the city.

“Don’t look at me,” said Simon sheepishly. “Sophia’s in charge now, and she told me she needs to stop at Eleusis for a purification ritual. Anyway, we’re passing through the area of ancient Eleusis on the road to Delphi, so it’s really not out of the way.”

“Sophia, what’s the meaning of this?” begged Apollos as he tried to draw her closer to him.

“In ancient times we traveled this road on foot for fourteen miles in a sacred procession to reenact the story of Demeter in search of her daughter Persephone, who was abducted by the god of the underworld,” intoned Sophia as she gazed into the distant past. “This was the Sacred Way.”

The taxi picked up speed as it rode on Leoforos (avenue) Athinon out of the congested city and toward the body of water generally known as the Saronic Gulf. The road to the city of Elefsina, where ancient Eleusis once stood as a beacon of Greek civilization, followed the shoreline of the water.

Apollos’ mind was reeling from the sudden pressure that descended on him. Sophia wanted to initiate him into the sacred Eleusinian mysteries. What was she up to?

“On the surface,” continued Sophia, after a pregnant period of silence, “it appears that the myth of the mother in quest of a lost daughter is simply about the seasonal changes in the agricultural cycle, where the corn goddess must descend to the underworld or die in the winter time, and then return to life as a new stalk of corn in the spring time. However, as an allegory of the soul, the drama revealed the immortal nature of life, which goes through cycles of death and rebirth, just like the grain of corn that seems to die in the dark soil, but springs up to life in the bright light of day.”

Sophia’s face was beaming with a radiant light which came from her inner being. Apollos had never seen her like this before. She seemed to be transforming into a goddess right in front of his mortal eyes. He was speechless as he gazed upon her awe-inspiring beauty.

“Elefsina,” announced the taxi-driver as they neared the industrial town with its oil refineries, factories, and shipyard.

“We’re certainly going to need to use our imaginations to visualize Eleusis as it once was, not as it is now,” stated Simon jocularly.

“Just picture in your mind an ancient center of religious devotion nestled on the green slopes of a low hill close to the shore of the bay,” instructed Sophia.

When the taxi drove up to the archeological site, it was hard to imagine a glorious past amidst the scant remains of the ancient ruins.

“Follow me,” motioned Sophia to Apollos as she stepped out of the taxi and walked briskly towards a vision of the past that was etched in her memory.

“I’ll wait with the taxi,” called Simon as Sophia and Apollos receded into the background. “Don’t be long,” he added as he glanced at his wristwatch.

Sophia walked up the Sacred Way through the courtyard and gates and into the sacred complex, which she envisioned still standing in its majestic glory. Apollos only saw a sprawling site with paved pathways, exposed floors, blocks of stone and marble, a former cave to the underworld blocked with stones, and rows of stone seats from an ancient temple. Sophia stepped up into the Telesterion, a large rectangular temple, and

entered the Anaktoron, a small structure housing the holy relics. Apollos only saw an excavated hole, exposing what used to be the south end of the sacred chamber.

“Sit on the ground,” commanded Sophia. Apollos sat on the exposed stone floor cross-legged. “Close your eyes. You will pass from life to a state of death, and then back again. Do not be afraid. I will be your guide.”

Sophia placed her right index finger on the center of Apollos’ forehead and braced his head by placing the palm of her left hand behind his neck. “You are going to see yourself as a filament of light descending through nine levels into an embryo and developing a physical body for yourself. That is the descent of Persephone into the underworld, from spirit to matter.” Apollos saw the guided imagery flowing on the screen of his mind’s eye. He saw his body grow from a tiny seed like a grain of corn. “That is known as death to the soul because it becomes entombed in the matter of a physical body and becomes unaware of its heavenly home.” Apollos felt a cold shiver of alienation and darkness flicker in his consciousness.

“Now, you are going to awaken from your state of ignorance and watch as your soul body rises to an awareness of its true self,” said Sophia as her index finger vibrated rapidly, as if drilling a hole into the ventricles of his brain. Suddenly, Apollos felt and saw a flaming burst of light erupt in his inner soul, and he envisioned a golden ear of corn rising from the ground.

“I see a golden ear of corn,” exclaimed Apollos ecstatically.

“Good,” said Sophia, obviously pleased with the results of the ritual. “That represents a resurrection of your soul from the tomb of your body. The grain of corn had to die in order for it to live. Do you see that?”

“Yes,” answered Apollos joyfully, realizing that the entire drama of the Eleusinian mysteries was enacted inside the heart and mind as a personal experience.

“You may open your eyes now,” said Sophia as she released her hands from his head. “Remember that time on Mt. Davidson in San Francisco when I told you: You are not the body?”

“Yes, I remember,” recalled Apollos. “Now I know for sure. But why did you put me through this interior experience?”

“I needed to get you ready to be my amanuensis when we arrive in Delphi,” explained Sophia. “You will write what I dictate. And for that I will need your purified mind and soul.”

“I thought it might be because you wanted me to experience what Apollonius experienced when he was initiated here into the Eleusinian Mysteries by the hierophant that he predicted would initiate him,” reasoned Apollos.

“That is an added benefit, knowing that we are walking in the steps of Apollonius,” smiled Sophia as she took Apollos’ hand and led him back to the taxi.

“I wonder if the initiations Apollonius went through in India and in Egypt, and other places, were the same as here, or different,” wondered Apollos as he walked hand in hand with Sophia.

“Each unfolded a different dimension of the vast consciousness of the divine inner being,” expounded Sophia.

Apollos remained deep in thought as they drove up the national road (E962) northward to Thebes, and then westward up the mountainous secondary road (3) to Delphi. He didn’t say anything about his initiation to Simon. He stared out the window

at the chain of summits which formed Mt. Helicon. Sophia was either sleeping or simply daydreaming as her head rested on his broad right shoulder.

“Lebadea (Livadia),” announced the taxi driver when they entered the town in the middle of the agricultural valley of Boeotia, a region of central Greece. The taxi driver needed to take a break, and so did the weary travelers.

“That reminds me,” said Apollos as he stepped out of the taxi and stretched his body, “isn’t this the place where Apollonius visited the Oracle of Trophonius?”

“It most certainly is,” said Sophia, who was back to her cheery old self. “In fact, according to his biographer, Damis, the philosopher emerged from the narrow cave of Trophonius after seven days with the answer to his question: ‘What is the most complete and pure philosophy?’ In his hands he had a volume containing the tenets of Pythagoras, who taught five centuries before Apollonius.”

“Aren’t there two streams here, from which those who entered the shrine had to drink?” asked Simon, scratching his bald head to try to remember what he had read about the oracle.

“Quite right,” answered Sophia, who was willing to refresh his memory. “First, the inquirer had to drink the water of Lethe (oblivion) to forget all past concerns, and then he had to drink the water of Mnemosyne (memory) to recall what was received from the oracle.”

“Maybe I should get some water from the streams and drink it when I ask the oracle of Delphi to reveal the contents of the little book tomorrow,” said Apollos, looking at Sophia inquiringly.

“That’s a good idea,” remarked Sophia, “Except we’ll have to boil the water – to get rid of any pollution – before you drink it.”

“Go ahead, I’ll wait by the taxi,” waved Simon reluctantly as the adventurous couple hurried up the small hill behind the town to find the magical water.

Within ten minutes the exuberant couple returned with two marked plastic bottles of water. A couple of young boys had led them to the famous streams for a small fee.

“Now we’re ready for the oracle,” said Apollos as he crawled into the taxi, holding both of the bottles of water.

“I hope it works for both of your sakes,” said Simon in a tone that was not very reassuring.

“The oracle resides not in the water,” rebutted Sophia, “but in the purified vessel of the spokesperson. The water is only used as a catalyst to facilitate the communication process.”

The taxi headed westward through cotton fields, with eucalyptus trees lining both sides of the two-lane blacktop road.

Within an hour and a half, the taxi had climbed up the southern slope of Mt. Parnassus and negotiated the winding road past some of its giant sandstone cliffs. Finally, after traveling 117 miles from Athens, they had arrived at Delphi.

“Here it is, the center of the world,” proclaimed Sophia, who felt like she had returned to a familiar place. “According to a legend, Zeus wished to find the center or navel of the world, so he released two eagles from opposite ends of the world. When their paths crossed the sky directly above Delphi, he established this site as the Omphalos, or navel of the earth.”

“According to another legend,” propounded Apollos, wishing to share his storehouse of knowledge, “the great serpent Python once lived in the chambers leading to the depths of the earth, and the oracle was controlled by and named after that fearsome creature, the Pytho. However, Apollo fought the dragon and slew him here, on the side of Mount Parnassus, and threw the body in the fissures to decay below the cavern of the oracle.”

“There’s another legend about this area,” interjected Simon, not wanting to be left out of the discussion, “where Zeus destroyed the world with a flood, but Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha survived and landed here on Mt. Parnassus.”

“Look, Apollonos Street,” interrupted Apollos, who was pleased to see the name of Apollonius honored. “Is our hotel on this street?”

“Actually, our hotel is on 32 Pavlou,” remarked Simon, who looked at a piece of paper where he had written the reservations for two rooms at the Parnassos Hotel. “The street is named after Apostle Paul.” The taxi turned onto Pavlou-Friderikis Street.

“Remember, Apollonos is a form of the name Apollo, the god of light,” reminded Sophia.

“I know,” said Apollos. “However, Apollonius is also a form of the name Apollo, who represented the intellect and the rational side of man.”

“Parnassos Hotel!” exclaimed the taxi driver in a loud booming voice, as if to sound the grand finale to a long tedious journey.

Before going to sleep that night, Apollos and Sophia drank the purified water from the streams Lethe and Mnemosyne. Both of them decided to put off the reward of marital bliss for the sacred encounter with the spirit of the god who would speak through the oracle.

Early the following morning, before the rays of Aurora beamed on the sacred archaeological site of Delphi, three eager pilgrims embarked on a pilgrimage to visit the oracle. Sophia was in a deep meditative state of mind, and Apollos gripped a notebook and pen as they walked solemnly hand in hand up the Sacred Way to the Temple of Apollo. Simon tagged along close behind them. Nearby, the slopes of Mount Parnassus rose to an elevation of about 8,000 feet.

Sophia led the way past the huge blocks of random-shaped limestone scattered throughout the ancient complex. They walked up the path which once was lined with statues, memorials, and treasuries. At the site where the Sanctuary of Apollo once stood, there only remained several tall Doric columns of thick cylindrical stones; the stones were stacked on top of one another in irregular heights. The peripteral temple once had thirty-eight columns (a six by fifteen design) around its rectangular sides. As they walked through an area where the portico once stood, Sophia said, “This is where the inscription read, ‘Gnothi Seauton’ – Know Thyself.”

Sophia proceeded to walk over to a spot near the center of the temple. “This is where the Delphos, or womb, of the earth mother, Gaia, was located,” reminisced Sophia. “She was the first oracle, and everyone who followed afterwards, including Themis, Phoebe, and Phoebus Apollo has taken on the mantle of her primeval spirit. Here I will sit.” She sat down cross-legged on the limestone slab with her long white robe covering her legs. Apollos sat down near her on her right hand. Simon sat on a nearby rock and watched.

There was no tripod of gold, ornamented with carvings of Apollo in the form of the Python, for Sophia to sit on. There were no oracular fumes rising through the cleft of the earth underneath the oracle. There was only a modest priestess, who sat with a straight back in a meditative pose and closed her eyes to concentrate on the crystal ball of her mind's eye.

"Ask your question," exhaled Sophia after she had taken a deep breath in preparation for the inspiration to begin. The first ray of Aurora beamed over the top of Mt. Parnassus.

"What are the contents of the book, Key to the Initiated, which Apollonius of Tyana wrote?" asked Apollos, who had carefully rehearsed the question the previous night. The scribe had the pen in his hand, and the notebook on his lap, ready to write what the mouthpiece of the oracle revealed. Unbeknownst to Apollos and Sophia, Simon had brought a tape recorder to record each word spoken by the oracle.

Sophia drew in another deep breath and exhaled slowly. Then she, or the god of the oracle, spoke in a slow melodic tone:

"This is the story of every soul living
Who ventures to travel beyond Earth's confines,
Seeking celestial and heavenly glories;
How it achieves this is written in stories.
Signs, symbols, metaphors must be deciphered,
Numbers add, names unveil, find meaning in All.
Characters external, part of you they are;
Walk in their steps, look through their eyes, you'll go far.
Starting with the central vision of seven,
Within and without seek the knowledge of Self;
Raise your consciousness from lowest to highest,
Ascend to the crown and in Truth you'll be blest.
Step one the base you must subdue and conquer;
Step two false prophets of lewd pleasure expose;
Step three the Dragon of dense desire devour;
Step four the Beast of low nature lose power;
Step five the cross of your body-self deny;
Step six be pure like the Lamb of clear conscience;
Step seven enter the door of the bliss-mind;
The ladder you've climbed up is the spine divine."

Sophia paused. There was a reverent silence in the mountainous air around them. Even the birds paused in their singing to listen to the new song that was being sung. After another deep breath and slow exhalation, Sophia continued the inspired recitation in an ancient cadence: hexameter verse.

"DRAMA OF LIFE is the keynote that's sounded, vibrations in motion,
Neophyte stands at the gate of redemption and waits for the trumpet.
Act one the chakras or centers are opened, and flower in colors,
Rainbow of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple lights up the aura.
Act two the trumpet sounds, brain cells awaken, illumined with bright light,
Spinal fires surge up the centers to light the encompassing Sol-Flame.

Act three the battle with elements, beasts of man's low inner nature,
False prophet, dragon, and beast are all three tied, defeated, and transformed.
Act four the harvest of earth and its vine in the center of the Heart,
Washing and cleansing, makes ready the purified blood of the New Man.
Act five the scourge of the land – procreate – generation is finished,
Regenerate and make ready for birth of the heavenly Soul-child.
Act six the last battle, descend in bold steps to infernal regions,
Extinguish all fires of burning desire, and gone is the Temptress.
Act seven, Last Judgment, earth lives are unrolled, and reviewed, and summed up;
Conqueror rides on a white horse, a new solar vehicle – a god.

Such is the DRAMA of each living SOUL.”

Sophia paused again. Then she concluded her prologue:

“Four seasons hath MAN:

Spring, the awakening, is his resurrection;

Summer, the growth, is his propagation;

Autumn, the harvest, is his fruition;

Winter, the resting, is his preparation

for a new season.

Then the cycle begins again, and again, and again.”

Sophia stopped. Her introductory melodic tones were concluded. She swallowed and cleared her throat. Apollos handed her a bottle of water to drink. She slowly gulped the water to lubricate her vocal cords. When she had relaxed again, and regained her solemn composure, she started to speak again, but this time in free verse.

“These are the words that Apollonius of Tyana wrote. May he always be remembered as a man who became a god,” intoned Sophia in a conversational tone.

As Simon listened to the oracle speak, he realized that he was hearing the revelation of one of the Vatican's best kept secrets: the esoteric meaning of the Apocalypse. Suddenly, he realized what he needed to do. He would wait for the complete unveiling of the little book by the oracle, just to make sure that he had recorded the complete ancient scripture. Then he would take the tape, along with Apollos and Sophia, to Rome.

----- X X X X X X X -----

Joshua dreamed that he was being thrown into a pit. Inside the pit were a scorpion and a snake. He cried out, and the snake and scorpion hid behind a rock in a crevice of the dry pit. Then he was pulled out of the gloomy pit by some merchants and taken, kicking and screaming, to a foreign land where he was sold as a slave to a temple priest. The temple priest had a beautiful wife who tried to seduce the handsome young man. He had to flee from her on numerous occasions. And then one day she drew a sword and placed it against his neck, demanding that he perform the illicit act with her or he dies. This time he screamed and ran for his life. His heart was pounding as he ran.

Joshua heard someone banging on the door of his hotel room. He got out of bed in his pajamas and went to open the door. He opened the door slightly and peered through the narrow opening with half-opened sleepy eyes at a young man standing in the semi-dark hallway.

“Are you all right?” asked the concerned young man. “I heard you through the adjacent wall. You were crying and screaming.”

“I must have had a nightmare,” answered Joshua in a soporific drone as he tried to remember what he was screaming about.

“O, my gosh, you’ve got blood on your neck,” said the young man, who was also standing in his pajamas.

Joshua ran his fingers across the left side of his neck and then stared in disbelief at the sign of blood on his right hand. He turned around without closing the door and walked quickly to the bathroom to look in the mirror. He couldn’t believe his eyes. There was an actual razor-sharp cut on his neck. He put a cloth on the wound to keep it from bleeding. An image of the dark-haired woman in his dream, with a sword in her hand, flashed in his mind.

“Are you all right?” called the young man, who had placed his head inside the room to see what was happening.

Joshua walked back to the front door and saw that the young man was already almost entirely inside the room. He had dark hair and light brown skin.

“It’s just a small cut,” said Joshua as he approached the young man. “You look familiar,” he added as he looked into the dark brown eyes of the concerned young man.

“I was on the tour with you yesterday,” said the young man. “My name is Yusuf, but you can call me Joe.” He wanted to extend his right hand in greeting, but he saw that Joshua was still holding the small cloth to his neck.

“Now I remember,” said Joshua as he recalled seeing Yusuf when they entered the Jaffa gate of the Old City. “Sorry about all the commotion. My name is Joshua, and you can call me Josh.”

“What happened to your pajama top?” asked Yusuf, who noticed a tear across the length of the front.

“Oh, my goodness,” said Joshua, realizing the extent to which his dream had become a reality. “I can’t believe this. What I dreamed has come to pass.”

“What did you dream?” asked Yusuf curiously.

“I dreamed that I was thrown into a pit,” said Joshua, whose eyes gazed upward into a faraway land. “I think it might have been my brothers who threw me in out of spite or jealousy. Then they sold me to some merchants traveling on camels to what seemed like Egypt. I was sold as a slave to a priest in a temple, where I was trained to be a temple servant. The priest’s wife, however, had other plans for me. She wanted me for her own pleasure. She even threatened me with a sword if I didn’t lay with her. That’s when I tore away from her grasp and ran away.”

“So that’s probably when you got the cut on the neck and the torn garment,” conjectured Yusuf, “and when you screamed out loud in your sleep.”

“That is so strange,” said Joshua reflectively. “I’ve never had such a dream before – so real that it manifests in physical reality.”

“What’s also strange about your dream,” added Yusuf, “is that it resembles the story of the biblical Joseph, except for the temple part.”

“Oh, my gosh!” exclaimed Joshua, realizing the implication of Yusuf’s statement. “Do you think it’s a past-life experience?”

“I don’t know about that,” frowned Yusuf. “I’m not convinced that we live more than one life. However, your dream could be a forewarning to watch out for women trying to seduce you.”

“You’ve got a point there,” remarked Joshua, recalling a soul-memory of an initiation in an Egyptian temple. Suddenly, an image of Egypt popped-up in his soul-consciousness. He saw two tall obelisks standing in front of a rectangular-shaped temple; they seemed to reflect the rays of the sun. Yusuf noticed the distant look in Joshua’s eyes.

“Wow, you looked like you just spaced-out,” remarked Yusuf. “Where’d you go?”

“I just had a vision of a temple on a mound in Egypt with two tall obelisks standing in front of it,” beamed Joshua. His face seemed to reflect the light from the distant past. “Something, or someone, is calling me to go to Egypt.” Joshua’s tone was absolutely resolute, as if the hand of destiny was guiding him through imagery imprinted on his mind.

“My guess is that you saw the ancient city of Heliopolis, which is associated with Joseph,” said Yusuf, displaying his knowledge of the biblical story. “Joseph married Asenath, daughter of Potipherah, the priest of Heliopolis, which is also called On.”

“I’ve got to go there,” reiterated Joshua, sensing an urgent desire to heed to the soul-call that was the driving force in his life.

“I’ll help you get there, if you want,” volunteered Yusuf. “I’ve been there before. All we have to do is catch the night bus to Cairo. We’ll be there by Monday morning. It’s too late to make it to the early morning bus, which leaves at 7:30am.” Yusuf looked at his wristwatch to check the time.

“I’d love to have a traveling companion,” said Joshua gleefully.

“Do you have a multiple-entry visa?” asked Yusuf.

“Yes, I made sure before I left the United States to get one in case I ventured into other lands, like Egypt,” answered Joshua.

“Good, so we’re both set to go and return without any hassle,” stated Yusuf. “In fact, I’d like to show you my favorite spot in Jerusalem today.”

“Where’s that?” asked Joshua.

“Get dressed and meet me in thirty minutes in the hotel lobby,” said Yusuf excitedly. “You’ll be in for a pleasant view of a special spot on earth.”

In thirty minutes the newfound friends were strolling outside the garden-like front of the Seven Arches Hotel on the summit of the Mount of Olives, waiting for the first rays of the sun to strike the gold-capped Dome of the Rock.

“Look, Beth-Shemesh is opening its doors in the east and revealing its glorious light!” exclaimed Yusuf when dawn broke over the Old City.

“What’s Beth-Shemesh?” asked Joshua as he watched the golden light chase the darkness away.

“The House of the Sun,” answered Yusuf. “That’s what my Hebrew mother called it when the sun rose in the eastern sky.”

“That’s quite a coincidence,” remarked Joshua. “My mother is also Jewish. She married a Christian man against the wishes of her family.”

“My mother married a Muslim,” shared Yusuf. “You can imagine what a cultural divide they had to cross.”

The young men watched in silence as the golden Dome of the Rock glistened and bathed in the golden rays of the rising sun. The entire Old City seemed to glow in the magnificence of the central shrine.

“What a glorious sight!” proclaimed Joshua as the gold leaf covering the anodized aluminum dome lit up with resplendent beauty in a brilliant pure gold light.

“That spot is considered to be the center of the world,” reported Yusuf.

“I know,” acknowledged Joshua. “In fact, my mother, when she used to take me as a child to the synagogue, had me memorize a Midrash by the Rabbi Tanchuma bar Abba that expounded that theory. I still remember it. It goes like this:

‘As the navel is set in the center of the human body,
So is the land of Israel the navel of the world . . .
Situated in the center of the world,
and Jerusalem in the center of the land of Israel,
and the sanctuary in the center of Jerusalem,
and the holy place in the center of the sanctuary,
and the ark in the center of the holy place,
and the foundation stone before the holy place,
because from it the world was founded.’”

Yusuf joined in the recitation of the beloved verses, and they both laughed with an inner joy when they finished, realizing that they both had memorized the central teaching of their foremothers.

“Let’s go have our free breakfast, and then go for a tour of that magnificent shrine,” suggested Yusuf. “Then we can come back here by noon and check-out. And then we’ll head out the Jaffa Gate to Ben Sira Street to catch a bus by evening. We can take our time and visit some more sites in the Old City, or just stroll through the market places.”

“That sounds like a great plan,” agreed Joshua. “Plus, it will help to fill our stomachs first before we feed our minds and souls.”

One hour later the young friends were crossing Jericho Road at the bottom of the Mount of Olives and entering the eastern Lion’s Gate (St. Stephen’s Gate). Yusuf led the way through the Old City to the Western (“Wailing”) Wall area, where they followed a pathway on the right to a gate called the Mughrabi Gate. A sunny plaza greeted them. They ascended two flights of stairs, walked through a stone arcade with four arches, and stopped on the raised artificial platform to admire the octagonal building centered in the huge area known as the Haram al-Sharif (the “Noble Sacred Enclosure”).

“It looks even more magnificent up close,” said Joshua, referring to the entire building.

“Wait until you see the inside,” said Yusuf. “My father used to bring me here at least twice a month when I was growing up, before we moved from the West Bank to America about seven years ago. I was seventeen at the time.”

“Why did your father want to move to the United States?” asked Joshua.

“He had relatives there who convinced him to leave the turmoil and fighting behind and to start a new life,” explained Yusuf as they walked toward the western entrance of the shrine, which had four entrances, one on each side of the cardinal points.

“Plus, he had a Hebrew wife, which made life difficult for him. Now they’re happy, but I’m torn between my childhood home, where my relatives still welcome me when I visit them, and my adopted land.”

“My father met my mother when he was touring the holy land over thirty years ago,” said Joshua. “They fell in love and he was able to bring her back to the States, where they got married. And soon afterwards, I was born. They’ve always called me the holy land child because that’s where I was conceived. So here I am, at the dawn of a new millennium, visiting my mother’s land.”

“We’ll have more time later to talk about family histories,” interrupted Yusuf, “but we need to take off our shoes before we enter the holy ground.” He motioned to some pigeonholes near the entrance, where they placed their shoes before entering the holy shrine.

As Yusuf led Joshua under the portico and through the double doorway, Yusuf voiced a simple prayer which Joshua barely heard:

“Ashhadu alla ilaha illa Allah wa ashhadu anna Muhammad rasulu Allah.”

“Was that a prayer you said?” asked Joshua out of curiosity.

“Yes, that is our Muslim credo,” gladly explained Yusuf. “It says: There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad (peace be upon him) is his messenger.”

Joshua wasn’t sure how to respond to Yusuf’s statement of belief. He accepted the monotheism, but he had reservations about the rest of the statement. Nevertheless, he felt respectful towards the holy shrine as he anxiously walked across the red rugs and approached the oblong rock, which was surrounded by a wooden lattice.

“This is the spot from which, according to Muslim tradition, the prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) made a night journey through the seven heavens,” expounded Yusuf, as he reached through a crescent-shaped hole in the lattice and touched the sacred rock, whose porous surface felt cool to the touch.

Joshua reached in and touched the sacred rock, which according to Jewish tradition was the bedrock of Mount Moriah, the place where Abraham almost sacrificed his son Isaac.

“Some believe that there is a hoof print left on the rock by the steed, Alborak, that carried the prophet from Mecca to Jerusalem,” continued Yusuf. “The beginning of the seventeenth Sura or chapter of the Koran says that he was taken on the night journey in order to be shown some signs.”

Joshua looked up at the interior of the Dome of the Rock, known in Arabic as Qubbat As-Sakhrah. The dome stretched 20 meters across and rose to an apex about 35 meters above the sacred mount. The dome rested on an inner circle of four granite piers and twelve marble columns.

“I read somewhere that this is the spot where the foundation stone was laid in the building of the world,” remarked Joshua as his eyes reverted from the heights back to the oblong rock.

“I also read of an ancient Semitic legend that spoke of a gigantic serpent that held this rock formation in its mouth,” said Yusuf. “That reminds me of the cave-like crypt underneath the mount. Come, let me show you.”

Yusuf led Joshua down several steps to a dimly-illuminated chamber beneath the ancient sacred stone.

“This cave is known as Bir-el-Arwel, the well of souls,” spoke Yusuf softly, as if not to disturb the dead. “Some people believe that this place is like the crossroads between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Some have claimed to have heard the voices of the dead, and others have claimed to have heard the sounds of the rivers of paradise.”

Joshua turned to go back to the upper section of the shrine. He wasn't interested in speaking with the dead. In fact, he suddenly felt uneasy about the realm of the dead that haunted his mind from time to time. He started heading for the exit, back into the light of day.

“Wait,” softly called Yusuf as he tried to catch up with Joshua. “I wanted to read to you one of my favorite inscriptions on the wall.”

Yusuf led Joshua to the south wall and read one of the inscriptions, from the seven hundred and thirty-four feet long chain of inscriptions that lined the walls:

“Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim, la ilaha illa Allah wahdahu la sharika lahu, la hul Mulku, wa la hul Hamdu, wa Huwa 'ala kulli sha'in Qadir.

“Which means, In the name of Allah the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no God but Allah. He is one and He has no partner. Sovereignty and Grace are His and He is the Omnipotent.”

When the sun was finally starting to set on the western horizon, the two friends were boarding the bus with their backpacks, heading for Egypt. They were exhausted from walking all over the Old City. When the Aviv Tour bus departed from the Ben Sira Street station, the two travelers sat quietly and watched Jerusalem fade away. Within half-an-hour they were both nodding their heads with eyes closed as the bus rumbled down the highway. Darkness descended on the eventful day.

Once again Joshua dreamed that the priest's wife was trying to persuade him to share an illicit bed with her, and once again he told her that his religion prohibited him from committing immoral acts. This time Zelicah – the priest's wife – invited the women of Egypt to witness the beauty of the servant. The women were so enthralled with the charming young man that they cut their hands with the knives they were using to cut the fruit they were eating. Now they understood why Zelicah was burning up with passion for the young Hebrew.

The repetitive dream tormented Joshua's subconscious mind. Once again he felt the sword against his neck, and once again he struggled to escape from her lascivious grasp. He wanted to scream out, but he felt a suffocating oppression grip his throat, and then suddenly the scene changed, and he was condemned to a term in prison. He was charged with attempted rape, according to the falsehood with which Zelicah had accused the noncompliant servant. Even though the judges and the priest, whose name was Potipherah (a priest in the house of the sun), saw the evidence of the torn garment, which proved that Zelicah was trying to grab the front as the servant was trying to flee, nevertheless the priest and judges felt they needed to protect the honor of Zelicah. And so the Hebrew was charged and sentenced to twelve years in prison.

“I'm innocent,” mumbled Joshua in his sleep. “I'm innocent.”

“Joshua,” said Yusuf. He gently nudged Joshua's shoulder with his hand. “Wake up.”

Joshua felt a jolt in his physical body as his astral body realigned itself with his conscious mind. He opened his eyes wide open and stared at Yusuf, feeling as if he was stuck between the world of sleeping and the world of waking.

“You must have had a terrible dream again,” softly spoke Yusuf.

“It was the same dream I had before,” said Joshua, as his mind readjusted to his environment and he realized what had happened in his dream-mind. “Except this time I was falsely accused by that evil woman, and they put me in prison on the charge of attempted rape. For twelve years!”

“Re-occurring dreams usually have a deep significance,” postulated Yusuf. “The number twelve might also be meaningful.”

“I wish I knew why this is happening to me,” questioned Joshua. A tear welled up in his right eye. He tried to go back to sleep, but the haunting image of the priest’s wife kept coming after him, and he couldn’t tear loose from the feverish anguish that had gripped his mind.

“Yeshua,” whispered a still small voice as Joshua started drifting off into dream-land after his battle with his inner demon had tired him out. “Yeshua, you have won the battle, and you have overcome the passions that plague mankind. You are the virtuous conqueror of the self.”

“Binah, my angel,” mentally voiced Joshua, realizing that he was entering into the ethereal region of lucid-dreaming. The dreamer was aware of the self as the dreamer. He saw Binah’s flowing auburn hair and white linen robe. “Why am I having such terrible dreams?”

“That was your final test with your passionate nature. Didn’t you recognize the role of the temptress that I played?” chided the angelic Binah, who was fulfilling Joshua’s inner wish to understand his subconscious experiences.

“Was that a past-life experience?” inquired Joshua, who was curious to know if his initial hunch was correct.

“Yes, it was,” encouragingly informed Binah. “And your brothers were the qualities that you had developed previously. They were bringing you to the full measure of a man, which was signified by the round of twelve years, or twelve life-times, that it takes to accomplish the twelve Herculean tasks. Here, let me show you something.”

Binah tapped the crown of Joshua’s head lightly with her magic wand, and a vision of an ecliptical circle of twelve signs appeared in the heavens of his soul-mind. As Joshua focused his consciousness on the revolving wheel, it appeared as if the twelve signs were twelve brothers carrying colorful banners with insignias in a grand procession:

Judah’s blue banner led the procession from the east with the sign of the Lion;

Levi’s black, red and white banner had the bejeweled high-priest’s breastplate;

Asher’s rose-colored banner had an olive tree in the center;

Dan’s sapphire banner had the serpent, symbol of wisdom;

Joseph’s dark banner had the fruitful bough by a well;

Naphtali’s reddish banner had the hind;

Reuben’s red banner had the first-born, the Aquarian son of man, image;

Zebulun’s white banner had the ship sailing Piscean seas;

Gad’s black and white banner had a camp with two paths leading to it;

Issachar’s earth-colored banner had the taurine beast of burden;

*Simeon's green banner had a picture of a city in the center;
Benjamin's multi-colored banner had the wolf.*

At the end of the procession of former ages and former signs, which passed before his mind's eye like a motion picture show, Joshua saw a central sun emerge from within the revolving wheel. The dazzling solar blaze raced through the sky like a golden horse-drawn chariot, carrying the revolving wheel of starry signs through the universe in a never-ending circle-dance.

"That's the solar logos, the mind and body of the divinity that ensouls the field of manifestation that you saw," revealed Binah, who was watching the same celestial vision with Joshua. "You are in the process of becoming that solar logos. Your next step will be to meet the sky goddess, the Queen of Heaven."

A face appeared in Joshua's consciousness, a face the likes of which he had never seen before. A heavenly face! And just as suddenly as it appeared, the incredibly magnificent face disappeared. A wisp of a silvery hair-like substance hovered above Joshua's head, and then that thin silvery-thread vanished, too.

Joshua's vision was over.

"Yusuf," nudged Joshua sharply with his elbow against Yusuf's arm.

"What?" said the stunned sleeper. "What is it?"

"I had a vision," divulged Joshua joyfully. "My angel came and helped me understand the meaning of my dreams, and then she showed me a vision of celestial grandeur."

"Did you have a night journey through the seven heavens, like the prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him)?" asked Yusuf in an earnest manner.

"Nothing like that," admitted Joshua. "It was more like being in the middle of Ezekiel's wheel and watching the celestial parade of zodiac signs spinning around me."

"Something like Joseph's dream about the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowing down to him?" questioned Yusuf perceptively.

"That's an interesting way of looking at it," replied Joshua. "Or should I say, a unique way of interpreting the dream-vision?"

When Joshua finally fell asleep again, he dreamed that he was confined in a prison house with two attendants, a butler and a baker, who had offended the king. He attended to the needs of the king's officers for an entire year. At the end of one year, the butler dreamed that he would serve a cup of ripe grapes from the fruit of the vine to the king, whereas the baker dreamed that birds were eating the baked goods from his three baskets. Joshua's intuitive mind saw that the butler would be restored to his former position, whereas something bad would happen to the baker in three days. On that same day, the queen gave birth to a son, and on the third day a feast was given in celebration of the king's first-born. The butler was freed from prison and presented the chalice once again to the king, whereas the baker suffered the fate of death. Joshua's fate was to serve out the remainder of his twelve year sentence.

As the dream of an imprisoned self continued, Joshua realized that life itself, in the material world and the physical body, was like a prison. Only the intuitive mind could release the immortal self from imprisonment and attachment to the confining, mortal body-oriented personality.

And so it happened—as Joshua’s inner awakening was about to take place—that his ego (the ruler of his body-consciousness) dreamed of a sevenfold fertility cycle followed by a sevenfold cycle of infertility, portrayed as symbolic bovine and ears of corn. The king’s wise men (the concrete thoughts of the objective world) guessed that the king would display his fertility by having seven daughters, who would afterwards die; they also guessed that the ears of corn on one stalk were seven cities built by the king’s mighty hand, and those cities would be destroyed during the king’s reign; some interpreted the symbolic bovine as seven kings, who would be destroyed by seven princes; others interpreted that the king would be so fertile that he would take seven wives, who unfortunately would die during the king’s lifetime. The ego (the outer personality) refused to accept such nonsensical explanations, so the king-ego decided to slay all the magicians (wise men). The butler (the awakening mind of the dreamer) remembered that the Hebrew servant (the illumined intuitive mind) was the true finder of mysteries and the revealer of secrets. So the informed mind (the king) turned to the illumined mind (the Hebrew) for the interpretation. The awakened mind saw a septenary cycle in the life of the land (or physical being), where seven progressive stages of abundance and fertility of nature are followed by seven successive stages of reaping what had been sown. The image of the doubting mind (the king) wanted to have assurance that the interpretation was true and correct, so the Hebrew gave the king a sign: that same day the queen would give birth to a son, but the first-born son would die.

Joshua awakened from his long dream and stared out the window at the dark landscape of the desert. For the first time in his life he was aware simultaneously of what he was dreaming, and what the dream meant. He also realized that everything he was dreaming was part of him. All the characters – all the images and symbols – were part of his personality: the physical body, the emotional body, the mental body, and the causal body. He, the intuitive immortal self, was the dreamer and the revealer of the mysteries of the dream.

He closed his eyes again, and he knew what he would see next. It was as if he were watching a movie that he had seen before, and the images flickered upon the screen of his conscious mind as beams of light projected from the booth of an immortal, all-seeing Mind. He watched as the king was convinced that the Hebrew servant’s words were true. The king was ready to hand over the rule of the land to the wisest of men, but the king’s advisers wanted the Hebrew man to prove that he was fit to reign as the grand vizier, second only to the king. He needed to display knowledge of all the languages of men. That same night an angel came and taught him all seventy languages of mankind and called his name Yehosef. When Yehosef appeared before the king and his advisers, he ascended the seventy steps to the throne of the king, and he spoke to the king in all seventy languages. As the king declared Yehosef to be his second-in-command, he placed the royal ring on his hand, a gold chain around his neck, and a golden crown upon his head. Yehosef listened as the king made a proclamation to all the people of Egypt: “This man who this day is crowned to be second to the king, this man to whom mysteries are revealed and he in turn reveals those mysteries to us, this man who is the savior of our land and the prince of the life of this age, this man in whom the god speaks and lives – henceforth his name will be Zaphnath-paaneah.”

Joshua opened his eyes and looked at his traveling companion. Yusuf was sound asleep. The sky was beginning to turn light blue, and the lights of a large city emerged from the desert sands in the south.

“Yusuf,” said Joshua, gently tapping him on the shoulder. “Wake up. I think I see Cairo up ahead.”

Yusuf sat up and rubbed his eyes, trying to clear the sleepiness away. When he eventually managed to look in the direction of the lights, he confirmed Joshua’s assumption.

“You’re absolutely right,” verified Yusuf. “We should be in Cairo within half-an-hour. Then we’ll take a taxi from the bus station to a suburb in northeast Cairo. We’ll be staying at the Ain Shams Obelisk Hostel, which is five minutes away from the historic obelisk of ancient Heliopolis.”

“It looks like we’ll be arriving in Cairo at the same time as Ra-Khepri emerges from his night journey and signals the creation of a new day,” announced Joshua jubilantly. He was referring to Khepri as the sacred scarab who rolled the sun like a gigantic ball through the sky, and then through the underworld to the eastern horizon.

“I like to call him Re,” said Yusuf.

“Like in Ray, a drop of golden sun?” inquired Joshua facetiously, alluding to a line from his favorite musical.

“That’s very bright of you,” punned Yusuf. The two friends laughed.

When the bus entered Cairo, the sky-goddess, Nut, gave birth to the sun-god, Ra, once again in the eternal cycle of renewal. For Joshua, it was like witnessing the first day of creation.

“The place we’re heading to, Ain Shams, means ‘eye of the sun’ in Arabic,” reported Yusuf as they rode in the white-and-black taxi toward their destination (about 10 km). “We could have taken the metro there, but it’s a lot easier and faster taking a taxi.”

Joshua was happy either way. His attention was absorbed by the sights and sounds of the ancient, and the modern, attractions in the sprawling city. Everything was new to him: the buildings, the cars, the streets, and the people.

“I’ve got reservations for a room with two beds at the hostel,” continued Yusuf, while Joshua’s eyes were riveted to the passing panorama. “We can stay there a couple of nights before we head back.”

“That’s fine with me,” replied Joshua without taking his eyes away from the window.

When they arrived at the hostel, the owner told them that they had arrived four days late for the commemoration of the arrival of the Holy Family in Egypt 2,000 years ago. He said there was a large gathering at the Church of Saint Mary in Maadi, 15 km south of old Cairo, to celebrate the event on June 1st. Maadi was considered to be the traditional site where the Holy Family descended to the Nile River to take a boat to Upper Egypt.

Yusuf explained to the owner that they had come to visit the site of ancient Heliopolis in the adjacent district of El-Matariya. The owner told Yusuf in Arabic that they should visit the Tree of the Virgin at Matariya, where the Holy Family visited and rested under the shade of an ancient sycamore tree. The talkative owner also related a legend about Mary washing the clothes of the child near the tree, and it was believed that they quenched their thirst from a well near the tree. By the time the owner was finished

recounting the various legends and traditions of the Holy Family in Egypt, a subject about which he was knowledgeable, the young adventurers were convinced that they at least should pay a visit to the sycamore tree.

“He must be a Coptic Christian,” said Yusuf when they finally left the owner’s office and set out for their room. “They have an ancient tradition, which they’ve kept intact over the centuries, that the historical journey of the Holy Family lasted for more than three-and-a-half years and that the holy child blessed the land of Egypt with his holy presence. They even quote from the book of Isaiah, the 19th chapter, that the Lord would come to Egypt and the idols of Egypt would fall down. They say that the idols in the temple of Heliopolis fell down when the holy child arrived, and that nothing remains of that temple except the red obelisk.”

When the traveling duo reached the Virgin’s Tree later that morning, they saw an old gnarled sycamore, which was not the original tree under which the Holy Family rested. The original tree, according to local legend, fell sometime in the 17th century and was replaced with a new sapling in 1672. When it fell again in 1906, it was replaced with a shoot from the fallen tree. Yusuf and Joshua touched the tree, like the other visitors to the site, and they felt a connection with the religious fervor that attracted pilgrims to the place where they sensed the Holy Family’s presence.

“I wonder if the story of the Holy Family in Egypt, especially the various sites that they visited, corresponds to the Egyptian story of Isis, Osiris, and Horus?” asked Joshua when they walked away from the sign which said “Mary’s Tree” and started walking toward the obelisk.

“You mean where Isis traveled throughout Egypt gathering the fourteen dismembered pieces of Osiris, and supposedly establishing a temple at each site where a piece of Osiris was found?” inquired Yusuf, who recalled the story he had studied in school.

“Yes, that story,” remarked Joshua. “There was a tree in that story, except that it was a tamarisk tree, and there was a child named Horus, who was the rightful heir to the throne. It just seems to me that a lot of Christian churches were built to cover up former pagan sites, and names and stories were changed to support the new religion. That’s my personal contention.”

“I understand,” said Yusuf. “I’ve wondered the same thing about the two traditions I was raised with, how the stories and traditions vary from one to the other. Take for example the story of Joseph that I mentioned before; the Islamic tradition has Joseph teaching Muslim values and the message of submission to Allah’s will, whereas the Hebrew tradition has Joseph giving allegiance to the Lord God of his forefathers. It’s curious how they both look at the story of Joseph, some of which comes from the Book of Jasher, through different eyes.”

“That’s funny how you keep bringing up the story of Joseph,” commented Joshua. “I experienced another episode of that story in my dream while we were traveling in the bus.”

Joshua recapitulated the dream as they walked in the direction of the obelisk of Heliopolis.

When they approached the tall red granite obelisk, Joshua abruptly stopped talking. His eyes were fixated on the peak of the obelisk, which was 68 feet and 2 inches in height, with about six feet of length embedded in sand. The pivot point on the

pyramidion (miniature pyramid) seemed to be a gateway between earth and sky, and Joshua had an instantaneous vision of the sacred capstone illumined with the rays of the sun. He felt as if the solar reflection from the electrum covering (of silver and gold) pierced his heart and soul and invigorated him with a primeval energy, the life-giving power of Ra.

“What are you envisioning now?” asked Yusuf, who had become used to Joshua’s extra-sensory perceptions.

“I saw the capstone light up like a sunburst in the sky,” described Joshua. “That stone is full of the energy of the sun.”

“You can imagine how the first Egyptians must have felt, watching that Benben stone rising from the primordial waters on top of the primordial mound at the dawn of creation,” expounded Yusuf. “The Egyptians believed that Nun, the god of the waters of chaos, and Neith, the goddess of the limitless sky (of air and light), in an act of androgynous self-generation brought the world into existence – similar to the Hebrew concept of the spirit moving upon the face of the waters in the beginning.”

“So the sky-goddess Neith floats upon the waters of Nun, creating the primordial mound (Benben), from which Ra emerges at the dawn of creation,” interpreted Joshua, who continued to look up at the capstone.

“I couldn’t have said it better myself,” congratulated Yusuf. “Ra, in essence, was the son of Nun.”

“Sounds similar to the story of the biblical Joshua, who also was the son of Nun,” added Joshua. “And coincidentally, may I add, who made the sun stand still.”

“And, as a further coincidence,” added Yusuf, “both Joseph and Joshua died at the age of one hundred and ten.”

“Which, if I know my Hebrew, is Aleph, the One, and Yod, the ten, which contains all numbers,” postulated Joshua. “And by extension, Qoph, the hundred, would be a symbol of the Cosmic One.”

“Or you can mathematically state that the One is the infinite and timeless, whereas the ten is the finite, manifested existence,” added Yusuf.

“I think the energy from this obelisk is having an effect on both of us,” laughed Joshua. Yusuf joined him in the merriment as they approached the obelisk, which was erected by Sesostri I (12th Dynasty of the Middle Kingdom) in 1942 B.C.

As Joshua came closer to the immense obelisk, he had a strong magnetic attraction to it, and he reached out and placed the palms of both of his hands on the red granite. Images of a sun temple with a sacred lake emerged in his receptive mind. He closed his eyes and the images became clear and distinct. He saw Yehosef building a large temple and a palatial house for himself, within which he set a throne made in the likeness of the land of Egypt with a river running through it. It took him three years to complete the building. He saw the thirty-year-old viceroy riding in a chariot throughout the land of Egypt, collecting corn for the cities and storing it in the treasuries for future use.

Yehosef rode into Heliopolis on a hot, sunny day. He came to visit Potipherah, whose name meant “belonging to the sun.” He was the priest of Heliopolis, “City of the Sun.” Potipherah had a beautiful eighteen-year-old virgin daughter named Asenath, whose name meant “she who is of Neith,” the Egyptian goddess of the eastern sky. Potipherah wanted his daughter to be a bride for the ruler of the land, Yehosef. Asenath

didn't want to marry Yehosef, for she had heard he was a man of another race and was sold as a slave. However, when she saw the young ruler in royal attire arrive in a chariot of gold like the sun coming from heaven, her heart melted and she repented of her former reluctance to be his bride. When Potipherah called Asenath to come down from her ten-room tower, where she lived with seven virgin maidservants, she hurried down into the presence of Yehosef.

Joshua couldn't believe what he was witnessing: the face of Asenath was the same heavenly face that he had seen when Binah told him that he would meet the sky goddess, the Queen of Heaven. His heart stopped for a moment, and his breath was caught in his chest, as he realized that this was the culmination of a long quest: the sacred marriage of the Sun and the Sky.

Joshua kept his eyes closed and his hands on the obelisk, whose vibrations pulsed through his arms, transmitting images of former times. He continued to watch as Yehosef, himself a virgin, met the virtuous Asenath as if she were his own sister. He was not willing to make any commitments to her until she promised to get rid of her Egyptian idols and worship the Most High God with him. He would return to her in eight days. Asenath spent seven days fasting and cleansing herself for her bridegroom. She threw away the precious stones dedicated to the gods and goddesses: Amun (sun), Shu (air), Tefnut (moisture), Geb (earth), Nut (sky), Osiris, Isis, Set, and Nephthys. On the eighth day, as she stretched her hands out to the east and prayed to the God of the ages to acknowledge her sincerity and her conversion, and to make the person she loved more than her own soul to be her husband, lo and behold a messenger from heaven appeared to her. The messenger resembled Yehosef in every respect, and he brought the message that she would eat the bread of life and drink the cup of immortality with her bridegroom Yehosef that same day. When the man vanished, Asenath prepared herself and put on her wedding robe, which was sky-blue woven with golden sun colors. When the bridegroom arrived for his bride . . .

Joshua released his hold of the obelisk at the precise moment when he saw that he was the bridegroom, and Asenath was his bride.

----- X X X X X X X -----

Paul went straight to Elijahu when he returned to the encampment at Ein Feshka. He had one thing on his mind: to meet the man who Asherah said knew the mysteries of the resurrection of the body.

Elijahu was repairing one of the temporary shelters when Paul approached him and asked, "Can you take me to Bannus? I need to see him."

Elijahu glanced up from his work and looked with piercing eyes at Paul, who was breathing hard and fast. "Who told you about Bannus?" asked Elijahu sternly.

"Asherah," confessed Paul. "She said he knew how to help a disciple achieve the permanent state of ecstasy."

"Why would she tell you a thing like that?" asked Elijahu suspiciously.

"I had an ecstatic experience near the date grove," explained Paul, "and she saw me and rescued me from the snake, and then I told her about my experience, and . . ."

“Wait a minute!” interjected Elijahu. “What snake?”

Paul told Elijahu about the snake that hypnotized him, how Asherah stepped on the head and tail of the snake, and how his spine reacted in conjunction with the physical manifestation.

Elijahu looked at the ground for a long time in a deep thoughtful silence. He stroked his long gray beard with his fingers. Paul waited impatiently for an affirmative word from the Essene elder. Finally, after several minutes of interior deliberation, Elijahu spoke his mind: “Bannus is a former disciple of mine. Everything he knows, I taught him. The former disciple became a master in his own right. However, I should warn you ahead of time that his methods are harsh and strict. The purification rituals alone can destroy a weak-minded individual. What we teach in the community here is intensified a hundredfold by his accelerated techniques. I don’t know if you’re ready for him.”

“I’m willing to try,” acknowledged Paul. “I’m willing to do whatever it takes to achieve the goal my heart desires.”

“This is something that will demand your entire heart, mind, and soul to accomplish,” stated Elijahu emphatically. “The preparatory cleansing of your entire being will take at least two years. During the third year, your mortal nature will be transformed so dramatically that you will never be the same person again.”

“If you’re trying to scare me or discourage me, it’s not working,” confirmed Paul. “I’m determined to go through the valley of the shadow of death in pursuit of the greatest prize a mortal can attain.”

“In your case, perhaps it is expedient to send you to a master so you don’t have to spend at least seven years working towards a maturation of our Way,” conceded Elijahu. “After all, the people in our community are very hesitant to admit you even as a probationary member.”

“Then it’s settled?” anxiously inquired Paul. “You’ll take me to Bannus?”

“I can’t just take you to him,” cautiously stated Elijahu. “I will need to get his permission to bring you to him. He spends most of his days beyond Jordan in a cave. I will go to him tomorrow.”

“When will you be back?” asked Paul anxiously.

“It usually takes me seven days, there and back,” answered Elijahu succinctly. He turned away from Paul and returned to his work. There was nothing else that needed to be said at the moment.

Elijahu left Ein Feshka early the following morning. He had his walking stick with him, and he also carried a small satchel of dried food for the journey. He wanted to do most of his walking in the coolness of the morning, when the invigorating desert air coursed through his lungs and flowed through his veins. He always planned on resting in the shade during the heat of the noon sun.

Something about this trip made Elijahu uncomfortable. He wasn’t sure if he was doing the right thing this time. Usually, when he determined that a student had passed a certain level of competence and dedication, he was certain Bannus would accept that student as a disciple and proceed to teach him the higher or more advanced aspects of the Essenes’ wisdom. However, the case with Saul was totally different: this person was not his student, and he did not know much about him.

Paul spent the following days nervously waiting for the return of Elijahu with word that Bannus had agreed to accept him as a disciple. He performed menial tasks and adhered to the rules of the Essene community, but his mind was preoccupied with other matters: What would life be like with Bannus as a teacher? Where would he live, and would he be able to adapt to the environment? How would he cope with the strict regimen that Elijahu had warned him about? Would he have the patience to pursue his goal even if the results were not forthcoming?

“Paul, you’re worrying too much,” said his sister Phoebe on the third day after Elijahu left. He had voiced his concerns to his sister, who was always willing to listen to her brother speak of his turbulent mental anguish. “You’re always anxious about the future, when you should concentrate on the present.”

“I’ve always been like that since I was a child,” said Paul. “You know that I play out a dozen scenarios in my mind, and life always turns out differently anyway.”

“So why do you concern yourself with such imaginary speculations about what might happen?” asked Phoebe.

“I guess I enjoy visualizing the possibilities that my busy mind dreams up,” replied Paul. “It’s like trying to read the universal mind as it presents its infinite range of ideas to the finite mind.”

“I think it’s more like you trying to see the future like a seer does,” remarked Phoebe. “That’s the visionary part of you.”

On the fourth day, Phoebe asked Paul the question that he had been avoiding since he ran into her: “Why are you here?”

“I was hoping you weren’t going to ask me that,” responded Paul. “It’s a long story, and I’m afraid you won’t like what you hear.”

“Don’t be foolish,” said Phoebe with a soft smile as she placed her hand reassuringly on his arm. “I’ve always respected you as my big brother. You can tell me anything you like, and it won’t change my opinion of you nor the sisterly love and respect that I have for you.”

“Well,” began Paul. “I might as well come straight out and tell you that I have sided with the pro-Roman faction in our land. In fact, I have been commissioned by the high priest, who is a Roman sympathizer, to infiltrate the Essene sect in order to determine if there are any messianic rebels who want to overthrow the foreign rulers.”

“No, that can’t be!” exclaimed Phoebe vociferously. “You should know that we are a peace-loving people who want nothing to do with the government, nor with the corrupt priesthood in the temple. We have a spiritual community that is only concerned with building the kingdom of heaven for ourselves and for like-minded people.”

“I can see that now,” admitted Paul. “But the ruling party thought that there might be Zealots hiding out in these communities, you know, like Judas of Galilee, who tried to lead a group of militant followers in an insurrection against the empire.”

“You know that our elder, Elijahu, wouldn’t allow that,” reprimanded Phoebe. “In fact, I had to convince him, while you were visiting with Asherah that first day, that you were not the vicious persecutor of our movement that you were rumored to be.”

“That’s another thing I haven’t told you,” said Paul, hanging his head down in shame. “I used to be that person until I met a saintly man who told me to go to the wilderness in order to change my ways and redeem myself. I hate to admit it now, but I had been an accomplice to a crime against a fellow human being. I stood by and failed to

stop the martyrdom of a good person, whom some called Stephen. I hold myself accountable for his death by stoning.”

“Paul, how will you ever pay for your sins against humanity?” cried Phoebe. She wanted to throw her arms around her brother as a sign of forgiveness, but she couldn’t bring herself to do it. She felt that her brother had committed an unforgivable wrong.

“But you promised not to judge me,” pleaded Paul. “That was part of my past that I’m not proud of anymore. I’ve seen the error of my ways, and I mean to commence a new life. That’s why I asked Elijahu to take me to Bannus.”

“I’m sorry I judged you so harshly,” confessed Phoebe. “I still love you as a brother.” She threw her arms around him as they both felt tears flowing down their cheeks.

On the sixth day, toward sunset, Elijahu walked slowly into the small encampment of Ein Feshka. He was tired. His bearded face showed the fatigue of a weary traveler.

The first person to greet Elijahu was Paul, who had kept his anxious eyes peeled for any sign of the expectant arrival of the elder.

“What did Bannus say?” were the first words out of Paul’s mouth.

“Bring me some water, first,” said Elijahu wearily. His eyes were lowered.

Paul ran to the nearby spring and scooped up a bowl of water for the thirsty old man. Elijahu drank his fill, and then wiped his whiskers and beard with the back of his hand before looking at the apprehensive disciple.

“Bannus said that he’ll take you as a disciple on one condition,” stated Elijahu, looking seriously into Paul’s eyes. Paul’s face turned pale, and the words stuck in his throat as he suddenly feared the worst. Elijahu noticed the sudden change in complexion on Paul’s face, and he waited a moment for the effect of his words to sink into the disciple’s mind. “You must pass the supreme test – purification of body, mind, and soul – by completing a forty day fast.”

Paul’s mouth opened to speak, but the words wouldn’t come out. He stood there, with gaping mouth, looking at Elijahu, who was waiting for a reply. Paul remembered the experience at the date grove, and he realized that he might only have this one chance in his life to find complete fulfillment and satisfaction. He knew in his heart that the treasure he was seeking was worth more than everything in the world.

“I have come thus far,” responded Paul, recalling his wilderness experience up to this point. “And I will finish the course that I have started.”

“That’s what I was hoping to hear,” said Elijahu with a smile on his face. “We’ll set out for Bethabara, the house of passage, the day after tomorrow. I need to get some rest before I travel again.” Elijahu turned and slowly walked with the aid of his walking stick towards his humble abode.

Five days later, Elijahu and Paul reached the ford in the River Jordan, where they crossed over to the other side and walked eastward along a small valley of reeds and flowing water. They approached a place of willows about two kilometers from the Jordan, a place where a small perennial stream flowed over smooth stones. They stopped to drink the cold, tasty water from the natural spring. When their thirst was satiated, they washed their faces and heads with the refreshing and cleansing water. A peaceful feeling flowed through Paul’s soul.

Elijahu walked up the west side of a small natural hill which rose out of the reeds at the head of the small riverbed. He entered a natural cave. In the semi-darkness toward the back of the cave sat a long-haired, bearded man in his loincloth with eyes closed. Elijahu and Paul stooped down as they approached the meditative hermit; they sat cross-legged in front of him, waiting for him to finish his meditation and to recognize their presence. Paul looked at the gentle face of the man who was going to be his master.

Bannus opened his eyes after several minutes of absolute silence. His brown eyes radiated a warm welcome to his guests. He nodded his head reverently towards his former master, Elijahu, and then he slowly turned his long-faced head in the direction of his new disciple.

“So this is Saul, who asked for me to teach him what he already knows,” said Bannus in a soothing tone of voice.

“I am honored that you agreed to accept me as your disciple,” said Paul as he bowed his head humbly and reached out his hand to touch the bare feet of the master as a sign of submission.

“When the disciple is ready to learn,” replied Bannus, “the teacher arrives to open the doors of learning.” The aphorism resounded in the small chamber of the cave.

“If you don’t mind,” interjected Elijahu, “I think I’ll leave the two of you alone. I really want to spend some time alone on my favorite hill.” Elijahu stood up in a half-stooped manner so he wouldn’t hit his head on the ceiling of the cave. He gave an affectionate look to both the master and the disciple as he raised his hand in a blessing before he turned to leave the modest sanctuary. He walked up the small hill overlooking the cave.

“Are you hungry?” asked Bannus with a subtle hint of mischief in his voice. Paul wasn’t aware that the teacher was already putting the student to the test.

“Yes,” answered Paul, his mouth watering with the idea of food. “We only had dates and other dried fruit, and some dried bread, for our journey here.”

“I have some special desert food for you,” said Bannus, reaching behind him to produce a small palm-woven bowl full of dried carob pods. The flat, narrow horn-shaped pods looked tantalizing to Paul’s gastronomical senses. He was just about to reach for a pod when he recalled the words that Elijahu had relayed from Bannus: “You must pass the supreme test by completing a forty day fast.” Paul looked into the perceptive eyes of Bannus and instantly drew back his hand from the bowl.

“So Elijahu told you about the supreme test?” asked Bannus knowingly. Paul nodded his head. “And you are willing to undergo the purification of body, mind, and soul for a period of forty days and forty nights?”

“Yes, I am,” said Paul assuredly.

“Good,” affirmed Bannus. “That seals the vow you have made this day to follow the Way of Purification.” Bannus reached out with his long arm and placed his warm right hand on the crown of Paul’s head. Paul felt an electromagnetic current flow from the top of his head, down his spine, and throughout his etheric body.

“Saul,” said Bannus as his hand continued to transmit an ethereal flow of energy into the disciple’s entire threefold being, “may the Great Life, with its flowing living waters, permeate every fiber of your being as you prepare to undertake the Great Work.” Paul saw a river of light streaming through his cerebral cortex, down through the medulla oblongata, to every nerve fiber in the spinal system, forming a veritable body of light.

“Repeat with me the Great Law of our forefathers,” commanded Bannus. Paul recited the ancient affirmation together with Bannus:

“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord:
And thou shalt love the Lord thy God
With all thy heart,
And with all thy soul,
And with all thy mind.”

When Bannus released his hand from the crown of Paul’s head, a flood of tears erupted like a geyser from the depths of his soul. Paul couldn’t stop the streams of cleansing waters as they flowed like underground springs to the surface of his eyes. He now saw clearly that the way had been prepared for him to enter the stream that would lead him to the inner kingdom of rapturous ecstasy.

“From this day forward, you will recite the Great Law at dawn and at dusk in your mind only,” instructed Bannus. “You will observe one year of absolute silence—not a word must come out of your mouth—as taught by our ancient master, Pythagoras. This vow of silence will cleanse your mind from extraneous thoughts and purify your tongue from the senseless chatter of the monkey mind. Instead of thinking of things to say and thoughts to think, you will start by beheading the mind, which stands in the way of achieving crystal-clear consciousness. You will work on making your mind as pure and clear as a mirror-like lake, where the mountains, trees, and clouds in the sky are reflected with perfect clarity.”

Paul felt like a new-born child, who was to be led by the hand through a new world, an inner kingdom of heightened awareness. It was as if he were developing a whole new set of senses to experience an inner world that he was taught to observe with keen interest. What was happening inside of him became more important than what was happening in the external world.

“By closing the door of the lower mind, you open the door of the higher mind,” taught Bannus. “By closing the physical eyes to external impressions, you open the single mind’s eye to an internal reality. By closing your eyes to the sounds of the natural world, you open an inner listening device that will enable you to hear a still small voice. By closing the doors of the five senses – what the eyes see, the ears hear, the nose smells, the tongue tastes, the skin feels – you avoid the mental desires that arise from those senses. When you cut the strings of attachment to your sensory desires, you purify your mind and you free yourself from the bond of your bodily passions.

“Your body is the House of Passage that you inhabit while you journey through this world. But this house is not the real you. The real self passes in and out of this house.”

Bannus stopped talking. He took a deep breath through his mouth, and then he exhaled a long stream of warm air into Paul’s face. Paul felt a pleasant glow envelop his head.

“Rise, my little one,” said Bannus endearingly. “Henceforth you will be called the Little One, an initiate into the mysteries of the Great Life from which everything is formed and to which everything returns.”

Bannus led Paul by the hand to the entrance of the cave. Paul was surprised to see how tall and slim Bannus looked. They walked hand in hand to the natural spring where Elijah and Paul had satiated their thirst.

“Drink the waters of purification,” enjoined Bannus, who cupped his hands and filled them with savory water. Paul squatted beside the stream and imitated his actions. “Let this water be nourishment to your body and soul. You may drink this water whenever you feel hunger or thirst.” Paul drank from his cupped hands until he could drink no more.

“Stand, Little One,” said Bannus, rising from the squatting position. Paul stood erect and waited for directions on how to proceed with what he intuited was a ceremonial initiation. “Breathe deep through your mouth and hold your breath to a count of ten.” Paul filled his lungs with the warm desert air. “Let this air be nourishment to your heart and soul. Breathe the breath of life to its fullest whenever you feel weak or need the life force.” Paul breathed deeply several times until he felt oxygenated and invigorated.

“Come, Little One,” said Bannus, taking Paul by the hand and leading him up to the top of the adjacent hill. Paul felt the strength of the master’s energetic arm pulling him up to higher ground. Paul was gasping for air after the strenuous climb; Bannus didn’t show any sign of strain or exhaustion. “Raise your hands to the sky and feel the energy of the sun pulsating with waves of heat and light within your body.” Paul raised his hands in the direction of the setting sun. “Let the solar rays be nourishment to your mind and soul. Meet the rising and the setting sun on a daily basis to reenergize every cell in your being.”

Paul stood on the hill overlooking the verdant valley, and he felt like he was standing on top of the world. He looked southwards and he saw the area of the Dead Sea and the Wilderness of Judea; he looked eastwards and he saw beyond the Jordan River into Samaria; he looked northwards and he saw the land of Galilee.

“The land that you see before you,” pointed Bannus with a panoramic sweep of his hand from southwest to northwest, “is the Holy Land, according to our teachings. But it pales in comparison to the holy land that is the threefold body of the human being. Look at Judea – that represents the navel, the lower physical aspect of man. There, in Samaria – that represents the heart, the emotional aspect of man. And Galilee – that represents the head, the mental aspect of man. Those three represent the kingdoms of your threefold world. However, there remains one last kingdom for man to inhabit and to rule: Here, at the center, the place we call Beyond Jordan, the place of the spirit of man, the inner kingdom.”

Paul thought that Bannus was referring to the literal hill on which they were standing, but when Paul turned his eyes from the sweeping panorama and looked at his master, he saw that his eyes were closed. The master was looking inwards, pointing to the center which was at the heart of all life. Paul closed his eyes and imitated the master. He visualized the center of his being in an invisible world that spread out like the rays of the sun in all directions throughout the universe.

“The wise men say the center is everywhere, and the circumference is nowhere,” postulated Bannus. He looked at Paul with beaming eyes of wisdom and smiled. They both watched as the fiery sun sank over the western horizon, knowing that it was rising as a solar blaze elsewhere.

“Come, Little One,” said Bannus as he prepared to descend the natural hill. Paul scanned the upper surface of the hill for any sign of Elijah. He was nowhere to be seen. “Don’t worry about Elijah,” remarked Bannus when he noticed Paul was standing stationary. “He comes and goes wherever and whenever he pleases. This is his hill, and

according to our legends, he ascended into the heavens from here in a chariot of fire. He probably is back in his humble abode at this very moment.”

Paul was amazed to hear that Elijah was associated with the legendary prophet of his childhood memories. He remembered how as a child he had always dreamed of ascending in the same chariot that he had pictured the prophet Elijah riding into the heavens. As a young student he had read stories of Helios riding in a golden chariot drawn by four horses, and he thought that both stories related to the journey of the solar orb across the sky. Now, with the awe-inspiring reality of actually standing on Elijah’s Hill, Paul wasn’t sure what was fact and what was fiction.

“Come, Little One,” coaxed Bannus, “you will have all night to reflect on what you’ve seen and heard this day. I will show you the cave you will live in.” Paul followed Bannus half-way down the hill to another natural cave, which was smaller than the one Bannus lived in. In the center of the cave he noticed a small fire-pit made of river rocks. Beside the fire-pit, on the ground, was a bed made out of reeds. On the bed of reeds lay a bundle of clothes. “You won’t need a fire until winter comes. We just passed the time of the summer solstice. Six months from now you’ll need a fire to keep warm.” Paul wanted to ask why Bannus didn’t have a fire-pit in his cave, but he knew that he had to keep his lips sealed. The oath of silence wasn’t easy to observe. Bannus rescued him from his awkward predicament when he said, “You’re probably wondering why I don’t have a fire-pit in my cave.” Paul nodded his head with an affirmative gesture on his face. “When you learn how to heat your body with your inner fire, you won’t need a fire-pit, either. Anyway, here’s a bundle of clothes you can use to keep warm, if needed. I made them out of the inner bark fibers of the trees in the valley.” Bannus wrapped the green-dyed bark-fiber robe around his waist and shoulders to demonstrate how it should be worn. Paul took off his old brown linen robe and tried on his new bark-woven robe. It felt rough, but warm, to the skin. “Now you look like a real disciple of the wilderness,” said Bannus in a jovial tone.

Bannus left Paul alone in the cave as the sky darkened and the stars began to display their twinkling light. Paul sat on the cave floor in his new robe and reflected on the events of the day. He couldn’t believe that he was finally a disciple of a real master. That night he dreamed that he was riding in a golden chariot, but he couldn’t get the chariot into the sky.

The following morning, and every morning thereafter, Paul awoke to the sounds of chirping birds in the nearby valley. They were the precursors of each new day, calling for the disciple to arise and greet the rising sun. Paul diligently followed the daily routine that Bannus prescribed for his rapid purification.

“Today I will show you how to cleanse the body and mind of its passionate nature,” said Bannus, who was drinking from the same natural spring as his disciple in the morning. “When you descend into the cold water to bathe, you sublimate the generative desires, thus preserving a chaste nature for the regeneration of your body.” Bannus descended into the shallow spring and lay lengthwise, completely submerging his naked body and holding his head under water for almost a minute. Paul watched at first, and then he performed the same procedure.

“When you descend into the waters of life, which is what you do when you leave the world above to come to the world below,” expounded Bannus after Paul stepped out of the water onto dry land, “you enter the world of matter and take on a body of flesh.

When you leave the world of matter, you take off your robe of flesh. Naked you come into this world, and naked you leave it. This drama of life you will reenact in the morning and in the evening.”

After morning meditations, Paul was instructed in the process of developing the higher mind, which Bannus called intuition or the wisdom of the soul. “This is the method of careful observation of every thread of thought of which the fabric of your mind is constructed. I call this tent-making because each part of the tent must be constructed properly in order for it to be a suitable habitation. Your habitation is the mind. Henceforth, you will be a tent-maker.”

Paul learned how to understand the cause and effect of each and every thought that entered his mind. He followed each thread of thought from its inception to its ending. He was taught how to have the right ideas about things by basing his thoughts on careful observation of the external world of nature and the internal world of mind. He learned to differentiate what was reflected from the heights of intuition into his receptive mind. He advanced from level to level, learning that his higher mind was actually a vast realm of consciousness that spanned the ocean of inner space.

“Once you free yourself from the many masters that try to rule your body and mind,” instructed Bannus as Paul neared the end of his forty day fast, “you will be the master of your own life. Only the Most High, your higher mind, will be lord of your life.”

After the period of fasting ended, Paul was given the carob pods to eat. “Here, Little One, take this nutritious food,” said Bannus, offering him the same bowl of carob pods which he had offered Paul on the first day of the fast. “Now you may eat. You have successfully completed the supreme fast.” Paul took one long pod from the bowl and slowly chewed the dried pod, savoring each chewy seed and relishing the sweet honey-like syrup within the pulp. “Let this food be bread for your body and give you energy to perform your daily tasks.”

During the following hot summer days, Paul followed Bannus down the valley and along the Jordan River to find other sources of food: dates from the date palm tree, olives from the olive tree, almonds, and other tree-food. Edible plants and roots were another source of nourishment. But the staple food was always the carob bean pod from the evergreen Carob tree (or Locust tree). Paul learned how to knock the carob pods from the stalks attached to the trunk and limbs of the tall trees by using a long stick, and he learned how to dry the pods in the sun to make them palpable.

In the winter, Paul learned how to gather dried wood for the fire and how to make a fire. Bannus would sometimes come to his cave to sit with Paul around the fire and watch the dancing flames with their blue, red, and orange colors. He also learned about the cosmic fire that flowed through his spinal cord. In the spring, he rejoiced with nature as it appeared as if the world was reborn and redecorated with the many-colored flowers.

A year passed, and then a second year, and Paul began to completely forget his past life before he came to the wilderness. He felt as if his mind, body, and soul had been transformed. He was at peace with himself and with the world. He realized that the solitary path, which Bannus espoused, was conducive to a total purification and renewal of one’s threefold nature – body, mind, and soul. The way of the wilderness had taught him to make his mind pure and clean of any new material desire. Toward the end of the third year, he felt like an entirely new man.

And then it happened, but not quite like he expected it to happen. In the middle of the night, at the time of the spring equinox, he was awakened from his sleep by a bright and shining light in his cave. The light had the form of a golden chariot, which was drawn by four living creatures: a lion, an eagle, a man, and an ox. Inside of the chariot was a long-haired bearded man, dressed in a white robe, who beckoned for Paul to take a ride in the chariot. Paul felt as if his soul stepped out of his physical body, like a bird out of a cage, and sat in the chariot beside the man. The chariot seemed to hover above the ground for a moment, and then it ascended into the starry sky. The chariot moved along a river of solar waves, through spheres of light, through inter-cosmic dimensions, into another world.

When Paul stepped out of the chariot into the new world, he saw a tiny baby in a basin of water. Beside the basin was a mother who was washing the naked body of the baby. He heard her singing softly to the baby as she bathed it:

“Hail, the baby’s come to us,
Hail, the Son has come to us,
O, what joy he has brought
To our hearts and to our souls.”

Then he heard the mother say the name of the baby: “Elisha ben Abuyah, you are a beautiful baby, and you will grow up to be a fine son.”

Paul came closer to the mother and child, and he looked into the baby’s face. Instantly, the thought entered his mind that he was looking at himself in the form of a newborn child. Paul recalled the words of his master: “When you descend into the waters of life, you enter the world of matter and take on a body of flesh.” He had reenacted the drama of life on a daily basis, and now he was confronted with that life face to face. He wanted to take the baby out of the basin of water and bring it home with him.

When Paul suddenly found himself back in his cave again, he wondered if he had really traveled to another world, or whether he had a vision. He needed to find out what had happened. He hurried to Bannus’ cave by the light of the full moon.

“Bannus, something happened to me just now,” said Paul excitedly. “I wanted to ask you what it means.”

Bannus sat up. “Tell me what happened,” he said.

Paul explained in minute detail the experience of the chariot ride and the encounter with the newborn child.

“Son,” said Bannus, using the endearing name for the first time with Paul, “you have taken a ride in the Merkaba, the Light-ship of the soul, to another dimension. In reality, you must know, the soul does not travel anywhere. Everything and everywhere is already inside of your inner spirit, and your spirit is a reflection of all that is. Your soul basically became aware of a higher consciousness, and it appeared that you traveled to it, when in actuality it opened up as a new reality within the crystal-clear consciousness of your mirror-like mind.”

“But how about the newborn child that I saw in the basin of water?” inquired Paul.

“You have become a true seer, like the oracles of former days, and your consciousness has revealed to you your next life,” explained Bannus. “You will be Elisha son of Abuyah in your next incarnation.”