

The Heart and the Cave

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THE close relationship¹ between the symbolisms of the cave and the heart explains the function of the cave from the initiatic point of view as representing a spiritual center. The heart is in fact essentially a symbol of the center, whether it be the center of a being or, analogously, the center of a world, that is, whether the point of view be microcosmic or macrocosmic; the same significance thus naturally comes to be attached to the cave also, in virtue of its relationship with the heart; but this symbolic connection calls for a fuller explanation, and that is, precisely, the theme of this article.

The "cave of the heart" is a well known traditional expression: the word *guhā*, in Sanskrit, generally denotes a cave, but it is also applied to the inward cavity of the heart, and thence to the heart itself; this "cave of the heart" is the vital center in which resides not only *jīvātmā*, but also unconditioned *Atmā* which is in reality identical with *Brahma* itself, as we have shown elsewhere.² This word *guhā* comes from the root *guh*, which means "covering" or "hiding", as does also another similar root, *gup*, whence *gupta*, which is applied to everything secret, to everything that is not outwardly manifested: it is the equivalent of the Greek *Kruptos*, whence the word "crypt" which is a synonym of "cave". These ideas are related to the center inasmuch as it is considered as the most inward and therefore most hidden point; these same ideas refer also to the initiatic secret, either in itself or as symbolized by the disposition of the place where initiations are given, a place which is hidden or "covered", that is, inaccessible to the profane, whether its access be guarded by a "labyrinthine" structure or in some altogether different way (as for example, the "temples without doors" of Far-Eastern initiation), and always considered as an image of the center.

On the other hand, it should be noted that this hiddenness or secrecy, which characterizes spiritual centers or their figurative representation, implies that traditional truth itself is no longer accessible in all its fullness to all men equally, which is the sign of a period of "obscuration", at least in a relative sense; this enables us to "place" such a symbolism in the course of the march of the cycle; but that is a point we shall have to come back to more fully in studying the relationships between the mountain and the cave, inasmuch as both are taken as symbols of the center. For the moment, we will simply point out, in this respect, that the figure of the heart is a downward-pointing triangle (the "triangle of the heart" is yet another traditional expression); and this same figure also stands for the cave, whereas that of the mountain, or of the pyramid which is its equivalent, is on the contrary an upward-pointing triangle; this shows that we have here a relationship that is inverse, and also in a certain sense complementary. Let us add, with regard to this representation of the heart and the cave by the inverted triangle, that here is one of those cases where there can clearly be no question of attaching to this symbol any idea of "black magic", despite the all too frequent assertions of those whose knowledge of symbolism is totally

insufficient.

Having said this, let us return to what is, according to the Hindu tradition, hidden in the "cave of the heart": it is the principle of the being which, in this state of "envelopment" and with regard to manifestation, is compared with what is smallest (the word *dahara*, which denotes the cavity where it resides, refers also to this same idea of smallness), whereas it is in reality what is largest, just as the point is spatially infinitesimal and even null, although it is the principle by which all space is produced, or again, just as the number one appears as the smallest of numbers, although it contains them all principally and itself produces their whole unending series. Thus we find, here also, the expression of an inverse relationship inasmuch as the principle is envisaged from two different points of view; of these, the point of view of extreme smallness concerns its hidden and, as it were, "invisible" state which is, for the being in question, still no more than a "virtuality" but which is the starting point of its spiritual development; here then is the "beginning" (*initium*) of this development, which is directly related to initiation in the etymological sense of this term; and it is precisely from this point of view that the cave can be considered as the place of the "second birth". In this connection we find texts such as the following: "Know that this *Agni*, who is the foundation of the eternal (principial) world, and through whom that world may be attained, is hidden in the cave (of the heart)"³ which refers, in the microcosmic order, to the "second birth", and also to what is macrocosmically analogous to it, the birth of the *Avatara*.

It has already been mentioned that what resides in the heart is both *jīvātmā*, from the standpoint of individual manifestation, and unconditioned *Atmā* or *Paramātmā*, from the principial point of view; the distinction between individual and principle is no more than an illusory one; it only exists with regard to manifestation, but in absolute reality they are one. These are "the two who have entered the cave", and who, at the same time, are also said to "dwell on the highest summit", so that the two symbolisms of the mountain and the cave are here united.⁴ The text adds that "those who know *Brahma* call them darkness and light"; this is more particularly related to the symbolism of Nara-nārāyana, of which we have spoken in connection with the *Atmā-Gitā*,⁵ quoting this very same text: *Nara*, the human being or the mortal who is *jīvātmā*, is identified with *Arjuna*, and *Nārāyana*, the divine or the immortal, who is *Paramātmā*, is identified with *Krishna*; now according to their literal meaning, the name *Krishna* denotes darkness of color and the name *Arjuna* denotes lightness of color, or night and day respectively, inasmuch as they are considered as representing the un-manifested and the manifested.⁶ A symbolism exactly akin in this respect is that of the Dioscorides in their correspondence with the two hemispheres, one dark and the other light, as we have indicated in connection with the meaning of the "double spiral"⁷ On the other hand, these "two", that is *jīvātmā* and *Paramātmā*, are also the "two birds" who are mentioned in other texts as "dwelling on one and the same tree" (just as *Arjuna* and *Krishna* ride in the same chariot), and who are said to be "inseparably united" because they are really one, the distinction between them being no more than illusory,⁸ as we have already seen; it must be noted here that the symbolism of the tree is essentially "axial" like that of the mountain; and the cave, inasmuch as it is considered as being under the mountain or inside it, is also on the axis, where in any case, whatever the point of view, the center must always be, for it is in the center that the individual is united with the Universal.

Before leaving this subject, there is a point of language to be considered, the importance of which should not be overestimated but which is none the less curious: the Egyptian word *hor*, which is the name of *Horus*, seems to mean "heart"; in that case *Horus* would be the "Heart of

the World" according to a designation which is to be found in most traditions, and which is in perfect keeping with his symbolism in general, as far as it can be determined. One might be tempted, at first sight, to connect this word *hor* with *cor*, the Latin for heart, the more so since, in the different languages, the similar roots which denote the heart are to be found both with the aspirate and with the guttural as first letter: thus, on the one hand, *hrid* or *hridaya* in Sanskrit, *heart* in English, *Herz* in German, and, on the other hand, *ker* or *kardion* in Greek and *cor* itself (*genitive cordis*) in Latin; but the common root of all these words, including the last, is in reality HRD or KRD, which can scarcely be the case with the word *hor*, so that there would seem to be no question here of any real identity of root, but merely of a phonetic convergence, which is none the less striking. No doubt more remarkable, and in any case directly connected with our subject, is the following point: in Hebrew the word *hor* or *hur*, written with the letter *heth*, means "cave"; this does not necessarily mean that there is an etymological link between these Hebrew and Egyptian words, although they could, strictly speaking, have a more or less remote common origin; but however that may be, their resemblance is none the less of considerable interest, seeing that there can be no such thing as pure chance. Moreover, in Hebrew, *hor* or *har*, written this time with the letter *he*, means "mountain"; now since *heth*, among aspirates, is a reinforcement or hardening of *he*, as it were a "compression", and since *heth* moreover expresses in itself, ideographically, the notion of limit or enclosure, we see that the very relationship between the two words denotes the cave as being the enclosed place inside the mountain, as indeed it is, literally as well as symbolically; and this brings us back once more to the relationship between the mountain and the cave, which we shall now have to examine more closely.⁹

¹ The author is here following up an allusion made to this relationship in his long review of W. F. Jackson Knight's book, *Cumaeen Gates, a reference of the Sixth "Aeneid" to Initiation Pattern*. This review, under the title *La Caverne et le Labyrinthe*, immediately precedes the present article as chapter XXIX in *Symboles de la Science Sacrée*.

² Man and his Becoming according to the Vedanta, ch. 3.

³ *Katha Upanishad*, Valli 1, shruti 14.

⁴ *Katha Upanishad*, 3rd Valli, shruti 1 (cf. Brahma-Sutras, 1st Adhyaya, 2nd Pada, sutras 11-12).

⁵ *Voile d'Isis*, mars, 1930. *Atmā-Gītā* is the name given to the *Bhagavad Gītā* when it is considered according to its deepest meaning. The passage referred to (from Guénon's article *Atmā-Gītā*) is as follows: "Nārāyana, 'He who walks (or is carried) on the waters' is a name of *Vishnu*, applied by transposition to *Paramatmā*; the waters here represent the formal or individual possibilities. In Christianity Christ's walking on the waters has a significance exactly related to the same symbolism". *Translator's note*.

⁶ Cf. Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Darker Side of Dawn and Angel and Titan*, an essay in Vedic Ontology.

⁷ See *La Grande Triade* ch. V.

⁸ *Mundaka Upanishad*, 3rd Mundaka, 1st Khanda, shruti 1; *Shwēkishwatara Upanishad*, 4th Adhyāya, shruti 6.

⁹ We hope to publish the article on *The Mountain and the Cave* in our next number [Editor]