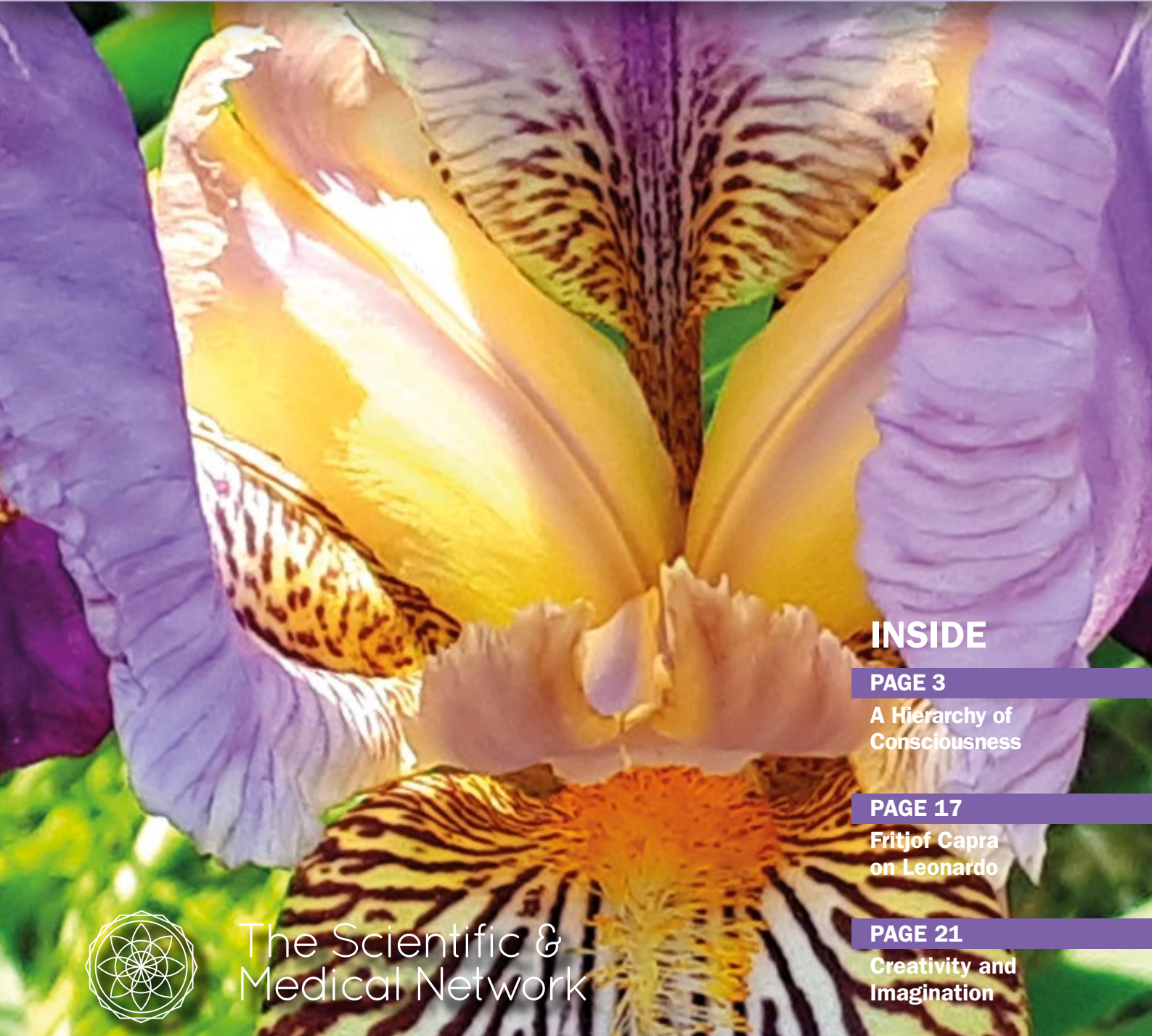


Paradigm Explorer



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Imagination



The Scientific &
Medical Network

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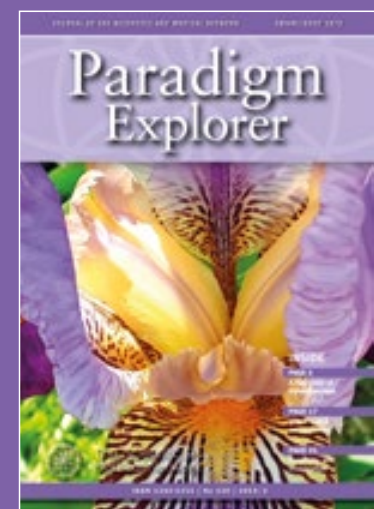
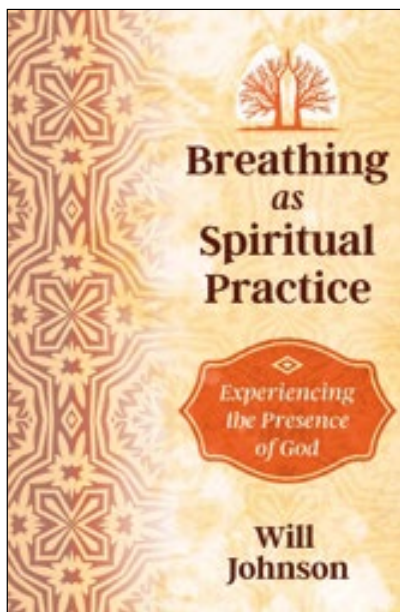


Photo: Natalie Tobert



THE WONDER OF BREATHING

Gunnel Minett

■ BREATHING AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE, EXPERIENCING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Will Johnson

Inner Traditions, www.InnerTraditions.com, 2019,

160 pp., p/b, £14.99 - ISBN 978-1-620556-887

This book can be described as a daily journal written by someone on a spiritual retreat in a monastery. The author is not part of the monastery, only a visitor. The focus of his retreat is to pay attention to his breathing. Just that. To focus on every breath he takes, all day, every day for as long as he stays there. No more, no less. Coming from a Buddhist background, he wants to follow Buddha's instructions on the awakening of the awareness of breath; "as you breathe in, breathe in through the whole body; as you breathe out, breathe out through the whole body."

This simple activity turns out to lead to a big inner change. By simply paying attention to the breathing, breath by breath, his awareness starts to expand. What Buddha was referring to was not just to breathe in air, he also pointed to a spiritual aspect of breathing: it can expand your consciousness and become a spiritual path to a higher potential.

As a journal of someone on a spiritual path, the book is beautifully written with several poems and suggestions as to how to pursue the experience of expanding the

breathing. But personally I think the book would have benefited from a physiological explanation of breathing; understanding the central role breathing has in the body would have added to an understanding of the spiritual dimension. To make us see that breathing is not just vital for our survival and physical wellbeing, but also a powerful way to deepen our understanding of ourselves and how it can make us expand our consciousness and inner wellbeing.

I have been using breathing as a tool for expanding inner wellbeing since 1980 and have experienced how people have started an inner journey, similar to the one described in this book. It does not matter in what context a person starts to become aware of the potential of the breath. When the person starts to be aware of their breathing, either through altering their breathing pattern or simply by observing the breathing, they tend to start an inner journey.

If this type of comparison had been added to the book, it would have added a new dimension to the personal journey described. Nevertheless, the book offers a very interesting insight to the powerful tool which our breathing can be.

PHILOSOPHY- SPIRITUALITY

A PURPLE ROBE - MARGINALISING GNOSIS

David Lorimer

■ CATAFALQUE – CARL JUNG AND THE END OF HUMANITY

Peter Kingsley

Catafalque Press, 2018, Two volumes, 825 pp., \$75, h/b - ISBN 978-1-9996384-0-5

In this radical and passionately intense work of coruscating brilliance and at times sacred indignation and scathing denunciation, Peter Kingsley places Western culture on a catafalque, an image he received in a powerful dream and which signifies a wooden platform on which a coffin is placed. In 1917, Oswald Spengler published his landmark study *The Decline of the West* and now, just over 100 years later and building on the work of Carl Jung, comes Kingsley's stark declaration that Western culture is in fact already dead. This may be a surprise to progressive technologically minded people, but much less so to the more spiritually aware and exactly for

the reasons that Kingsley identifies, namely that we have lost touch with our primordial roots, as he also argues in his earlier works *In the Dark Places of Wisdom and Reality* about the significance of Parmenides and Empedocles for the origins of philosophy. Native Americans tell him that his duty as someone who remembers what most people have already forgotten, is 'to shock people into an awareness that all life comes from, and returns to, the sacred.' (p. 17) In Gnostic traditions, the fall is understood as a descent into separation, density, forgetfulness and sleep, hence gnosis - and initiation more generally - is an experiential remembering of one's true divine identity. Indeed, the Greek word for knowledge is *aletheia*, signifying not forgetting. As Plotinus said, 'Remembering is for those who have forgotten', which means most of us.

It is impossible to pick out more than a few key themes from this magisterial and profoundly significant book, and these will necessarily reflect my own concerns and understanding. The first volume runs to 445 pages, while the second consists of 344 pages of notes plus the index. Hence there is a staggering scholarship behind this study, with each note often consisting of up to 20 related references with commentary. Since the publication of Jung's extraordinary *Red Book* 10 years ago, it has become impossible to deny his role as a prophet, mystic and Gnostic, although some Jungians continue the attempt to rehabilitate 'the mystical fool' into some form of respectability and therefore rational acceptability. Jung himself is only too aware of this when at the beginning of the *Red Book* he contrasts the spirit of this time with the spirit of the depths. The first would like to hear of use and value, 'but that other spirit forces me nevertheless to speak, beyond justification, use and meaning.' Jung explains that he took away his belief in science, forcing him down to the last and simplest things and placed his understanding and knowledge 'at the service of the inexplicable and the paradoxical...the melting together of sense and nonsense, which produces the supreme meaning.' The spirit of the time is blind to what really matters, preferring to live on the surface rather than plumbing the depths, seeking out what is rational, reasonable and therefore comfortable and respectable.

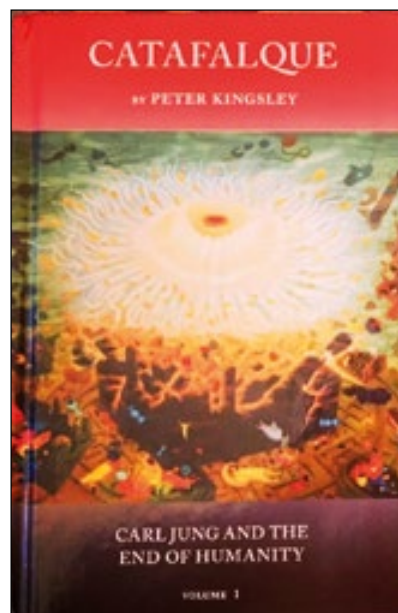
Kingsley writes that 'it is bound to be the case the only possible approach to the reality of the prophets will always be from the scorned side, the silenced side, the disgusting side of prophecy. At the end of the day

the only lasting good is going to come from the side openly mocked by rationalists, disposed of by Jung scholars, rejected by Jungians, even repulsive to Jung himself.' (p. 285) This is the purple robe put on Christ as prophet so that people could mock him and eventually kill him - the same fate has befallen many luminaries since his time, while rationalists from Aristotle onwards have mocked prophetic inspiration and ecstasy as unsound: reason can kill the living spirit. In the Gnostic Gospels, including *The Gospel of the Beloved Companion*, Jesus is a wisdom teacher who has realised gnosis and speaks directly from the Spirit. He is one with the Spirit and the Spirit is one with him. Those representing the letter and the law, including Peter, do not understand what he is talking about and refer to his 'strange and complicated ideas.' Nor do they understand the mystical vision of Mary Magdalene, the woman who is 'freed from the fetters of forgetfulness' and has 'seen the All..the truth of your Self, the truth that is I am.' Thus she becomes the 'completion of completions.'

In the famous BBC interview with John Freeman, Jung does not say that he believes in God, but rather that he knows God - it is not a question of belief, but of knowing: 'the existence of a transcendental reality is, indeed, self-evident... That the world inside and outside us rests on transcendental background is as certain as our own existence...' (p. 758) Jung represents the prophetic fire and spirit, but this is too intense for his followers, as it was for the followers of Jesus. Gnosis is translated into institutional dogma, 'the spirit and fire of the Christ had to vanish, be stamped out' so that the birth of the Church is a second crucifixion and death; 'and after that, the only way the spirit of Christ could stay alive was inside the heart of a few hidden heretics and mystics.' (p. 400) This is still true today. The foundation of the C.G Jung Institute in Zürich provides a telling example. Jung himself stated that the primary aim and focus of the Institute would be interdisciplinary research in a whole range of subjects, while his followers were amazed that Jung had not grasped that the main purpose of the Institute was to train analysts. Hence, as Kingsley puts it, 'In Jung's own name, officially and very efficiently, Jungians were managing to get rid of Jung.' (p. 396)

Kingsley shows how Jung stands in the initiatory lineage of Parmenides and Empedocles, whose wisdom was acquired from the spirit of the depths and who incarnated the real meaning of prophecy as

people who speak on behalf of the divine reality within: 'one who at any moment in history speaks or writes or communicates faithfully, accurately, without interfering with the process, on behalf of the divine, serves as a mouthpiece to record exactly what the sacred is needing to convey.' (p. 293) So to become a prophet means 'returning deep into the past until you are brushing against the root of yourself, your primordial beginning and ultimate point of origin.' (p. 298) Their role is always to conform to the divine will and to state what the collective awareness of people is not yet able to grasp, still less to face: the collective darkness which is unconsciously projected outwards onto others as the shadow. Jung himself explains (p. 300) that the primordially ancient



is something new, and that 'the task is to give birth to the old in a new time.' Kingsley then adds, with startling emphasis that 'without prophets willing to take us back to the primordial reality of what we are, we have no future left.'

This is exactly where we are as a culture. We are cut off from our ancestors, from our roots, from our centre, from the sacred, from our deepest identity, and we urgently need to return to this source. There are striking parallels here with the work of John Moriarty whose last autobiographical book is called *Nostos* or homecoming and who writes that we are so concerned with rights that we have virtually forgotten about rites, existing as we do 'in the narrow circle of sensory-intellectual light' where 'the excluded soul is the great calamity of our age', prioritising as we do information and knowledge over wisdom.

Kingsley refers to the ancient Greek mystical process of rebirth out of the personal into the impersonal so that we no longer live for ourselves and can become a source of life for others. Simone Weil in her essay on human personality also identifies the impersonal with the sacred as the realm of truth and beauty. And TS Eliot writes of the need to 'be still and still moving/into another intensity/for a further union, a deeper communion' - the process is necessarily intense, 'a condition of complete simplicity costing not less than everything.' This is symbolised for Kingsley by rebirth in the Grail cup of redemptive and intentional suffering, dying before we die, stripped away to nakedness - the journey recounted by Chris Bache in his forthcoming book *LSD and the Mind of the Universe* describes a similar transformational process on behalf of the collective. As Kingsley puts it in the last sentence of the book: 'it's only by shedding everything, including ourselves, that we sow the seeds of the future.'

Cleverness is not enough, rationality and reason are not enough; they both depend on deeper layers of the psyche that the left hemisphere has forgotten and even denies, as Jung and Kingsley insist: mysticism is more fundamental than theology, as Aquinas realised at the end of his life. However, the indigenous people have not forgotten, as we are beginning to learn - they remember our primordial and original instructions and some, like the Kogi, even send out messages to us as the younger brothers. These two aspects of ourselves represented by left and right hemisphere thinking (Iain McGilchrist's work dovetails well here, even though not mentioned) must be restored to balance, a process that prophets like Jung and Kingsley attempt to undertake within themselves and which involves listening to dreams and noting synchronicities that shape our lives. Kingsley gives a stunning example from his own life, linking up an unexpected viewing of a programme about Jung at the age of 14 at the flat of a girlfriend with his amazing unconsciously guided drive across the continent where he finishes up in the dark at Jung's Bollingen retreat, suddenly illuminated by moonlight and resulting in a profound new sense of self and of his mission 'living so close to a mystery that one becomes it.'

The last part of the book introduces the friendship between Jung and Henri Corbin, based on many conversations with his widow. Kingsley sees Corbin as both a mystic and an academic rescuing

through Sufism a real understanding of the imagination that the West had forgotten: 'philosophy, logic, science, even the apparent arts of reason, all have their origin in the experience of another world.' (p. 364) He adds (p. 727) that 'there is no true philosophy which does not reach completion in a metaphysics of ecstasy, no mystical experience which does not demand serious philosophical preparation. And such precisely was the *dawning wisdom*.' Corbin was almost unique in giving the feeling to Jung that he had been completely understood, something which I believe Kingsley has also achieved.

Only a few insights from the multifaceted richness, subtlety and penetration of this alchemically transformative book can be conveyed in a review, and I urge readers to invest time in studying this extraordinary work and pondering its profound significance not only for our perilous times but also with respect to our own spiritual journeys of individuation 'as the life in God and through God' – how we can speak from the divine reality within us. Then perhaps, at last, the repressed wisdom of the gnostic Sophia can shine a light into the dense darkness of our unconscious culture.

GNOSIS AND INSUBORDINATION

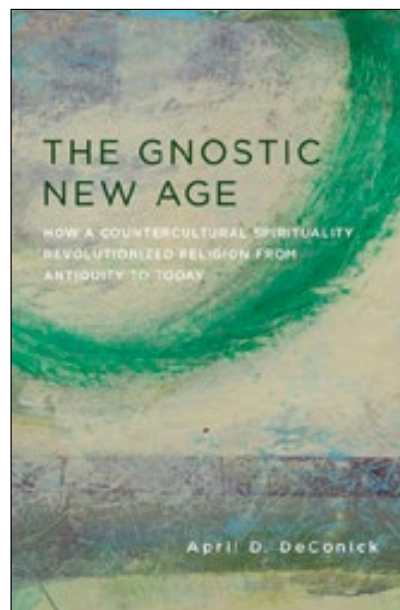
David Lorimer

■ THE GNOSTIC NEW AGE

April D. DeConick

Columbia University Press,
2016, 380 pp., £22, p/b – ISBN
978-0-231-17077-2

Subtitled 'how a countercultural spirituality revolutionised religion from antiquity to today', this authoritative and fascinating study traces the influence of ancient Gnostic thinking on modern spirituality as a transgressive force. Transgression is defined as 'breaching a norm that has become recognised by a powerful group as a prescription, law, or custom. It is the act of crossing a line, stepping over a boundary, moving beyond convention, straying from the straight and narrow, overstepping a limit.' (p. 289) This quotation already encapsulates one of the central themes of the book in the relationship between the Apostolic Catholics and Gnostic groups. The former developed political power to enforce sanctions against what they regard as deviant views, creating a norm and defining orthodoxy over against heresy. Faithful sinners subordinated themselves to the Church while errant Gnostics were insubordinate



in asserting that they do not need the Church as an intermediary in order to have direct access to the Divine. They claim that our essential human self or spirit 'is nothing less than God's very own life essence' waiting to be reawakened through gnosis.

In her historical treatment, the author characterises early expressions of spirituality in Babylon, Egypt, Greece and with the Hebrews as 'servant spirituality', reflecting the society of the time with dominant elites controlling a subservient populace. This then evolves to 'covenant spirituality' in the Old Testament and in initiatic traditions to 'ecstatic spirituality'. By insisting on the God within perceptible through the *nous* and in the experience of gnosis, the Gnostics inverted this message of servitude, which represented a major transgression to the dominant orthodoxy. A Hermetic hymn by Asclepius refers to:

Mind (nous) by which we know you,

*Reason (logos), by which we seek you
in our dim suppositions,*

*Knowledge (gnosis), by which we
rejoice in knowing you.*

Two central theological chapters address the influence of Paul on both Apostolic Catholicism and Gnosticism and the controversy over Gnostic and orthodox readings of the Gospel of John. Paul defined himself in contrast to the Jewish law and the church in Jerusalem under James, and his own conversion is described by the author as an extra-ordinary Gnostic incident. Significantly, he does not consider the father of Jesus to be the tribal God Yahweh but the One God Yahweh who transcends the tribe. This dual understanding is central to the two readings of John, where the

old tribal god becomes the adversary. The author characterises Jesus in the Gospel of John as the Descendent Light and his early followers as Children of Light. She makes an interesting case that the Gnostic Cerinthus (pp. 156-7) was the author of the Gospel and discusses the role of Simonian Samaritan converts, characterising the worldview of the Gospel as 'a unique cognitive blend'. She explains how the orthodox author of I John asserts the doctrine of sacrificial atonement, rejected by the Gnostics. Irenaeus in his *Against the Heresies* claims that the apostle John wrote the fourth Gospel in order to stamp out Cerinthus' teachings, and the final chapter containing the statement of authorship is added later to showcase the faith of Simon Peter. However, reviewing the evidence, the author concludes that Cerinthus' views on the fourth gospel are in line with the Children of Light and that his 'interpretation of the fourth Gospel matches their point by point. In fact, it represents the oldest reading of the fourth Gospel and aligns perfectly with the Gnostic predisposition of the gospel.' (p. 157) This is hugely significant and she sums up the overall scheme, commenting that we become friends of God rather than servants, and that it is our ability to love that makes human beings transcendent.

The Gnostic story is the story of the human self with its transcendent origin and the inherent dynamic of a fall into dark and dense matter involving separation and ultimate return, falling asleep and awakening, forgetting and remembering, descending and ascending from darkness back into light. The author identifies and illustrates different therapeutic ritual dramas involving purging, recovery and integration of the fallen spirit merging with God 'in a bath of Being or in an embrace of the sacred erotic.' (p. 175) These are described in some detail and what I found most fascinating was Gnostic incubation in silence, which represents 'both the primal state of the ineffable God they seek and a bodily practice in which they engage to withdraw into this primal state as they return to the source of life. The primal God in Gnostic myths is a silent God, and the goal of the Gnostic journey is to withdraw back into this original silence, rest, and stillness. Silence is considered the state of utter transcendence, the very essence of ultimate reality in its original condition.' (p. 182) Living silence is a state of silent light. I found this an extraordinary description of a non-dual state attained in meditation, but the author does not mention this word or draw such comparisons with

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