

*"The Buddha
from Babylon could
be the answer to many
questions . . . This is a
fascinating and hugely
informative read."*

-Mariel Hemingway

The
BUDDHA
from
BABYLON

The Lost History and Cosmic Vision of Siddhartha Gautama

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Preface

THE BUDDHA FROM BABYLON

Scholars have estimated that the historical Buddha lived in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. Traditionally his date of birth is given as 563 BCE and his date of death as 483 BCE. There has been a general consensus that he lived and taught exclusively in an area known today as India, which during this era was composed of sixteen independent kingdoms.

At the same time, however, a vast empire dominated the region west of India. The militant Achaemenid Persian dynasty, after overtaking the former Babylonian and Median Empires, had expanded its sovereignty from Egypt to the Indus. Central to their territory was Babylon, the world's largest and most cosmopolitan city of that period and the energetic hub of spiritual and intellectual explorations. By the lifetime of the Buddha, Babylon had been exposed to a wide assortment of religious views from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indus Valley.

This book will offer the view that Siddhartha Gautama, the name of the person who became the Buddha, had been born outside of India, and had become an important leader in Babylon prior to the event known as his enlightenment. This

book further explores how this background and experience was instrumental in shaping his cosmic visions.

The legendary biography of Siddhartha Gautama written 2,000 years ago recounts that before becoming the Buddha he was born a prince of the Sakya clan and was raised in his father's cloistered royal estate. According to the story of his younger years, he was married and had a son before venturing out into the world. Once outside of his sheltered paradise he was shocked to learn that people suffered from birth until death. His deep compassion for others set him on a quest to solve the cause of suffering.

Choosing to depart his princely domain, he entered the mendicant lifestyle to learn the skills of trance meditation. After some ten years of spiritual searching he finally found a path to salvation. One day while sitting under a tree in a forest, the Buddha attained Perfect Enlightenment. Immediately he embarked on a journey followed by growing numbers of disciples. Through oral sermons and cosmic visions he set forth his enlightened views about the scope, nature, and essence of life. These teachings became known as Buddhism.

According to the Buddhist scriptures recorded after his passing, the Buddha taught primarily in India from one end of the Ganges River to the other. One source of the literature appeared in northwestern India, and thereafter traveled south to the island of Sri Lanka and then to other south Asian countries. Another collection was assembled in the northeast India, in an area claimed to be the ancient kingdom of Magadha, today's state of Bihar in India. In due course these scriptures spread north into China and from there to Korea

and Japan.

In the late 19th century a surveyor and trader in artifacts said that he discovered the Buddha's birthplace in Nepal, which he declared to have been the homeland of the long-since extinct tribe of the Sakyas. Nepal, located south of China, and north of Bihar, has had a history of Buddhist culture, but archeological evidence concerning the time of the Buddha in this location has remained unconfirmed to the present. For more than one hundred years since this claim was made archeologists have tried to find some trace of the Buddha or the Sakya tribe in this region. Academics still support a Nepalese or Indian birthplace, although a host of serious and respected scholars have deemed the claim to be either suspect or utterly fraudulent.

The story of the Indian Buddha dates back to about two hundred years after Siddhartha Gautama's lifetime. At that time, coinciding with arrival of Alexander the Great in that area, India's kingdoms were unified into one nation under the Emperor Asoka, a converted Buddhist. His reign appears to coincide with the effort to localize Buddhism inside India.

The religious literature of this period cloaked the Buddha in supernatural powers. They developed a picture of him as a divine being who possessed supernatural spiritual powers and in death watched over believers from *Parinirvana*. As Buddhism competed with other local religions, its proponents felt obliged to convince the local population that it was an indigenous Indian religion, but ultimately to no avail. Brahmanism prevailed and evolved into the dominant religion in India.

Several hundred years later, encompassing Brahmanism

and its forerunner, Vedism, the new religion of Hinduism emerged with the writings of a brilliant new testament, the Mahabharata. It lifted the nation of India to a divine status.

The result was that Hinduism delivered a decidedly homegrown Indian cosmology and belief system. Led by the socially influential religious caste of Brahmins, Hinduism prevailed as the local religion of choice, and eventually forced the stranger, Buddhism, to move on. Buddhism only survived due to its timely arrival in other Asian countries, and its willingness to adapt to local beliefs and customs in China, Sri Lanka, the countries of Southeast Asia, and, centuries later, in Tibet, Korea, and Japan.

The Buddha from Babylon presents an alternative biography of the Buddha based on reliable analyses of more recent archeological findings and insightful interpretations of mythological literature. This narrative, based on alternative research that unveils the lost history of the Buddha, provides evidence of his origin to the west of India. He was, it appears, born an Arya-Scythian, and a royal personage of the Saka clan, a people of Eurasian origin.

Recently several historians have determined that the legendary Sakya people were actually the Saka, whose descendants are well known to a region that stretches today from southeastern Iran through Afghanistan and Pakistan, up to the Indus River Valley where India begins. The location of the Saka suggests that the man known as Siddhartha Gautama must have been born to the west of India, far from Nepal or northeastern India.

This is the first biography of Siddhartha Gautama to reveal that prior to becoming the Buddha, he had an

important career in Babylon. It paints the story of a young prodigy who grew up in the Arya tradition of the Lion-Sun shaman. In due course, he headed for Babylon where his wisdom, princely demeanor, and divination skills earned him the position of Chief Magus of the Magi Order headquartered at the Esagila Ziggurat Temple complex.

Evidence of his presence in Babylon shapes this speculative biography. During his time in Babylon he acquired a reputation as a beloved figure, a popular leader in charge of the general welfare of the population. He possessed a remarkable depth of knowledge, was well versed in philosophy and astronomy, and became a visionary, stargazer, metaphysicist, and philosopher. He was educated to hold a wide range of spiritual concepts, including ancient shamanism, the Sumerian/Akkad, and the Egyptian, Vedic, Judean, Assyrian, Greek, Zoroastrian, and Babylonian religions.

He had become a master of the mythic language used from the earliest civilization to convey the cosmic visions of seers. Later, once he became the Buddha, he used this “visualization“ language to paint his remarkable cosmological visions. His talents described the scope of his brilliance and the depth of his compassion prior to his accomplishment of Perfect Enlightenment.

Although Babylon was under Persian rule at the time, the Magi Council decided to replace the sitting emperor who was away on a military venture. They placed Gautama on the throne. After the Persian Emperor died under mysterious circumstances, Siddhartha Gautama would hold the role of the King of Babylon and presumptive Emperor of Persia for

several months. However, his time in Babylon came to an abrupt end when Persian nobles conspired against Gautama. Their political coup and purge forced him to abdicate and flee for the Indus Valley forest. In his place a Persian military general, Darius the Great, with the guidance of his religious mentor Zoroaster, took power and became the new emperor.

* * *

The cosmic visions of Siddhartha Gautama are described in *The Buddha from Babylon* within the context of four progressive cosmologies that he conveyed using mythic language. The reader is taken into the Buddha's mind to reveal a comprehensive and in-depth system of existence. As he unveils his teaching course, the Buddha shows that he is a highly educated man, well aware of religious ideas, mythologies, wars, and the quest of conquerors for personal immortality and domination. If so, we might imagine that his sophisticated, worldly knowledge would have had a profound impact on his Teachings—connecting individuals, society, and the boundless cosmos to the evolution of humanity.

If, indeed, Siddhartha Gautama had been the Chief Magus from Babylon prior to becoming the Buddha, we may be able to find evidence of Babylonian mythology, religiosity, astronomy, divination, and numerology in the Buddhist scriptures. Highly respected historical and archeological analysts have detected clues pointing at a possible "Babylonian connection." Based on this premise, *The Buddha from Babylon* builds on their insights, and for the first time advances possible evidence of Babylonian imagery and celestial knowledge in his sutras.

The Buddha from Babylon unravels “what the Buddha knew and when he knew it,” providing a unified narrative of the Buddhist teachings from a fresh perspective. It brings Siddhartha Gautama to life as a real person, and yet shows why he has been dubbed the wisest man of all time and elevated to a divine figure.

Beyond his background and personal journey, this book explores the mind of the founder of Buddhism. His biography, we believe, cannot be complete without examining his overarching purpose—the exploration of life’s deepest meanings and the grand dynamism revealed through his cosmic visions. The Buddha’s observations illuminated the essential mystery of existence, addressing the universal questions that curious minds have aspired to know from the beginning of human endeavor.

As the quest for a “Theory of Everything” continues in modern times, this book reveals that an identical aspiration for Universal Truth underlies the earliest notions of ancient theology, philosophy, psychology, cosmology, astronomy, mathematics, art, music, and natural law. In this book today’s scholars, students, philosophers, psychologists, historians, scientists, cosmologists, and politicians can gain a new appreciation for the misunderstood or overlooked wisdom of a forgotten past. *The Buddha from Babylon* was written to enlighten anyone with a desire for exploring deep meaning, regardless of their beliefs or background and whether or not they identify as Buddhists.

An important feature of this book is its interpretations of mythic storytelling. By covering the history of world religion through symbolism and the metaphoric, the reader is

introduced to the language Siddhartha Gautama uses in conveying his enlightenment. The Buddha leveraged his visionary sight to define his doctrines and insights. The result is a deep spiritual exploration into who we are, individually and as a species, and a forwardlooking framework for who we can become and how we can get there.

The reader will experience a journey that evolves from a historical perspective to the Buddha's visionary elucidation of life as a super-structure system. Along the way the reader will encounter how and why all things are connected across space-time, scale, and dimension. As the book unfolds, it reveals the Buddha's purpose as a messianic mission designed to direct the future of human civilization onto a positive path of evolution. Some 2,500 years ago he foresaw an end to the era of instinct-based evolution and sought to inspire humans to self-direct the next phase of evolution toward higher consciousness. For the sake of the future he left behind a grand vision of the human psyche as a pliable system that either operates on a default basis or may be guided and shaped by its user. He recognized that our destiny—individually and collectively—was always in our hands.

SPIRITUAL ARCHEOLOGY:

ABOUT THE AUTHOR'S METHOD OF RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Author Harvey Kraft is a spiritual archeologist and founder of the Everlife Foundation, a research and education center dedicated to the investigation of Buddhist views and history.

He has established a unique form of “Spiritual Archeology,” defined as a method for unearthing and interpreting ancient information.

Spiritual archeology is used to dig beneath the surface of ancient spiritual information and unlock its secrets by: (a) employing archeological research, (b) translating and interpreting mythic literature, (c) analyzing histories from a spiritual perspective, (d) finding hidden meanings embedded in ancient linguistics, as well as (e) integrating visionary insights and observed data.

Spiritual archeology requires an intuitive skill for connecting disparate pieces of evidence based on the premise that spiritual information was developed and exchanged widely among distant cultures prior to the advent of writing. The spiritual archeologist must search for underlying meanings in the subtext of mythic works with the spirit of a detective seeking out the intents of the ancient sacred scribes. This research has revealed that seers developed and conveyed the first versions of cosmology, mathematics, physics, astronomy, psychology, and spiritualism by using the language of mythology, metaphor, and symbolism to reveal their visionary scope of existence.

Much of the wisdom of the seers has become elusive with time. Today, some consider myths to be fantasy or lies. Others seem to hold on to spiritual concepts and religious views as if they were set in stone, although oftentimes their notions are mere shadows of what the old seers once understood. Substantially oblivious to the common roots that most religions share, today’s cultures, both West and East, are still engrossed in contests over divine and cosmic truths.

However, the technology of modern communications provides the spiritual archeologist with ready access to information as never before, and we can probe further and deeper to gain a better understanding of humanity's spiritual roots essential to directing humanity's future.

A more lucid view of history from Before the Common Era (BCE) is hobbled by the limited amount of empirical research available. The era's mysteries lend to fantastic interpretations and a wide spectrum of religious traditions that read legends, myths, and sacred literature as historical facts. Spiritual archeology recognizes that the brilliant, visionary writers of ancient literature embedded their wisdom within these sacred dream stories told as a history of quests. They all held a comprehensive view of the whole of Existence; each of their cosmologies contained a highly sophisticated system connecting human beings to greater powers.

The quest for immortality has dominated belief systems from pre-historic times onward. Academic examinations notwithstanding, spiritual archeology attempts to identify the profound views of the great seers of the past who led the successful establishment of political-economic-religious structures in early civilizations based on the achievement of balance between divine order and stable climates.

Employing spiritual archeology's granular and deep exploration of ancient history has produced this speculative biography of the Buddha by taking into account clues that may have been overlooked or ignored by traditional historians or religious advocates, since they must work within the more stringent confines of institutional

frameworks.

Using the methods of spiritual archeology, this biography of the Buddha unearths the shamanic, Sumerian, Egyptian, Judean, Babylonian and Vedic beliefs that influenced him. Furthermore, it takes into account other beliefs and the political climate of his time and delineates his teachings, an original form of Buddhism that is a breathtaking cosmic system he espoused with the intent of influencing the quality and future development of human life.

For most Westerners, modern thought started in Greece. In actuality, the foundation for Greek mythology and philosophy was influenced by Egyptian and Mesopotamian teachings. Others claim an Indian origin. This book proposes that the religious thoughts underlying both Western and Eastern beliefs were incubated between Greece and India, an area that today spans the Islamic nations of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. This is where the first spark of Buddhism surfaced from Arya and Babylonian traditions.

Spiritual archeology digs up and integrates information, intuition, and analysis in order to provide a richer appreciation for the origination of ancient beliefs and behaviors universally embedded in today's human cultures. This biography of the Buddha transcends Buddhism as a religion. Rather, it approaches it as it was originally intended—as a search for the meaning of life.

This book provides a cohesive narrative of Buddhist thought, reflective of Siddhartha Gautama's unprecedented visionary capabilities, and unencumbered by the sectarian schisms characteristic of later eras. Taking into account the universal approach of the Buddha, the spiritual archeologist

writing the biography of the Buddha takes on a role similar to that of a theoretical physicist who formulates scientific concepts that may never be possible to prove in an absolute sense. Both the spiritual archeologist and theoretical cosmologist make use of elusive clues, formulas, and patterns in an attempt to decipher the unknown.

Told in a documentary writing style, *The Buddha from Babylon* takes the reader on an exciting “ride“ through ancient history as it might be seen through the mind of the Buddha. A central premise of this book is that the Buddha possessed a deep knowledge of history. He was well versed in the mythic languages and religious views espoused by seers and shamans prior to the sixth century. He was also sensitive to the impact of divine order on ordinary people. He had attained a leadership role in Babylon where he was highly engaged with the public and clearly understood the plight of people both on a personal and social scale. His vast knowledge of astronomical data, sacred mathematics, and cosmic time prepared him for his own articulation of Universal Truth.

He did not attain enlightenment out of the blue.

Before the event known as his enlightenment, he espoused profound philosophic views about the connection of humans with the cosmos, and explored the impact of habitual behaviors on psychological wellness. Once he achieved his goal of seeing the full picture of Existence, he began immediately to explain both the vicissitudes of mortal existence and the system and laws underlying all of cosmic Existence.

This book explores a critical nexus in history, a time

when the fields of religion, philosophy, and celestial cosmogonies were inseparable and openly debated. The Buddha appeared at the height of this period, coined the Axial Age (800–200 BCE) by modern philosopher Karl Jaspers. At its inception Buddhism had a relationship with other religions of its time and was influenced by past religions. It also originated and developed new concepts, some of which were later adopted into Christianity, Sufism and Hinduism, and more recently incorporated into non-institutional spiritual practices.

The Buddha used cosmic visions to explore the scope of the Universe, across space, time, and scale and the connection that the Laws of Existence had to human experiences. His insight into human beings offered highly advanced psychological theses and applications geared to opening the door to the unconscious, expanding the capacity of consciousness, and connecting with the Universal-Mind of a super-conscious cosmos.

The Buddha from Babylon articulates a holistic view of Buddhism through four cosmologies, or stages. This approach encompasses the key Teachings of the Buddha prior to the development of various Buddhist schools of thought and doctrinal distinctions.

In addition, the author has chosen to credit the Buddha with concepts that appear in sutras deemed by academic analysts to be the works of later generations. By identifying certain visionary sutras with Babylonian influences, this book suggests that these dissertations could have originated only with Siddhartha Gautama himself. The connection between the Buddha and Babylon is a most profound discovery. It

affirms the considerable use of his original, oral teachings in the later recordings of his Teachings. In that respect *The Buddha from Babylon* reconnects and unifies the whole of Buddhism under his purview.

The reader will discover in the Buddha's visions a profound linkage of cosmic self-knowing and the enlightened scope of Universal Truth.

The Buddha's cosmic visions also appear to be shockingly congruent with modern knowledge occupied today by scientific fields. One would be hard-pressed to explain his advanced insight, farsight, and foresight without our access to the technological, mathematical, and analytical tools we have today. Ironically, unencumbered by the boundaries of the observable, he pushed the envelope of inner sight even beyond what we can see today by looking through the most powerful telescopes, microscopes, or scanners.

But today, as science unravels the complex details of the mind and body and explores the mechanics of a vast Universe, academic studies of ancient wisdom are often approached as quaint or archaic.

From a modern perspective that sees religious myths as exaggerations and spiritual visions as hallucinations could the discoveries of the Buddha still be relevant today?

ABOUT THE LOTUS SUTRA

For the fourth and final cosmology of Buddhism featured in this book, the author has chosen to focus on the Lotus Sutra. The Lotus Sutra was translated from Sanskrit and Pali into Chinese in the second century CE and then spread to Korea

and Japan. It is the premise of this book that the original, oral rendition of this sutra came directly from Siddhartha Gautama.

As the surviving written versions appear to reflect certain additions or modifications possibly made by Mahayana scribes in India, the author has focused on parts of the scripture that, in his view, reflect the sutra's original cosmic revelation.

The full title of the Lotus Sutra is written in Sanskrit, Chinese, or Japanese as follows:

Original Sanskrit: Sad-dharma Punda-rika Sutra

Chinese Translation: Miao-fa Lien-hua Ching

Japanese Transliteration (from Chinese): Myo-ho Ren-ge
Kyo

Several translations in English attest to the interest the Lotus Sutra has generated in Western countries. The "Lotus Sutra" is a condensed title in English. The full title reflects a literal translation commonly written in English as The Sutra of the Lotus Flower's Wonderful Dharma.

The text has also been published as the "Threefold Lotus Sutra" with an introductory and closing sutra added to the volume or volumes of the main body of text containing the following:

Preface Sutra: The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings (3 chapters)

Main Sutra: The Lotus Sutra (28 chapters)

Afterward Sutra: Sutra of Meditation on Universal Virtue Bodhisattva (1 chapter)

The author offers his own wording for the English translation of quotations from the Lotus Sutra used in this volume. However, he also wishes to thank other English language publications of the Lotus Sutra and to acknowledge their authors in the event that there may be some overlap with the wording used in any of their works.

Published English translations of the Lotus Sutra text include:

The Lotus Sutra translated by Hendrik Kern, Forgotten Books (1884, first ed.)

Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma translated by Leon Hurvitz (1975, first ed.)

The Threefold Lotus Sutra by Kato and Tamura, Kosei Publishing (1975, first ed.)

The Lotus Sutra translated by Burton Watson, Columbia University Press (1993, first ed.) © Sokagakkai (SGI)

Sadharmapundarika: The Lotus Sutra, Vol. 17, Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, M.G. Chitkara, APH Publishing (2004)

The Lotus Sutra by Kubo and Yuyama, Numata Center (2007, second ed.) © Bukkyo Deigo Kyokai (BDK)

The Lotus Sutra translated by Gene Reeves, Wisdom Books (2008, first ed.) © Rissho Kosei-kai

Because Sanskrit was designed to be symbolic language with multiple “levels of subtext,” it can be open to

interpretations. Therefore, for the quotations from the Lotus Sutra provided in *The Buddha from Babylon*, the author chose to reword translations made in various English versions. Based on his scholarship of the sutras he has provided the interpretations that he believes best communicate the deeper meanings originally intended by the Buddha. In addition, he has chosen to use modern grammar and sentence structure for the quoted material in order to facilitate the reader's understanding of the intended meanings. For example, rather than a literal translation of the title of the sutra, the author has chosen to bring out its original underlying meaning, wording it as **The Perfectly Endowed Reality of Life Everlasting**.

A NOTE TO THE READER

Footnotes appear throughout the book to enhance the reader's understanding of the meanings and implications of mythic language and ancient expressions. Notes appear at the bottom of the page, rather than as endnotes, to give the reader immediate access to additional information about the origin of terms, names, and descriptions. The author decided to provide important information in this way rather than interrupt the cohesive flow of the main text. In addition, the footnotes serve the traditional role of providing the source for quotes or stories.

Introduction

IN SEARCH OF THE BUDDHA'S BIOGRAPHY

Do human beings have a personal connection with the Universe at large?

Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha, answered the question by weaving a grand cosmology that extended the scope of humanity beyond the bounds of life on Earth. He arrived at this perspective of the “True Reality of All Existence“ using a method of inner vision. He described what he saw in a dreamlike language that to a modern person might appear more like fantasy than reality.

The Buddha possessed an inherent talent for cosmic knowing, but he still faced the challenge of conveying it to people. If understanding his Teachings required wisdom comparable to his, how could anyone penetrate it? Aware of this, the Buddha took a step-by-step approach aimed at making his Teachings useful to individuals, communities, and society at large. With that goal in mind, he would address three mysteries whose answers would enable the self-transformation of humanity:

What is a Buddha?

What is the ultimate purpose of Buddhism?

Can ordinary people become Buddhas?

THE ORIGINS OF BUDDHA

The Buddha was an iconic figure in the history of world religion—a man who represented the ultimate human aspiration to understand who we are and why everything is the way it is. The person we know of as the historical Buddha was supremely gifted in this regard. He lived some 2,500 years ago. His name was Siddhartha Gautama, and he became known as the Buddha, a title that means The Awakened One.

Way back in prehistoric times when shamans initially gained the gift of consciousness, they began their pursuit of “seeing into the unseen.”

Throughout history, their transcendent abilities expanded until the most successful master of visionary skills ever, Gautama, achieved a total awakening of the Universal-Mind. But according to him, he was neither the only Buddha, nor the first. Other Buddhas he envisioned throughout space-time in far-off world-systems had been and were doing the same work that he would do on Earth, and still others would arrive in the future.

Who was he? Where did he come from?

The Buddha from Babylon is a modern exploration of the lost history and cosmic visions of Siddhartha Gautama. The result is a speculative biography built on solid, verifiable evidence and links. Despite a vast amount of research, the case can only be a circumstantial one. Yet it offers the first legitimate historical alternative to the stories that have been passed down through the ages.

His most commonly cited biography, *Buddhacarita* [aka *Life of the Buddha* or *Acts of the Buddha*], was penned in the first century by playwright Asvaghosa (80–150 CE). This unabashedly mythic biography was written in the adoring style of presenting a divine hero with supernatural powers. In this context the Buddha was a divine being descending from “Heaven” into the earthly realm.

Based on the Buddha’s past life tales (Skt. *jataka*) compiled beginning 300 BCE and afterward, Asvaghosa portrayed the birth of a prince destined by his divine advent to become the revealer of “the Truth regarding the Reality of All Existence.” He started his tale with a supernatural birth of a cosmically endowed child born to Queen Maya—her name a metaphor for the emergence of a transcending wisdom into this world of illusion. Asvaghosa wrote that the newborn Siddhartha miraculously leaped from his mother’s womb and immediately took his first step. This act showed that at birth he immediately and inherently possessed supernatural powers.

The early days of the would-be Buddha tells of a young Siddhartha Guatama, a scion to the royal crown of the “Sakya” (Dynasty of the Sun) nation-clan, who was born in Kapilvastu (City of Kapil), presumably located in northeastern India. His childhood years were described as a sheltered upbringing inside his family’s vast royal estate in Kapil, the capital of the Sakya kingdom. Siddhartha did not emerge from its grounds until he reached a mature age. By that time, according to Asvaghosa, Siddhartha had become an adult with a wife and son. But once he ventures out of his father’s royal family estate, he is moved to pity when observing the

ravages of aging, sickness, and death. Struck profoundly with compassion for the doomed plight of human beings, he abdicated his position as the crown prince expected to take his father's throne and embarked on a personal spiritual journey, vowing to find the cause of suffering and discover an antidote for it.

Asvaghosa's mythic biography may have been based on facts, but its author was more concerned with elevating the Buddha's birth to a divine status, as was the case with the treatment of Jesus in the Christian Gospels written at about the same time. While his compelling tale accurately communicated the key concepts and aspirations of the Buddhist Teachings, the story was, at least partially, a legend. His Buddha was a messianic savior who is destined from birth to save people from suffering and strife by using divinely-gifted supernatural powers.

FINDING BABIL

In the 19th century CE, a claim was made that Kapilvastu, the ancient capital of the Sakya, had once been located in today's Nepal, a country neighboring northeastern India.

Was the Buddha born in Nepal?

The city of Lumbini in Nepal prizes its reputation as the Buddha's homeland, a sacred destination for many Buddhists. Although many historians and archeologists doubt this claim, few have been inclined to challenge it, perhaps until proof is found of an alternative location. But Nepal's claim had been tarnished from the start.

A discredited 19th century government surveyor based

in Nepal, Dr. Alois Anton Führer (on location 1886–1898 CE), forged archeological evidence used to proclaim that Lumbini was originally the lost Kingdom of Kapilvastu, the home of the Sakya clan and birthplace of the Buddha. Despite evidence that he was a forger and trader in fraudulent antiquities,¹ the area developed into a profitable tourist destination for Nepal, a decidedly Hindu country. In modern times, Nepal officially designated this area as a Buddhist pilgrimage zone and named it the Kapilvastu District.

Some archeologists, ignoring the fraud, continue to seek confirmation of the Buddha's presence by expanding their search to nearby regions in Nepal, as well as the adjoining Siddharthnagar District (named after Siddhartha) in India's state of Uttar Pradesh, and the state of Bihar, its eastern neighbor, and home of Bodh Gaya, said to be the site of his enlightenment. While both nations make claims to be the Buddha homeland, neither can offer clear proof from his lifetime. Although Buddhists lived in this area a couple of centuries after the lifetime of the Buddha, it is unlikely that confirmation of the "Sakya clan" or of their capital Kapilvastu can be found anywhere in Nepal or India.

On the other hand, potentially older Buddhist locations have been unearthed to the west of the Indus River Valley in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. These lands have been identified as the earliest centers of Vedic, Buddhist, and Zoroastrian cultures. A great deal of archeological evidence in this area has been destroyed over time or remains lost, so no direct physical trace from his time has been found here either.

The recent destruction of ancient Buddhist sites in

Afghanistan and Pakistan puts into question whether the region has the will to preserve remnants of Buddhist history or develop an archeological respect for their own geographical heritage. Contrast the conditions there with the kind hospitality and respect that contemporary Nepal and India have shown for Buddhism. These peace-loving people deserve praise for that outreach.

The absence of any evidence supporting the existence of the Sakya contrasts with the known history of the Saka people, a nation once located between Persia and India.

In support of this possibility, the oldest and richest discoveries of Buddhist worship and art have been made in this area, rather than India or Nepal. Long ago, the Saka culture settled in an arc stretching from ancient southeastern Persia (Seistan-Baluchistan regions of Iran and Pakistan) along the coast of the Arabian Sea to the Sindhu and Gandhara regions (Afghanistan), and up through the northern climes of the Swat Valley (foot of the Himalayas in modern Pakistan). Could the actual homeland of the Buddha have been the area west of the Indus Valley, known as the ancient lands of the Saka nation—a Scythian-Aryan peoples?²

If so, how did Buddhism come to be indentified exclusively with India?

At one time, under the rule of the Mauryan King Asoka, a few hundred years after the Buddha's time, the land known as India had expanded to include territories that later became Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In addition, the Buddha himself had traveled into India as far as the Ganges River. In his time Brahmanism was the dominant religion in that area. Buddhism would have been

deemed a minor new religion by the Brahmin-dominated culture (the forerunner of Hinduism), but it is also likely that he collected a significant number of converts there.

There is also some evidence of a migration by a large Saka Buddhist community from the Swat Valley to northeast India not too long after the lifetime of the Buddha. The move may have been due to natural causes or military threats. The two areas appear to share similar geographical characteristics, and indigenous Buddhists may have welcomed them. This would explain why the early Buddhists came to settle in northeastern India.

Although the original Saka Buddhist community may have been responsible for preserving a good deal of the oral Teachings of the Buddha, their recordings as sutras, related stories, and commentaries may have been initiated in India.

To be more appealing to the immediate population, the scribes sought to portray its founder as a local figure. Therefore the Buddhist scriptures acquired the varnish of Indie localities, characters, and religious agendas. Indian Buddhists further enhanced his appeal by providing him with the aura of supernatural adoration.

Prior to the first millennium CE, the Buddha was referred to as the Sage of the Saka (Saka Muni). Buddhist stone inscriptions were etched with the name *Sakamuni*,³ providing clear evidence that the Buddha was a member of the Saka. But Buddhists in India decided to reinvent the Kingdom of the Saka. It became the fictional kingdom of *Sakyavati*,⁴ land of the longlost Sakyas. At this point they renamed him Sakyamuni, Sage of the Sakya, and later inscriptions reflected that change.

Linguistic analysis of Saka heritage shows a relationship to Mesopotamia and Arya-Vedism. The name of the ancestral hometown of the Buddha, Kapilvastu, a settlement (vastu) called Kapil, also appears to have been a derivative name. Its source appears to be the name *Babil*, which was originally a Sumer/Akkad term for the “Gate of God,” commonly used in the Babylonian region. Its echo is apparent in the names of Babylon and the Bible.

The real Saka city of Babil would have been located somewhere in the Scythian region, an area best described as Greater Aryana where earlier many Arya-Vedic tribes had migrated from Europe and northwestern Asia in several waves over the course of hundreds of years. The Saka nation was a nomadic people that settled just east of ancient Medes, Elam, and Parsa (today’s Iran). One likely location for Babil could be along the ancient coastal region of Makran, which at the time included the southern coast of the Arabian Sea from the Persian Gulf to the Indus River. Today this area is known as the Seistan-Baluchistan province (formerly Sakastan) of southern Iran and Pakistan and includes the peninsula across the Straits of Hermuz (today’s Oman and United Arab Emirates). Another possible location for Babil could be in the northern lands of Greater Aryana, in and around Gandhara, where today sits the modern city of Kabul in Afghanistan, a name that echoes the sound of Kapil or Babil.

Dramatic evidence of Siddhartha Gautama’s presence in the region has been found as far west as Persia, but not in India. Family seals⁵ and records found at Persepolis, the ancient capital of the fourth Persian Emperor, Darius the Great, have been identified and associated with the names of

Siddhartha Gautama and his father, Suddhodana Gautama.

The Persepolis seals identified royals and other important personages within the Persian ruling sphere. Guatama was the name of the royal family of the Saka kingdom.

How was Siddhartha Gautama connected to the Persian Empire?

Other written records have suggested the possibility that Siddhartha Gautama was a major player in the history of the Persia Empire. According to the Bisutun Inscriptions,⁶ Siddhartha Gautama's name appears like an echo in the name of a little known King of Babylon. The inscriptions refer to a religious figure named "Gaumâta," from whom the Achaemenid Persian Emperor, Darius the Great, seized the throne for himself.

Could it be that Siddhartha Gautama was the mysterious King "Gaumâta"?

The name "Gaumâta" appears to be a variant of Gautama, the Buddha's family name. In the ancient multilingual land of Babylonia, multiple names and titles with spelling variations referring to the same person were common.

Is there any additional evidence to link "Gaumâta" and Siddhartha Gautama as the same person? Is it possible that Siddhartha Gautama rose to the throne of the Persian Empire? Could he have been an emperor before he attained Buddhahood?

After his youth in Babil and a period of religious training in the forests, he may have headed for Babylon where he quickly rose to a high position in religious circles. At that

time Mesopotamia's religious activities and cosmic explorations, including visionary, astronomical, and mathematical research, were managed by a popular order known as the Magi. They also provided the public with divination and welfare services. If, indeed, Gaumata had joined the interfaith Magi Order, we might be able to find evidence as to how he could have become the King in Babylon.

Does evidence of Babylonian Magi influences appear in Buddhist literature?

Could we discover Mesopotamian references in the Buddhist scriptures?

The earliest mathematical systems, astronomical measurements, and mythological literature were initiated in the ziggurat tower-temples of the Fertile Crescent by the cultures of Sumer/Akkad and Amorite Babylonia. Both Magi and Vedic seers furthered knowledge of a cosmic infrastructure, well known in the Buddha's time from the Tigris to the Ganges.

Discovering this connection in the Buddhist sutras would challenge the prevailing view that Buddhism was born and developed exclusively in India. Although the oral legacy of the sutras were assembled and recorded later in India, a Babylonian finding would have major implications regarding the origin, influences, and intentions of the Buddha. Moreover linking Buddhist scriptures with the rich Babylonian culture of his day would show that Siddhartha Gautama was the personal author of his visions. It would also confirm the dates historians have deduced for the Buddha's lifetime.

SIDDHARTHA IN BABYLON

During his youth in the Saka community, Siddhartha Guatama would have learned about the teachings of the Rig Veda, and he certainly would have known about other local religions, including Brahmanism and Jaina. Given the heritage of the shamanism in the Saka culture, he would also have been exposed to seer practices going back to tribal cultures and the earliest civilizations.

His Magi Order education would have immersed a brilliant, eagerly curious Siddhartha Gautama in Mesopotamian cosmic myths that included the Sumerian/Akkadian and Babylonian world creation tales. He would have been intimately familiar with the *Seven Tablets of Creation*, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and the biblical Genesis of the Judean exiles living in Babylon.

Is there evidence of this interfaith education in the scriptures of Buddhism?

Do the Buddhist sutras and related literature show his awareness of myths, no matter how obscure, that are connected to knowledge of Sumerian, Egyptian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Judean, Jaina, Vedism, Brahmanism religions? If such influences were to be uncovered, it would lend credence to Siddhartha Gautama's career in Babylon. While the Buddha's worldly interfaith knowledge would constitute a link to the Magi Order of Babylon, it may be difficult for some to imagine that such an important element of the Buddha's biography could have avoided detection for thousands of years. The reason for it is the virtual disappearance of the interfaith Magi from historical records. Historians know them

as a Zoroastrian clergy, but have not figured out how this order came to be exclusively dominated by that faith.

In making the case that he had achieved great prominence in Babylon prior to his Perfect Enlightenment, *The Buddha from Babylon* undertakes a close examination of archeological, linguistic, historical, and mythological evidence in relation to Buddhist writings and exposes an underlying net of Babylonian influences. Although “adjustments” were made to the record of his oral sermons after his lifetime, if even a small amount of Babylonian influences can be culled out of Buddhist literature, it will be a game-changer in understanding the Buddha’s Teachings as he originally intended.

So why was Western Asia’s influence on Buddhism lost in the records of history? The decision to de-link Buddhism and Babylon may have happened when the Teachings of the Buddha were initially collected in India at least one hundred years or later following his death. At that time Buddhist scribes seeking to popularize Buddhism as a local religion in India may have seen this background as counterproductive to their message of a conflict-free aura surrounding the founder. They appear to have adapted some names and places associated with the Buddha’s lifetime into names and places in India.

Our research has led us to a different story regarding the Buddha-to-be.

The inscriptions of Darius the Great (Per. *Darayavaush*), the Persian emperor for thirty-five years, boast that the Zoroastrian God Assura Mazda (Per. *Ahura Mazda*) chose him to take the throne (in 522 BCE) from a usurper named

“Gaumâta.” Darius shrouds the short-lived reign of his predecessor in a power struggle involving deceit, conspiracy, murder, and the prize of the Persian throne. He characterizes “Gaumâta” as an opportunist who illegally grabbed the throne in Babylon while the sitting Persian Emperor Kambujiya was away in Egypt.

Cyrus the Great first established the Persian Empire by conquering both the Babylonian and Median Empires. His son Kambujiya extended its size by invading Egypt. Kambujiya died on the way back from Egypt after learning of his replacement on the throne in Babylon. Months later Darius and a group of Persian elites took back the reigns of power from “Gaumâta” whom they branded a “usurper to the throne.”

Darius painted “Gaumâta” an imposter and illegal ruler, although the description does not seem to fit the highly educated and beloved leader. Darius identified him as a Magi, and sardonically labeled him as a “stargazer.” If the name “Gaumâta” referred to Siddhartha Gautama, this reference would mean that he held a key leadership position in the Magi Order. Moreover, as the headquarters of the Magi was in the temple complex of Esagila, home of the ziggurat tower dubbed “House of the Raised Head,” the designation of “stargazer” suggests that Gautama was involved with Babylon’s star observatory.

How then would the “stargazer Gaumâta” have become the King of Babylon in the absence of Kambujiya and presumptive emperor upon his sudden death?

At that time, it was traditional for religious leaders to also hold political positions. Prior to his royal ascent

“Gaumâta“ may have served as the Governor of Babillu, the Province of Babylon. As governor he would have taken charge of dispensing food to the needy. This would explain why he appears to have been a popular spiritual leader with political experience before assuming the throne. Once he became the king his kindness became all the more apparent. Described as a compassionate philosopher-cosmologist “Gaumâta” decreed freedom for slaves, lowered oppressive taxes across the board, and inspired neighbors to respect one another in a city known for its diverse ethnic groups and many languages.

His espousal of liberty, human rights, and generosity supports the thesis that “Gaumâta” and Gautama were one and the same person. His positions are consistent with the principles of Buddhism. If only the rule of such a man were not so brief, it could have been a very different world today. A man of the Buddha’s compassion would have produced a dramatically different model for political rule from that of Darius and his voracious military appetite for world conquest.

Did the early biographers of the Buddha know of this contentious time in Babylon?

Five hundred years later, either Asvaghosa lacked knowledge of Gautama’s Babylonian period, or he purposely avoided it. By cloistering Siddhartha in a royal estate prior to his quest for Buddhahood in the forest, he was able to avoid any mention of the unpleasant battle over the Persian throne. Such an episode would not have comported with his miraculous styling in which the Buddha possesses a supernatural pacifying power. In his adoring biography, people or animals intending to inflict harm upon the Buddha, would be instantly disarmed in his presence overwhelmed by

a sense of peace and bliss. To justifiably showcase the Buddha's demeanor as a powerhouse of peace for the world to come, Asvaghosa had to ignore any association with a chaotic outside world dominated by the destructive power of the empire that Gautama had left behind.

Asvaghosa was a devout Buddhist teacher who lived in northeastern India, and that's where in his story the Buddha was born and lived, and where Mahayana Buddhism thrived in his day. He would see no reason to place the early days of the Buddha in Persian controlled Babylon, the world's largest city when the Buddha was alive, but a place that by Asvaghosa's time had become synonymous with sin and decay.

During the writer's lifetime the Roman Empire occupied western Asia. The specter of their dominant military force was a reminder of the legacy born of the Persian Empire. But the pacifism of Buddhism, as Asvaghosa saw it, was about finding peace within and spreading it to others. Focused on the celebration of the Buddha's glorious attributes and wisdom, had he known anything of his associations with Babylon, the Magi, or the Persian throne, he would not choose to use it. Asvaghosa kept Siddhartha locked in his father's estate until his departure for the forest where he attained Buddhahood. The omission of Gautama's sojourn in Babylon meant that his earlier experiences there would vanish entirely from history.

EMPEROR OF PERSIA

The sitting Achaemenid sovereign of the Persian Empire,

Kambujiya (d. 521 or 522 BCE), had failed to return to Central Asia following his conquest of Egypt, where he had assumed the throne under the name Pharaoh Mesuti-Ra [son of the Sun God Rae].

His long absence from Babylon broke a traditional edict prized by the Council of the Magi Order. They required the King of Babylon to be anointed once a year in a secret religious ceremony in Esagila, but Kambujiya ignored them. So when he did not return for three years they vacated his throne, and by popular acclaim asked “Gaumâta” to fill the vacuum until the emperor returned to reclaim it.

In one account Kambujiya decided to rush back from Egypt, once he got word that his throne had been seized. But before he could make it back to Babylon, he died under mysterious circumstances. One version has Kambujiya accidentally falling on his own sword causing self-inflicted, fatal wounds. But was it really an accident? Or, as the next successor Darius had claimed, did he die of “natural causes.” Or, did Darius have a covert hand in seeing to it that Kambujiya would fail to return and reclaim the throne?

History’s picture of Kambujiya was one of a cruel, self-aggrandized, and possibly a mentally unstable monarch. According to the Egyptians, when he first invaded their land he enslaved its most prominent citizens. He gave each of his soldiers at least one of them to serve as a slave. He also put people to death and destroyed temples particularly in instances when he felt disrespected.

Meanwhile back in Persia, some of its nobles wanted better leadership, and in Darius, they saw an opportunity to make the change. But any attempt to replace one Persian

ruler with another would be treason.

For his part, Darius, the son of Vishtaspa (aka Hystaspes), a powerful Persian governor of the Achaemenid family, had been groomed for such a role. Since his boyhood, Vishtaspa had placed Darius under the mentorship of Zarathustra Spitamas, also known as Zoroaster, the religious head of a Persian religion.⁷ Zoroaster convinced Darius that the God Assura Mazda had selected him to be the future emperor and that he was destined to conquer the world. Darius was a wily strategist and a student of the political arts who became skilled in public persuasion and military maneuvering from what he learned from Cyrus the Achaemenid, the first Persian Emperor.

News of Kambujiya's untimely, but politically expedient death for Darius and his cohorts, immediately made him a strong candidate to take the helm of the Persian Empire. He charged that "Gaumata" was an imposter who fraudulently contrived to usurp the throne from Cyrus's rightful successor. Only one other person, Kambujiya's brother, Bardiya, had the direct bloodline to Cyrus, but he was also dead.

Darius argued that "Gaumâta" gained sovereignty by pretending to be Prince Bardiya (aka Smerdis). Although Bardiya had been dead for three years, Darius claimed that "Gaumâta" tried to get away with it because Bardiya was unknown in Babylon and his disappearance had been kept secret from the public. Upon his departure for the campaign to conquer Egypt, the Emperor Kambujiya had ordered his brother's murder to insure that his seat of power would be safe while he was away from Babylon. Was it plausible then, as Darius claimed, that "Gaumâta" would have pretended to

be Bardiya? Or, was this clever ruse designed to discredit “Gaumâta” so that Darius can lay claim to the throne?

Darius, a military strongman, and a member of the Achaemenid family, prepared for his coup with a propaganda campaign designed to legitimize his overthrow of “Gaumâta.” Darius claimed that he and a group of Persian nobles exposed the trickery of the Bardiya imposter and personally tracked down and killed “Gaumâta.” In his public inscription he referred to his cohorts in killing the usurper as the witnesses who would confirm the deed.

The “witnesses” were in league with Darius so they hardly represented an independent corroboration. Of course, if “Gaumâta” was really Siddhartha Gautama, this assassination had to be a lie,⁸ because he did go on to become the Buddha. Either someone else was murdered in the name of “Gaumâta,” or Darius shrewdly produced a disinformation campaign designed to cover up what really happened. With the “death of the imposter” the new emperor wanted to send a message to supporters of “Gaumâta” that he would not tolerate rebellions and suppressed any hope for the return of this popular leader. But in the wake of the coup nineteen rebellions arose throughout the empire. It would take Darius more than a year of brutal military action to crush the liberation-minded communities inspired by “Gaumâta.”

Also recorded in the Bisutun Inscriptions, among the rebel plots against Darius was an Achaemenid Persian nobleman whose bloodline gave him equal right to the throne. Vahyzadâta seized a royal palace near Babylon while the newly crowned Darius was still away suppressing rebellions. In a strangely parallel story, an inscription at

Persepolis claims that Vahyzadâta was also a Bardiya imposter. Darius sent an army to capture and crucify this usurper. Could Darius's words be trusted? Could it be that one story bled into the other? Could this mean that he concocted the Bardiya ruse to justify the elimination of any competitors?

Certainly Darius had good reason to write history in his own self-interest. While his story appears to be full of cunning deceptions, the real behind the scenes story of this episode has remained elusive to history. It has gone undetected for thousands of years because historians know little to nothing about "Gaumâta."

If indeed, as proposed here, Siddhartha Gautama served as King of Babylon/Emperor of Persia for three to seven months, where did he go to next?

It appears that when he abdicated the throne he headed for the Indus River Valley where for several decades thereafter he would become the Buddha and teach Buddhism.

In Asvaghosa's biography of the Buddha he recounts the decision by Siddhartha Gautama to reject his right to inherit his father's "Sakya" throne. The abdication expresses his crossing from a secular sovereign to a spiritual one. But the episode may also be an echo of Gautama's abdication of the Persian throne ahead of Darius's coup. In actuality, the Buddha had given up the world's foremost "crown of secular power" in favor of pursuing the crowning achievement of enlightenment. This metaphor undergirds a key principle of the Buddha's Teachings, the outright rejection of brutal militancy and insatiable materialism.

THE PURGE

The first step in verifying that the would-be Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, could have been King “Gaumâta,” requires that he was alive at the same time as Darius the Great. According to 20th-century historians the most widely accepted dating for the Buddha’s lifetime is from 563 BCE to 483 BCE, and Darius the Great is said to have lived from 550 BCE to 486 BCE. Even if these dates are off by a few years, it is clear that the two were contemporaries. Additional clues establishing their coexistence come from a competing religion of the time.

Darius installed worship of the Zoroastrian God Assura Mazda as the state religion. Zoroaster, who received support from Darius’s father, depicted the Buddha as an evil practitioner, associating him with occult practices and the creation of a new demonic⁹ religion. Similarly, Darius linked “Gaumâta” to the creation of a new mystical religion.

In turn, Buddhist literature referred to a competing sage, a pretender who claimed to be enlightened, as a copycat and corrupter of Truth. His name, Devadatta, appears to be the namesake for Zoroaster. Devadatta was charged with plotting to kill the Buddha and take over as the leader of his followers. Given the recording in Buddhist literature of nine unsuccessful assassination attempts on the life of the Buddha, could Darius and Zoroaster have been behind these efforts? Clearly, the Zoroaster who mentored Darius must also be a contemporary of the Buddha, as well as a prime candidate for the role of Devadatta.

Zoroaster and Siddhartha may have been colleagues in

Babylon's Magi Order. This is indicated by the sudden adoption of Zoroastrian rituals by the Magi Order under Darius's reign. Gautama, a supporter of the original interfaith tradition of the order, appears to have stood in the way of Zoroaster's desire to rid it of all Vedic influences and other faiths.

It appears that coinciding with Darius's seizure of the throne in Babylon, Zoroaster led a purge of the Magi Order cleansing it of all other religious views. From this point forward the Magi became a wholly Zoroastrian Order.

DESTINATION INDUS

The Saka capital of Babil, where Siddhartha Gautama grew up, would have been a sacred learning center—a place renowned for attracting a host of religious practitioners from near and far. After his initial training from teachers of various religions, Siddhartha would have been sent into the field for training in shamanic skill development. That may be why he was no stranger to the Indus when he arrived there following the coup, an indication that he had spent a good period of time there in his youth under the tutelage of various forest seers.

In the traditional biography of Siddhartha the aspiring young Buddha-to-be studied with the foremost ascetic teachers in the forests of India, covering a period of eleven years between his departure from home and his attainment of Enlightenment.

According to traditional literature, he marked his entry into Perfect Enlightenment during meditation under a tree in

a place called Bodh Gaya. Although the physical spot is believed to have been in India, in mythic terms Bodh Gaya figuratively means the “Enlightened Biosphere.” In other words, the Buddha’s breakthrough came at the anchor point for visionary channeling, a “Sacred Tree” located on the life-supporting planet Earth. There he entered a mind-space that can only be described as a nexus between celestial and physical domains.

His Perfect Enlightenment came during a trance-induced awakening that gave him unbridled access to see events in the past, present, and future; insight into the psychological behaviors of all human beings individually and in groups; and the distance viewing ability to cross space and dimensions into any realm in the Universe, near or far, large or small.

Immediately upon achieving Perfect Enlightenment he drew a devoted audience and began to unveil his world vision. From this time forward, Siddhartha Gautama was primarily known by several titles, among them the Buddha, Sakamuni, and World-Honored One. His followers recognized that the appearance of a Buddha on Earth coincided with a messianic advent anticipated by earlier prophets. This identity was referred to as the One-Who-Comes to Declare the Truth (Skt. *Tathagata*). He shared his destiny with his followers by revealing that they had been with him in past lives, and were indeed bound to him by their desire to be liberated from suffering. Together they traveled on a cosmic journey across Transmigration, a concept that extended relationships beyond one’s present lifetime.

While earlier seers had peered into the divine realms of Heaven, the Buddha was the first visionary to declare his

ability to see into other mortal existences in the Universe—whether they took place in the past or the future, in this world or in other worlds across the Universe. From his enlightened perch he embraced a modified version of the Brahmanic six realms of rebirth (Samsara), and then added a superseding and expanded view of existence. His cosmology featured remote Buddhas and their followers scattered throughout time and in every direction of the Universe, but also extending beyond the boundaries of time-space.

For approximately forty years Sakamuni, the Sage of the Saka, taught an insightful series of dissertations unveiling his view of the scope, nature, and essence of all existence. Imparting his progressive teachings in a manner that equated with the blossoming of a flower revealing more as it opened wider, he guided his students to comprehend and cultivate their enlightened self through practice and to share in his cosmological vision of a unified and integrated universe.

In imparting his own original visions over the course of his Teachings, he would at certain junctures craft changes to them and introduce superseding teachings. He used a method of education (Skt. *Upaya*) replacing one view with a grander one as soon as the student was able to comprehend the larger or deeper insight.

With his mind's eye he would fly beyond the dimensions of cosmic time, view the origination of the Universe, delve inside the essence of the atom, and explore the laws of relativity. His point of view was an omnipresent perspective, instantly encompassing the near, the far, the past, the now, and the everlasting. In mythic language, he would be seated beneath a jewel-bearing tree (an image derived from the *Epic*

of *Gilgamesh*) on a lion throne. This was the seat of enlightenment from where he courageously viewed the diverse facets of life's ever-changing reality.

UNIVERSAL TRUTH

In his Magi days he embraced an interfaith scope. For him, enlightenment was the culmination of his aspiration to share with all religions the mysterious Universal Truth that all of them aspired to align with. Sakamuni understood that India's Vedic and Brahmanic scriptures (Rig Veda, Brahmanas and Upanisads), as well as Sumerian, Egyptian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Judaic, and Zoroastrian teachings all shared this common source.

Buddhism gently avoided either rejection of or confrontation with other faiths, preferring to respond using its own rather artful approach— embracing certain doctrines before deconstructing, questioning, transforming, and reconstructing them using profoundly superseding wisdom. In articulating his view of Universal Truth, the Buddha used a wide range of symbols, myths, philosophical themes, and cosmic knowledge. His goal was to define Universal Truth in a way that all religions could agree with, because fundamentally they all sought to get it right.

During the pyramid-building era of Egypt's Old Kingdom, the priests called for alignment of social activities *with Ma'at*, the force of Universal Truth that kept the cosmos in its natural state of harmonious order. Conversely, they blamed chaos, whether natural or manmade, on lies or detrimental acts that threatened to disturb a fragile cosmic equilibrium.

The pre-philosophic Greeks believed that creation of the world emerged from a primordial chaos and was converted into “Universal Truth,” *Logos*, the inherent order and wisdom of the Universe. In the Fertile Crescent of Mesopotamia, *Arta* (Akk. *Riddum*) was the Sumerian word for Universal Truth, which the gods used to infuse the Universe with divine order. Vedism, the shamanic religion that migrated from Eurasia to Central Asia, embraced *Rta*⁴ (variation of Sumerian *Arta*), and defined it in the Rig Veda as the pure wisdom underlying Universal Order, Universal Law, and Universal Truth.

In Zoroastrian theology, the Vedic *Rta* was pronounced *Asha* using the Persian language. As Zoroaster stood in clear opposition to Vedism and Vedic-influenced religions, his view of Universal Truth correlated with the spiritual harmony and blessing achieved through allegiance only to the moral dictums of the Supreme God, Assura Mazda.

With the founding of Brahmanism in India, its scripture, the Upanisads, transitioned *Rta* into *Dharma*, a Sanskrit word defining Universal Truth as an aware Universal-Consciousness—a pure Reality emanating from a transcendent Universal-Mind that kept everything working in harmony. They added the notion that a sage able to tap into it would gain access to view all the inner workings of existence through the divine eye.

The multicultural beliefs in an all-encompassing Cosmic Harmony revolved around the achievement of alignment of the large-scale Universe, including divinity and nature, with human society and, by extension, to the fate of each individual. Essential to life, all agreed, was humanity’s harmonious alignment with Universal Truth to keep the

engine of existence operating with cyclical regularity.

This belief also served as the foundation for the Buddha's Dharma.

In Sakamuni's view the Universe was filled with enlightening beings. Because they were able to see, fathom, and articulate the Dharma as it really was, they had the responsibility to lead all others to decipher it. Everywhere beings from across space and time, those who embodied the Universal Truth in body and mind, had achieved this harmonious state by using the same cosmic Teachings that Sakamuni espoused to his listeners.

He would point out that mortal beings lived in a relative reality distracted by a myriad of illusions. Although they perceived forms as solid matter and suffering as real, he contended that all of life was at its core insubstantial and transient. Ironically, he observed, conscious beings regarded as separate that which was inseparable, and formed attachments with that which was ephemeral. From his enlightened perspective of the Dharma, however, Universal Truth was a pure, dynamic, and boundless Reality—a unified, integrated, multifaceted, and balanced super-structure of existence. In this system manifestations automatically and repeatedly came forth and receded from existence. This constant flow of creation and recreation produced various types of forms, appearing in various places, constantly changing their momentary conditional states. Although the stream of life generated overwhelming and unpredictable results, he proposed that human beings could mount this system and reprogram it with enlightened thoughts that would benefit all.

The Buddha unveiled his Dharma (defined either as Teachings, Truth, Reality, Laws, or Cosmology) in deliberate stages. His Dharma encompassed the True Reality (what is the true nature of things); the fundamental Laws of Existence (how things really work); and a Universe of boundless space-time-scale and dimensions.

The Buddha-Dharma unveiled the “True Reality of all Existence” as a single integrated system. However, he explained that it was a paradox combining the tangible and transcendent. In the Dharma all things were temporary and changeable, while simultaneously all things were in essence “void” [of relativity]. He included in it the universal “Laws of Existence” that managed nature, the physical laws of matter and energy, the metaphysical laws of life and death, social laws of community, and the inner workings of the mind. The Buddha-Dharma was itself a large operating system governed by the Law of Cause and Effect, creating a dynamic conversation between memories, potentials, desires, manifestations, and relationships interacting within the grand cosmos of existence.

The Buddha constructed an inseparable link between the consciousness of human beings and the cosmic infrastructure. He then used philosophical, metaphysical, and cosmological devices to describe the cyclical mechanism that brought forth the manifestation, recession, and reconstitution of all phenomena in existence.

The Buddha matched his lofty rhetoric with the capacity of his audience to absorb the visions he shared with them. As they grasped more in progressive stages, they would awaken a desire for greater knowing. In turn, the desire to know the

Buddha-Dharma would trigger a self-transformative process leading to an enlightened consciousness of “The Truth of the Reality of All Existence.”

His sermons were the vehicle for unveiling his Dharma in stages, which was why the word *Dharma* also came to be synonymous with his Teachings. The Buddha-Dharma as he revealed it over the course of several decades was recorded in volumes known as his sutras. The goal of teaching it: to hurdle the barriers that stand in the way of Perfect Enlightenment.

BEING OF THREE MINDS

The historical influences and various circumstances of the life of Siddhartha Gautama faded into the background once he revealed the wisdom of his cosmic visions. Consequently, no biography of the Buddha can be complete without diving into his mind.

The mind of the Buddha is the equivalent of a complete and accurate knowing of the Dharma. It encompasses the scope, nature, and essence of all existence. He communicated its Reality, Truth, Teachings, and Cosmology through the perspective of one who embodied “it.” He personally erased the line between person and Universe.

Buddhists believe that his thoughts are unfathomable. Yet the Buddha taught that each and every being was a candidate for achieving Buddha wisdom, because all humans inherently possessed enlightenment. His objective was to guide humankind to the awareness that they could evolve to higher consciousness, which he described in the Lotus Sutra

as the achievement of “a state equal to my own.” Ideally, human beings could see the reality of life as the Buddha sees it. But as each person is completely immersed in a bubble containing their self, vulnerabilities, perceptions, and interactions, they largely see their reality as an overwhelming struggle for survival, getting what they want, or finding a way out of this mortal mechanism. To become conscious of their cosmic identity in this context is a profound challenge. Given the difficulty of getting people to concede the presence of their inherent legacy of enlightenment, it was incumbent upon him to show the way—to guide people to an understanding of this precious source that was available to them. Therefore, the Buddha devised a method with which to “awaken” people to their full capacity by engaging the veil of mortal reality through the practice of self-transformation.

To that end, he needed to start somewhere and, practically speaking, he had to start with what his listeners already understood. His Teachings began with a comparative review of his religious predecessors and contemporaries. Upon this foundation he advanced his own unique cosmological treatise. To facilitate just the possibility of enlightenment for human beings, he proposed that the human mind operated within the same system and laws that made the Universe work. But awareness of it would not be enough. Awareness was but a prerequisite for aligning the two on a personal level. The goal was to actualize it.

The Buddha’s visionary ability harkens back to ancient shamanic practitioners, especially the Arya sages, seers united in the tradition of the Lion-Sun Fellowship. This

designation emerged from the prehistoric aspirations of tribal visionaries to understand the “unseen world of nature.” At the dawn of history shamans intuitively understood that they possessed a transcendent mind. While they appreciated the value of sensory acuity, they came to realize that the mind was also a sense that enabled one to explore realms beyond one’s immediate surroundings. The mind, as they understood it, operated on three levels.

The Individual-Mind provided a self-identity based on internal thoughts, feelings, and sensations. It formed the basis for consciousness, volition, behavior, and experiences, and also created the boundaries that separated “me from other.” The Shared-Mind was the collective identity of two or more persons with common interests, relationships, passions, and shared goals. For the tribe, it formed the basis for communal unity. In a modern context, this mind is formed by sharing beliefs, thoughts, and emotions between relational composites such as couples, families, workers, cultures, nations, religions, political alliances, and more—but it also creates the consciousness of “us versus them.” In addition, they realized that each person was part of a boundless Universal-Mind, an all-inclusive, non-differentiating higher identity that probed beyond the apparent and experiential. This mind unified all beings, all things, and the cosmos.

Ancient seers relying on the Universal-Mind envisioned a dual world divided into mortal and immortal planes. They used trance states to cross from one plane of existence to the other. From this consciousness of a greater sphere of existence emerged religions, gods, and cosmologies connecting human beings with natural phenomena,

circumstances and events, exotic dimensions, divine beings, and other powerful forces.

The earliest religious communities were built on some form of locally-defined divine order. That's why when conflicts arose among groups or settlements, opponents saw it as a war between opposing spiritual powers. Whoever won in battle could claim the stronger god and superior divine vision. History proves that religious leaders came to rely on militant authorities to win religious arguments and convert neighbors.

Buddhism rejected the idea that military power could be used for settling issues of Universal Truth. It saw militarism and violence as the embodiment of chaotic behaviors and vowed to rid the world of this affliction. Buddhism was built on the notion that experiencing the greater knowledge of self and the cosmos through a mind-probing practice could produce an accurate comprehension of Universal Truth, and in the process transform the instinctual individual into a cosmic being.

In place of conflict and war, Buddhism sought to employ self-transforming practices in pursuit of enlightened wisdom. Furthermore, Buddhism offered to put its wisdom to the test. Rather than requiring blind faith in divine powers, it proposed that coming to terms with the Truth of Existence would liberate people from the cycle of suffering.

Liberation required one to look into the Buddha's visions and contemplate their meanings. With a strong desire to explore the Universal-Mind within oneself, individuals could enter the Buddha's vast and deeply profound cosmology where they would find a uniquely personal and self-

transforming experience.

That's because buried within one's Universal-Mind is a deep-seeded need to know all that there is to know. The Universal-Mind operates on a super-conscious level—a higher level of consciousness that neither belongs exclusively to one individual nor any groups of people. It is always present within and without, whether one is conscious of its presence or not. This relatively inconceivable super consciousness, neither confined to one's waking hours nor to sleeping states, is the portal where human beings confront the deepest and most elusive questions of existence: “Why was I born? . . . What is the purpose of my life? . . . What's in store for me in the future?”

THE GRAND PERCH

When ancient shamans first explored the “transcendent sense” beyond the “here and now,” they used spiritual skills to “see” without eyes, “hear” without ears, “smell” without a nose, “taste” without a mouth, and “feel” without touching. They probed their immediate surroundings and discovered an “unseen” world within nature, and then they opened the gate to a cosmic landscape in the celestial realm above.

As religion advanced, spiritual practitioners realized that the mind was full of illusions. The ability of people to conceptualize, imagine, theorize, realize, foresee, perceive, intuit, fathom, and believe also meant that the mind was vulnerable to misconstrue or even hallucinate.

Using the Universal-Mind, shamans cultivated the skills to view spiritual entities and the power to actualize the

imagined. It was this inherent yet mysterious talent that had made it possible to observe the hidden works of nature and to see therein unseen forces and patterns; sense what another person was feeling; grasp the continuity of time and the dynamic comings, goings, and endings of things; and look up at the sky and view in it far-away places beyond this world.

They learned that the Universal-Mind used dream language to communicate, and based on this knowledge, they devised a mythological language. Symbolism, imagination, and metaphor, the stuff that dreams and fantasies were made of, were the tools they used to connect with “cosmology.”

The Buddha, perhaps the master shaman of all shamans, used these skills to reach into the boundless repository of the Universal-Mind. He saw in it a database of memories and possibilities that made the manifestation of all phenomena possible. This information, he proposed, was stored in a non-local, super-conscious plane. His Teachings were based on the thesis that this formless universal storehouse was the fountainhead of life from which all phenomena toggled between potential and activated states. He communicated this grand reality in the language of “mythology”—the symbolic shorthand of visions, metaphors, myths, and dream images.

Today the word “mythology” implies fiction, and “cosmology” has become an ever-expanding realm observed through the tools of modern science.

Long ago shamans using trance visions explored the hidden “cosmology” of nature and the cosmos. “Mythology” was the language they used to convey their findings. People accepted the notion that shamans could see into the unseen

world—and relied on them to communicate accurate visions of the realms beyond.

From the perspective of a visionary mystic, tapping the Universal-Mind was equivalent to telescopic wisdom or a view from the mountaintop—allowing the sage to examine the present from the perspective of a larger scope of causes and effects. If a “tuned in” being has developed the conscious capacity and co-creative skills to “read” (i.e., envision) and “write” (i.e., actualize) information onto the tableau of existence, they would be liberated from the automated functionality and narrow scope of the Individual-Mind or Shared-Mind.

Shamans understood that the Universal-Mind transcended boundaries, yet it was ever-present. It was as big as the Universe and encompassed all its possibilities. It was profoundly ubiquitous, far ranging, and nuanced. Its scope extended beyond one’s externally directed senses. It enabled one to detect the presence of that which was non-physical, even if it were hidden, disguised, remote, or even no longer present. Attuned human beings could use it to sense “potential”—what could be, should be, or will be.

In the ordinary course of their lives, many people use the Universal-Mind either as an intuitive or creative resource, or find access to it through prayer or faith in the divine. However, the noise of one’s Individual-Mind or Shared-Mind can interfere with the Universal-Mind, easily distorting thoughts or producing bewildering emotions. When one accesses the Universal-Mind with a level of clarity, the Individual-Mind or Shared-Mind may feel threatened by the higher mind’s challenge to its misconceptions. This is why it

is difficult for people to distinguish among their three minds; why people prefer the familiar to what is new, hard to understand, or foreign; and why they quickly reject ideas that do not fit in with what they have come to believe.

And yet, amid all the confusion born of ordinary mental and emotional engagement with the world, people continually search to understand themselves. This desire to know ourselves, whether it is conscious or unconscious, reveals that human beings are intrinsically driven to learn why it is that they exist. To find that answer, seers and philosophers throughout the ages have aspired to decipher the profound meanings and mysteries of life.

From the grand perch of the Universal-Mind, humankind has been able to tap into a boundless Universe. What have we discovered there? Is it god, nature, or some reality as yet inconceivable? Will people succeed in finding the ultimate Truth of the Universal-Mind?

Civilization was born out of the continual pursuit for meaning and purpose. Today, as science discovers more about the mind and the Universe, the mystery of existence continues to outpace the ability of human beings to see, grasp, fathom, or penetrate it. Despite the growing explosion of knowledge available to the human race, our ability to pierce the ultimate secrets of the Universal-Mind remains as illusive as it has ever been.

SUPER COSMIC SYSTEM

Long ago, religious seers connected the mortal world and the afterlife with a soul that once separated in death would travel

between these dimensions. The Buddha argued against this notion of two distinct entities, one a mortal form and the other a detachable spirit, that co-existed temporarily from birth to death. Instead, he reasoned that the information presumably encased in a soul-entity was to be found in the Universal-Mind. Just as a body of water could not be distinguished from its component drops, the Universal-Mind was a boundless ocean of infinite “meanings“ that contained all the information in existence, and each expression of mortal life was like a drop in that vastness. In this context, he contended, the information for every meaning or phenomenon, for every being, whether in a potential or manifest state, was ever-present and inseparable from the whole of all existence.

Buddhism linked the boundless scope of existence to the essence of individual life through a super-structure that encompassed everything. At the base of this system the Buddha viewed an underlying infrastructure composed of three boundless and inseparable fields, which he identified as Form, Formlessness, and Desire. This Threefold Field of Existence described the essence of each and every phenomenon, as well as the scope and nature of all phenomena. He viewed everything across space-time-scale and dimension as an expression of the Threefold Field of Form, Formlessness, and Desire.

In the Buddha’s view, any phenomenon no matter its apparent form was in essence rendered from a formless “set of data”—composed of memories and potentials. This actionable information operated across past, present, and future, and even across lifetimes. It was called “Karma” and

referred to all possible phenomena whether they were constituted of a person, groups of people or things, a fleeting thought, or emotion, or all of existence.

The Buddha envisioned the Universal-Mind as a cosmic super-system that permeated and encompassed everything. Everything in it was dynamic, transient, and cyclical. Therefore, the present large-scale Universe of Form was temporary and all subjects and objects in it were relative and mortal. But, from another perspective, the Universe was also made of Formlessness, and as such, was a holographic projection without substance at its core. In addition, the Universe of Existence was able to operate and change its attributes, because of the Field of Desire, the source triggering the manifestation of all things.

Using his Universal-Mind to identify the Threefold Field was an accomplishment of such profound meaning that only a Perfectly Enlightened being could fathom it. Nevertheless, the Buddha declared that those who would choose to follow his Teachings in due course would accomplish a state-of-being equal to his own.

To that end he went on to reveal the full spectrum of Buddhist Cosmology using mythic language. As his Teachings unfolded over decades he unveiled the scope, nature, and essence of existence organized here into a four-fold cosmographic system composed of:

The Universe of Infinite Wisdom

The Golden Mountain World System

The Cosmos of Relativity

The Perfectly Endowed Reality of the Lotus Cosmology

These four cosmologies provide a multifaceted, interactive, yet indivisible picture of existence. Together they describe Buddhism's all-encompassing and integrated super cosmic system—where no physical form could ever be immortal, no soul could exist as an independent entity separate from a body, and no effect could take place without a cause.

In the Buddha's Universal-Mind everything was related to something else; neither existence nor any single component of it could come into being by singularly spontaneous origination. It was impossible to separate the mind from spirit, or body from mind. Nor could there ever be an actual separation of person from environment, as nothing could exist without a place to exist; nor could there ever be a separation of space from time, any more than the wind could be separated from air.

The scope of his reality extended far beyond the perceived limits of existence—beyond the mortal world, beyond the realm of the divine, beyond the relative Universe, beyond the birth of the present Universe or its eventual end. The Buddha saw the True Reality of Existence as a transcendent, infinitely boundless field where everything was evolving; everything was alive in one sense or another; and countless diverse emanations appeared all sharing an inseparable relationship.

The Buddha's multi-faceted super-structure was an all-encompassing cosmos itself a Buddha from which all Buddhas emanated. In a colossal cosmic vision he illustrated that Perfect Enlightenment was a Perfectly Endowed Reality hidden within all human beings.

What was the purpose of this visionary revelation?

To inspire human beings on to the path of evolutionary self-transformation, a quest that will lead all to finding this perfectly endowed, shared, and boundless True Self.

The Dual Cosmology

The shamans had made a simple map of the world. In the center was a mountain. From it other worlds radiated out in six directions. Starting with an “X” to mark the sacred spot, they extended four lines in the direction of North, South, East, and West. Then they drew a vertical axis through the mountain connecting the nadir and zenith from the world below the surface to the one above the sky. The six orientations of this Mondial Cosmology represented the first large-scale design of the world. Shamans used it like a compass to guide their trance travels to far-away places. Seers sitting at the intersection, the world axis, or *axis mundi*, of this cosmogony used its channels to “see” across great distances in every direction. Their special sense allowed them to anticipate approaching dangers and plan their tribe’s hunting and gathering sojourns. It also opened their eyes to discover spirit dimensions beneath the surface and above the sky.

As shamans evolved into priesthoods, they discovered astral gateways that led them into the divine realm. There they came into contact with the gods. The Egyptians and Sumerians built pyramids and ziggurats, each designed as a

super-charged axial conduit for interworld exchanges. In due course, concluding that the gods lived in an immortal realm overseeing the mortal one, religions cast existence as a Dual Cosmology—one physical and the other a spiritual domain. Courting their favor, the clergy invited the gods to descend to Earth.

In the sixth century BCE Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, achieved a visionary breakthrough that revealed an unsurpassed scope of existence. His profound cosmic visions illustrated a boundless and dynamic universal super-infrastructure. He then elaborated on the Truth of the Reality of All Existence through the revelation of four integrated cosmologies.

Based on the theme that the mind and the cosmos were connected, he shared with disciples his access to the ultimate picture of time-space, scale, and dimension.

His visions were the culmination of trance explorations dating back to the first shamans to walk out of Africa and the great celestial seers across the ages from Mesopotamia and Egypt to Central Asia and India. Siddhartha Gautama, a master seer of the profound and virtuoso of the colorful mythic language of those great cultures, also conveyed his views using symbolism and metaphor.

During his lifetime, Babylon was the world's cosmopolitan and intellectual center. The stubborn city had undergone a long history of destruction, brutality, rebellion, and resurrection. Under the rule of the Persian Empire it was a melting pot of diverse cultures. This was also a time for new religions and the development of new ideas in philosophy, astronomy, and mathematics.

In Babylon, influenced by ancient shamans and Mesopotamian seers, Siddhartha Gautama helped to found the field of philosophy, became the city's religious leader, and briefly became its king—the world's first philosopher-king.

After a coup and purge he was forced to flee for the Indus Valley forest where he achieved Perfect Enlightenment. In Babylon he had observed that brutal authorities dominated the world and religions had become obsessed with immortality. Determined to share an alternative view of the inner workings of existence, he steered his disciples towards higher consciousness through cosmic explorations.

As the Buddha, he revealed that humanity was on a cosmic journey in search of the consummate Truth of Existence, a quest that started long, long ago with the first awakening of humans to the possibility of unseen realms hidden within and beyond the visible world.

THE BIG BREAKTHROUGH

Relying on their keen instincts, a small band of scavengers had mastered the ability to walk upright and wandered off on a worldwide quest. The smell of death permeated their world. To survive its teeming dangers they had to keep moving. Some 3.8 billion years after primeval life forms first inhabited the planet, these fierce, valiant, and curious explorers walked far and wide in constant awe of the cosmic canopy continuously hovering above.

Pressing on and on, night and day, driven by a fervent desire to behold whatever may loom ahead—no matter where it led—they migrated across vast continental tracts peering

into every nook of the vast world. They may have departed their ancestral homes on a hunt for food and water, or in a flight to safety, but along the way their journey turned into an expedition. Everywhere they searched they found a struggle for survival where death always prevailed. Theirs was a beautiful, but harsh, dangerous, and purposeless world. Or so it appeared until at some decisive moment something triggered in them the climactic emergence of higher consciousness.

The turning point for the transformation of humans from instinctual to conceptual beings was a sudden awakening to the possibility that life concealed an awesome mystery. This shocking leap forward from primitive to transcendent awareness launched humans into an ever-evolving quest for visionary sight and the comprehension of life in the Universe.

What caused this singularly epochal change in human capacity?

Living a ceaselessly challenging adventure inside the dangerous change-engine of nature, they observed that animals and plants suddenly would acquire new powers that defied prediction. Only those species with the ability to gain new abilities would survive. Those unable to adapt to nature's sudden and unpredictable changes would die. Massive climate disasters repeatedly wiped out the bulk of their populations, impressing upon these curious humans the need to survive all threats. Observing that some animals had developed various means for survival, they desperately wanted to figure out how they could do the same.

What gave various animals the ability to fly, run faster,

live underground, or develop great strength? Was it the strength of their desire to survive, they wondered?

With the scent of impending doom in their nostrils, they desperately desired to penetrate nature's power of self-transformation. Hoping to fortify their chances for survival, they attempted to grasp the secret to combating life's unrelenting dangers. Suddenly, at least one or more human beings became convinced that without achieving the power of "a greater knowing," it would be only a matter of time before their kind would become extinct.

In a staggering burst of enlightenment, with this one earthshaking, cathartic thought they instantly unlocked the talent for conceptual vision:

*All that is must have emanated from that
which is beyond what is apparent.*

The power to "see the unseen" appeared suddenly, as if it emerged in a dream. It was as if an emaciated man went to sleep wishing to grow very powerful arms and legs so that he can be a more successful hunter. Upon awakening he discovered that his wish had come true. But instead of powerful limbs, his desire to survive produced a larger brain. With it he now could figure out how to hunt more effectively and safely. But, in addition, this power delivered an unexpected talent no other animal had acquired. Early humans had manifested the awesome gift of insight, the power to conceive and imagine possibilities, an evolutionary leap they passed on to modern humans.

UNSEEN SPIRITS

The most skillful among the early beneficiaries of spatial reasoning and conceptual vision quickly sensed the presence of invisible entities hidden in nature. With their “mind’s eye” they pictured spirits inhabiting everything—the land, animals, plants, and inanimate objects. The spirits imbued their hosts with life-fueling nourishment, protection, fertility, and energy. In plants the spirits produced healing herbs and fruits. Spirits living in water bestowed it with sweetness and the ability to quench thirst. Certain spirits produced the willingness of self-sacrifice in animals so that humans may be able to eat them.

Spiritualism was the world’s pre-historic religion of beliefs about the natural world. As it spread across the globe with the migration of tribes, it evolved numerous cultural variations but shared a common cosmology. It divided the natural world into a Dual Cosmology composed of two parallel dimensions, the visible-physical-mortal domain and an invisible- spiritual-immortal dimension.

Hidden within nature was a complex Spirit World composed of many types of spirits inhabiting all things. Spirits could attach permanently to any physical entity, be free to move in and out of it, or they could function independently of a host. Whenever a good spirit would abandon an entity in its place a wild spirit would invade and cause chaos, such as turning animals into dangerous beasts or triggering droughts or storms. Human tribes realized that it would be prudent policy to have spiritual go-betweens able to contact the good spirits and appeal to them to stay and provide protection, fertility, food, and medicines. They appointed a person skilled in communicating with the spirits

of nature, a shaman, to intercede and negotiate on behalf of the needs of tribal communities.

Having received the “great knowing” of Spiritualism, the shamans now beheld with dread and admiration the fragile balance of life. They observed the great spirit of the sun to grow plants, give light, and produce fire; the moon to offer sight in the dark of night and rule the tides; and the comings and goings of unpredictable natural phenomena like rains, winds, and earthquakes. They sought the cooperation of the unseen spirits in plants and animals to provide them with food and the weapons needed to survive in a dangerous world. To procreate their kind they engaged life-giving spirits in nature for the blessings of fertility.

SHAMANS

The first shamans were “Spirit-Talkers.” In a state of constant conversation they communed with animals, plants, streams, and the sacred ground they walked. They sought to keep the invisible spirit-creatures aware of and engaged with their community.

A second generation of shamans heard the spirits. These “Spirit-Listeners” had the ability to receive information, read omens and signals sent from beyond, and convey critical information of value to the nurturing and sustenance of their clan. They designed trance-inducing rituals for the purpose of hearing and talking with the spirits. Experts in gleaning the messages concealed in the tufts of nature the shamans espoused the belief that they made contact and gained an affinity with the tribe’s protective spirits.

A third generation of shamans declared that they had pierced the veil of the Spirit World—initiating the ability to compel the spirits to take action on behalf of the tribe. These “Spirit-Callers” induced “magic” rituals, often requiring sacrifice, to conjure, consult with, and convince the spirits to heal the sick and injured, feed the hungry, and save the endangered. The callers designed increasingly euphoric dances and concocted hallucinogenic prescriptions for stimulating hypnotic visions and trance channeling.

A fourth generation of shamans achieved the role of “Spirit-Seers.” Not only could they speak to spirits, hear spirits, and call upon spirits; they had developed “distance viewing” skills to see into the far reaches of the Spirit Realm.

These visionaries turned their eyes to the sky to gaze upon the sun, moon, and stars. Observing that the heavenly bodies embodied Universal Order, the power to regulate day and night and the seasons, the mystics wondered who or what was responsible for this power? Indeed, they concluded that since the spirits animated all things in nature, would it not follow that they also inhabited the celestial giants above?

The seers recognized that the engines powering the heavenly bodies were giant celestial spirits. These were moody Titans wielding overwhelming elemental and natural forces. The Great Spirit inhabiting the sun would illuminate the day or choose to set the land ablaze with scorching heat; the Spirit of the Moon would offer sight in the darkest of night, or willfully unleash the frenzied spirits of lightning, thunder, and wind.

Throughout nature the awe-inspiring celestial Titans employed legions of dutiful spirits. Given their profound

impact on the functions of nature, seers deemed these Spirit-Titans to be masters of the spirit realm on Earth instructing the elemental spirits to provide the light, rains, and the temperatures essential to the growth of plants and the sustenance of life on Earth. They needed the cooperation of unseen spirits for the energy to survive and thrive in a dangerous world, for the strength to resist the siege of hardships, and for the blessings of fertility to procreate their kind.

The shamans declared that the unseen spirits ever brandishing their awesome powers in every facet of the physical world, the sky, sea and land, had been sent from the spiritual domain above. Therefore, it would be wise to pay homage to incur the favor of the mighty Spirit-Titans.

MONDIAL COSMOLOGY

The first-ever large-scale design of the world came about when tribal seers introduced the Mondial Cosmology. It mapped the earth as a circular flat surface surrounded by water. Three intersecting axes (two horizontal and one vertical)—North to South, East to West, and nadir to zenith—converged at the center of the world usually designated as a sacred mountain. The two directional axes pointed outward to four corners where spirit realms were to be found beyond the oceans. The world construct included three levels with a vertical channel connecting the Earth in the middle with the Heavens above and an Underworld below. This map had been discovered among many tribes across the continents.

At the axial intersection of this world cosmology

shamans saw a giant energy channel, like a pillar, holding up the sky. This “spiritual column” was embodied as three kinds of devices, including: (a) The Cosmic Mountain, marking the center of the world, its peak rising above the sky and connecting the land with the heavens; (b) The Sacred Tree of Illumination, conducting energy through its roots, trunk, and branches and reaching out to the stars, working like a nervous system between the ground below and the sky above; or (c) The Ancestral Totem, a single column representing the cosmic conduit for ancestral spirits who traveled between their communities and the afterlife world.

These models represented the first cosmology connecting one point on Earth to multiple points in Heaven, or multiple points below ground through the earth to multiple points above, or multiple points on Earth to one point in Heaven, or one point on Earth to one point in Heaven. The shamans were determined to use trance travel through these routes to learn about the unseen worlds.

Thus began a visionary exploration of the world beyond.

Using their extraordinarily intuitive gifts, the Spirit-Seers visually entered and scaled the topmost strata of the “Mountain-Tree-Totem” where for the first time they entered the celestial abode. Through ritual ceremonies and sacrifices the shamans aligned the mondial coordinates to open the two-way gate to the other worlds.

The visionary shamans piercing the divine world utilized controlled trance-travel techniques to mentally “fly into and over” the transcendent landscape without physically engaging it. Journeying beyond the horizon of sensory-based consciousness, their minds crossed into unexplored

territories, exotic other worldly domains occupied by unearthly forms.

By exploring the vertical channel of the Mondial Cosmology they discovered the realm of the gods. Observing the lands of the gods above and the low-world spirit creatures from below, the seers told of giant gods seated like kings on colossal thrones, and spirits in their service. Then the seers learned that divine- and spirit-beings were using the same vision channel to travel at will between worlds.

The unseen gods inspired awe. They possessed the grandest of all powers. They were the creators of existence, makers of Heaven and Earth, designers of laws, and rulers of all beings. In time, as seers learned more about the divine world, they came to the conclusion that the gods were immortal. Their domain had no death. On the basis of this differentiation they adopted a two-sided view of existence composed of a mortal and immortal world. This was the fundamental principle of the Dual Cosmology.

Once the shamans fully appreciated the local power they could exert with their special skills, they determined to become messengers of the gods. To facilitate their role as spiritual intercessors, they invited the gods down to Earth. From this point forward, the entire Spirit World fell under the tutelage of the gods, and the shamans took claim of the role as their spokespersons.

Both the Mondial Cosmology's world framework and the Dual Cosmology's physical-spiritual dichotomy continued into the age of organized religions.

In the nascent days of megalith religious architecture, the inherited belief in energy channels activated through

sacred trees, totems, and obelisk towers inspired the construction of sky-high stone “mountains”— mounds, pyramids and ziggurats—to serve as stairways and pipelines to Heaven. Whole cultures devoted themselves to tapping into and aligning with the celestial venues. Temples were built to serve as cosmic landing and launching stations used to acquire knowledge and interact with the divine ones. In time, they installed idols to provide the gods with bodies to inhabit when they descended into this world.

DIVINE POWER

Gods were invested with the roles and duties of creation, protection, and sustenance of nature and its inhabitants. Therefore, the shamans explained, the tribe needed to regularly appreciate the good graces received from the divine lords. Although humans had been accustomed to honor the spirits in order to acquire goods or appease them, the shamans made clear that the favor of the gods would require a more sincere expression—daily worship and shared sacrifice of all that is gained.

As the “Spirit-Talkers” spoke to spirits, now the shamans spoke to the gods.

As the “Spirit-Listeners” listened to spirits, now the shamans received instructions from the gods. Earlier the “Spirit-Callers” had called upon the spirits. Now the shamans called upon the gods to protect and nourish the tribes through the treacherous terrain of the mortal domain. Possessing all the skills required of the “Spirit-Seers,” the shamans had crafted for themselves the role of divine

mediums. Thus the tribal shamans had achieved the status of sages and prophets. Able to give voice to the will of the gods they served as guides for their flocks on Earth. Strengthening their hold with ritual ceremony and fetish objects, they superseded the power of all other leaders gaining primary control of tribal daily life.

The need to communicate their visions and lead their people to engage with the laws of the gods advanced the development of storytelling languages. Returning from trance journeys to the divine realm, the seer-shamans developed symbols, images, and vocabularies to describe the deities in visually poetic terms and convey parables replete with meaningful metaphors.

The physical forms of the gods—surreal composite images painted or sculpted in wood or stone—were selected from human, animal, ancestral, elemental, or celestial iconography. Using channel-opening ceremonies, the shamans guided the gods down into the human plane and into the idols. When the idols became inhabited they would embody divine attributes, such as protection, sustenance, or fertility. When they were angered the idols would throw thunderbolts and unleash elemental powers to cause destructive fires, rains, or winds.

Stories about the deities were crafted to resonate on different levels depending on the listener's ability to conceive. Tales of supernatural feats were designed to imprint upon the young a respect for divine power and cultivate dependence upon the gods. For adults, the myths would inspire appreciation of divine beneficence with corresponding fealty. Tribal elders and leaders were expected

to request advice and understand the sacred messages needed for wise governance.

The shamans called for worship of the gods and the social organization of tribes according to divine structure and laws. To ensure that their community would receive the blessings of protection, fruition, nutrition, and their perpetuation, they warned that disregarding the supreme commands of the gods—whether by ignorance or negligence—would invite suffering, chaos, destruction, and even deadly consequences. Solidifying their role as divine intermediaries, shamans came to exert the greatest authority over the tribe. No longer could secular tribal leaders send others on a hunt or make communal decisions without consulting the shaman for assurance of divine consent.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The seers had espoused the absolute authority of the gods to establish their dominance. But their own status remained vulnerable, especially when their tribes would be confronted with prolonged hardships. A tribe could turn on a shaman in the event of scarcity, sickness, or defeat by another tribe. Prone to accusations that the gods and spirits had turned their backs on them, the shamans looked for ways to redirect responsibility away from themselves. This hurdle led them to emphasize the idea of individual accountability.

In designing the initial version of the Doctrine of Human Accountability, the seers established that human behaviors influenced the actions of spirits. Viewing spirits as independent agents, they could either attach to or separate

from any host they inhabited. Based on the belief that the world operated in an orderly fashion due to the work of good spirits aligned with the goodwill of the gods, the idea arose that people must be accountable for holding on to the good spirits. Once a person dies, their spirit would depart for the higher realm and complete their duty by returning to make a good report to the gods.

At any time a good spirit could abandon the body of a human being who defied, ignored, or defiled the will of the gods. Into this spiritual vacuum a malevolent spirit would invade the body and bring with it the ravages of loneliness, chaos, hunger, or insufferable death. These spirits were wild. Bucking the control of the gods, they created chaos and danger. The gods banished them from their sight.

This doctrine for the first time placed responsibility on the individual human being to behave properly in order to hold on to his or her good spirit until the time of death. But as misbehaviors or disasters related to the tribe could be blamed on unsanctified spirits, the shamans were still vulnerable to charges that they caused bad spirits to invade the tribe.

Consequently, in an updated version of the Doctrine of Human Accountability, human beings were assigned a permanent spirit—named “the soul.” In this revised context, the soul acted as the lifetime recorder of information about its host. From this point forward, responsibility for actions were transferred entirely to the free will of individuals.

Unlike the mobile spirits inhabiting the local animals or watering hole, the soul was conceived of as a life-giving spirit tasked with animating sentient beings from birth to death.

Once the flame of life was extinguished, the human soul would separate from the body and return to the divine realm with a report to the gods. There the person would be judged to have been “law-abiding” or “sinful” depending on whether his acts in life were honorable or defiled the laws of the community or nature. The honored one would be lauded by the gods and remembered by the tribe, while memory of the sinful would be lost forever. The divine review of the soul allowed the shamans to connect retribution with the individual actions of tribal members.

Now when a community suffered setbacks, the shaman could shift blame for any hardships onto others. When leadership failed they would claim that the good spirits had abandoned the land because the gods had grown weary of the behavior of the chief. Declaring that the gods wanted the perpetrator to be punished, they elevated the need for punishment to an essential component of reclaiming the favor of the gods.

THE FIRST SETTLEMENTS

The survival of nomadic tribes depended on migratory animal hunts, beach-combing for seafood, and gathering of edible fruits and vegetables. They had ventured out of Africa in waves. From 70,000 to 50,000 years ago some tribes crossed the Bab-al-Mandab Strait separating present-day Yemen from Djibouti and followed the southern coastline of Asia all the way to Australia. Another migration some 50,000 years ago crossed from Egypt into the Levant and then headed north into Europe. Some of these tribes diverged to take an eastern

route into Central Asia and beyond. Finding temporary shelters in caves or in trees, they developed distinctly human cultures featuring religious beliefs and ceremonies involving spirits and gods.

As far back as 30000 BCE cave dwellings in Central Europe (i.e., Chauvet Cave, France) featured deified animal drawings and figurines of sorcerers wearing lion-head masks and bison bodywear. From 20000–10000 years ago migrations had reached across the world. Most shared the common heritage of the Mondial Cosmology, shamans using trance-induced channels to communicate with spirits and gods, divine laws, and the belief that the souls of their ancestors traveled to destinations beyond the visible world.

From 11000–7000 BCE, as the last Ice Age came to an end, the growing impact of shaman intercessions with the divine led to the first constructions of temple complexes honoring animal deities and featuring stone towers to facilitate divine contact: Gobekli Tepe in SE Turkey, Nevalı Çori in Eastern Turkey, and Mnajdra Temple Complex in Malta.

Further evidence of the pre-historic spread of shamanic cultures has been identified throughout the world in various locations including: (a) ceremonial megaliths, ritual mounds, and celestial ring structures in Nabta Playa in Nubian Egypt; Senegambian Stone Circles in Gambia and Senegal; Goseck Circle in Germany; Newgrange in Ireland; Stonehenge in England; Carnac in France; Watson Brake in Mounds, Louisiana; Norte Chico Pyramid mounds in Peru; and, (b) spirit art in caves, plains, and rocks in the Chauvet Cave in France; the Red Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka, India; Acacus Mountain Caves in Libya; Tassili n'Ajjer Caves in Algeria;

Mountain Caves of uKhahlamba in South Africa; Padha-Lin Caves in Thailand; and ancestral totem poles and stone stele in the Americas.

During this period most nomadic tribes had to stay on the move ahead of a warming global climate. Sea levels were rising across the planet. The Mediterranean Sea flooded over, creating the Black Sea. Floodwaters formed the Nile Delta. The Indian Ocean spilled into a tropical basin to form the Persian Gulf. The heat along the equator started converting the North African coast of Sahara from a tropical wetness to a dry region interrupted by seasonal monsoon rains. The North American continent experienced a significantly heightened humidity.

Global heating brought to an end the tens of thousand of years of human exploration into the farthest reaches of the planet. Once the rising waters washed away coastlines and islands, the intercontinental pathways were cut off, ending migrations across remote landmasses. Coastal tribes were forced to move further inland and some populations returned to cooler northern destinations.

Climate issues continued to challenge efforts to settle down. Prolonged freezing temperatures from 10000–8000 BCE and torrential rains and long-lasting droughts from 7000–4000 BCE slowed efforts to establish sustainable villages based on agriculture. Following the contraction of livable territories conducive to migratory hunting and wild-fruit gathering, a kinder climate prompted experimentation with the cultivation of food sources and did lead to the successful establishment of permanent shelters in fertile areas.

At the helm of these initiatives the shaman hegemony

called for perseverance and implored the celestial Titans, gods, and spirits to provide nutrition from the land and initiate the domestication of “friendlyspirit” animals. Successful farming of millet and rice began in southwest Asia. Seeding was first initiated in the Near East. In Mesopotamia herding of cattle was adopted and settlements were claimed out of the swamps of the Fertile Crescent. Between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, planting and harvesting of grains, fishing, raising farm animals, irrigation, and trading activities accompanied construction of mud-brick and stone homes.

Cooperation spurred the movement of large groups of people and animals into habitable regions, especially in response to floods or desertification in less favorable areas. But oftentimes the concentration of tribal settlements in close proximity triggered clashes. Initially loath to compromise their individual dominance over tribal order, shamans fell into power struggles over the supremacy of their tribal gods. But in time, wiser heads prevailed, and shaman diplomacy forged intertribal agreements that not only integrated their pantheons, rituals, and languages, but facilitated communal collaboration in daily activities.

Attracted to fertile areas multi-tribal congregations converged into new population centers accommodating several thousands, such as Jericho, Levant (Jordan); Catal Hüyük, Anatolia (southern Turkey); and Eridu, Sumer (Iraq). For obvious reasons these agro-center cities worshipped the deities of Fresh Waters, the Fertility of the Land, and the Moon, used to regulate the timing for plantings and harvests.

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AND ROYAL

BLOODLINES

Most tribal spokespersons for the gods found it advantageous to form religious councils, and, in time, they were able to establish areas of common interests and beliefs. Invariably shaman fellowships produced partnerships that grew into organized ministries. They formed the first human institution of any kind, religion, and they inspired the earliest civilizations.

The divine power originally invested with the sage of a tribe would be transferred to the ruling body of a priesthood charged with guardianship of the sacred places and practices. The hierarchical power structure of religious institutions—high priests, specialty priests, god-servants and caretakers—reflected the divine strata of the gods and their retinues. This chain-of-command infrastructure also served as a model for royal, warrior, commercial, and social organizations.

Initially, the clergy had the dominant power to demand that the appetite of the gods be appeased, even if it called for the sacrificial execution of a king and his entire royal court. But soon the balance of power became more evenly distributed. Cloaked in the robe of divine intercession, high priests became the personal advisors to kings and builders of royal bureaucracies that gave them the power to administrate the interests of the state.

Increasingly the role of priests involved the establishment of stability and order and the civilizing of the population. They created social laws to be consistent with divine law and aligned criminal punishment with divine judgment. Facing the continuing challenge of keeping peace

among larger, often competitive groups, the religious leaders increasingly produced stricter social rules and moral codes.

Order would insure the long-term viability of their power structure. Needing the support of royal allies and the protection of their military, the priests agreed to recognize the generational rights of kings and set aside prominent positions in the divine afterlife on the basis of bloodlines. Seers “visiting” the heavenly domain then reported that they witnessed a king’s royal ancestors seated with the gods. The Doctrine of Divine Bloodlines espoused the special status of kings to join their forbearers in an immortal afterlife.

The priests established a stable and successful society inspiring both people and sovereigns to embrace a devotional obsession with pleasing their gods. But euphoric worship also inspired competition among emerging settlements and their gods. Each city-state had its god and priesthood. Each had its lands and farmers. Each had its treasures and artisans. From 4000–2000 BCE, the appetite for economic, military, and religious domination resulted in conflicts and the beginning of nation building.

With the domestication of the horse and the ability to produce armor the military power of kings suddenly rose to a new level of violence. Conquest became the means for gaining wealth. Moreover, the priests would declare that the gods of the winner prevailed over those of the loser. Thus it came to be that the gods of one city subsumed the gods of the other. Military victories would enrich the prevailing religious institutions. Bounty for their gods came in the form of sacked treasures and foodstuffs.

Success meant greater wealth for honoring the gods who

brought the victory. The wealth was then used for the development of creative cultures. The temples hired artisans to create sacred gold, copper and bronze metal objects; craft decorative pottery, figurines, and bejeweled ornaments; formulate fragrances, ointments, and oils; and design colorful garments. The ritual trances of old now became flavored with sensual dancing, purification ceremonies, and idol worship. Priests and priestesses, kings and queens, and gods and goddesses were adorned in increasingly sumptuous visual and symbolic splendor.

The sudden viability and tremendous success of settled, growing, organized, and civilized communities overwhelmed the old traditions of nomadic tribalism. Planned urban environments and artisanship developed across the world. Builders constructed public places where people bringing goods into the city would have facilities for bathing and resting and where residents could be safe and enjoy music and dance. With their wealth and abundance came the enchantment of growth and beauty that produced remarkable cities in Egypt and Mesopotamia, in Harrapa and Mohenjo-Daro along the Saraswati and Indus Rivers (Pakistan), in Minoan cities and palaces (Crete) on the Mediterranean, and in Europe with the gold-laden military settlement at Varna on the Black Sea Coast (Bulgaria).

LIVING GODS

Kings became obsessed with their ultimate destination and role in the afterlife, demanding that seers acknowledge their bloodline so that they may join their ancestors in the realm of

the gods. Increasingly, the kings gained the upper hand over religious authorities. To remain in power the priests needed to appease each presiding king by showing that their gods favored him as one of their own. The capitulation of the clergy inspired the paradigm of an inter-world transfer of positions between royal and divine organizations. For example, in Egypt pharaohs were guaranteed their place among the gods in the afterlife. In this way the seer-priests set up the alignment of social authority with divine status.

The Egyptian Doctrine of Living Gods proposed the idea that earthly kings were divinely selected to sit on the throne and would return to sit on an eternal throne in the afterlife. The gods, they believed, picked from among their own to represent their divine power on Earth. Upon death these sovereigns would undertake a cosmic journey to retake their immortal seat among the gods next to royal ancestors of the same lineage. Consequently, blood relationships revealed one's status on Earth and for royal authorities it unveiled their divinity.

The construction of massive pyramids and temples initially in Sumer and Egypt were designed to create a two-way link with the immortal plane. By supporting royal preoccupations with immortality, priests had ordered the construction of man-made Cosmic Mountains to serve as cosmic gateways between Earth and the worlds above and below. In the Era of Divine Architecture the heavenly platforms, the ziggurat tower-temples in Sumer and pyramids in Egypt, were aligned with the appropriate celestial coordinates needed to establish an inter-world bridge between Heaven and Earth.

The quest for an immortal lifetime in Heaven would become the overarching goal of religion for thousands of years to follow. But initially immortality would be reserved only for those who made epic contributions in this world, the sovereigns and great heroes. For the rest of the people, religion would help them in the pursuit of harmony with Universal Order, to keep them nourished, safe, and in the good graces of the immortals while on Earth, but not in the afterlife.

Always there were seers reminding all that prosperity could come to an end if they did not pay tribute to the gods. Failure to please the gods would bring chaos and invite contaminated spirits into the world. Doom in the afterlife awaited all but the very powerful. Ordinary Egyptians believed that in the afterlife either their souls would be entombed in the underworld or, if so deemed by divine judgment, a monster would devour it. In the Sumerian view, in death all souls descended to an underworld “House of Dust.”

ORGANIZED RELIGION

Gods and Nature were inseparable. Priests understood the importance of this connection in matching the right gods with the needs, interests, concerns, and dependencies of locals. To make life possible and sustainable for specific tribal or urban populations, the role of spirits had to be diminished and obeisance had to be paid to gods. In an age of farming, a portion of the harvest had to be shared with the gods responsible for delivering the natural resources and

fundamental elements of nature (i.e., air, water, light, soil).

Priestly institutions dominated these societies. Located in the center of the cities the temples catalyzed social, economic, and ritual activities. The two major Sumerian cities (Uruk and Eridu) were built around ziggurats, step-pyramid towers topped with a temple containing a seat for their god. Neighborhoods surrounding the sacred edifice were organized according to status. The wealthiest and most powerful lived closest to the grand temple in a city's center, while the poorest residents filled out the outlying ring near the city wall. Religious assemblies at the temple grounds were similarly organized.

Religion and economics were related, and temple officials served a commercial function. The priests appointed themselves as the go-betweens in deals between Heaven and humans, the service providers, reflecting the religious belief that the gods were the owners of the world and humans their tenants. The Sumerian clergy recorded all business transactions drawing up contracts written and issued on behalf of property owners. The clergy served as the middlemen representing the interests of owners in the drawing of social contracts for the selling, rental, or care of material property.

The priesthoods amassed wealth by charging trading commissions, facilitating deal introductions, and collecting religious tributes. The roles of the priesthoods were very lucrative, and their costs minimal, resulting in the growth of the temples into economic powerhouses. They became the predominant owners of lands, producers of agricultural products, managers of merchant activities, builders of food

distribution routes, as well as administrators of contracts and keepers of records.

The riches they accumulated were used to enhance the grandeur of the temples and provide leading priests with lavish lifestyles. They hired builders to construct increasingly larger monuments and sculptures and to form statuary of animal images and celestial symbols. Their artisans created splendid art, artifacts, and architectural crafts displayed at ceremonies, inviting the descent of the gods into their graven idols.

The prosperity of religious institutions depended on the work of local people and the cooperation of nature. But the credit for it belonged entirely to their ability to communicate with divine interests. Although institutional religion had championed the conversion of tribal life into civilized communities, the foundation for their beliefs remained steeped in the cosmology they inherited from earlier shamans.

The priesthoods had emerged out of a worldwide affiliation of shamans who kept alive the heritage of the old divine secrets. Prehistoric seers had established powerful alliances across geographic boundaries designed to protect and perpetuate the mystic traditions of the Mondial Cosmology and gather special knowledge useful in their continuous effort to see beyond the veil of the divine realm.

One such spiritual alliance had preserved the ancient shamanic origins of Africa and brought it into Europe. Its chief symbol was the lion (Skt. *Arya*; Heb. *Arye*). Its Arya seers advocated the power to open the heavens with their cosmic roar, and worshipped the sun as the symbol of light and life.

Their Lion-Sun Fellowship espoused the ability of seers to illuminate the divine domain and their mythic stories were used to describe the worlds beyond. For the Arya seers, the lion was regarded as the majestic guardian of the Heaven-Earth passage, and the sun was the source and keeper of transcendent wisdom.

They developed metaphoric languages to convey their visionary landscapes, designed pantheons of gods and rituals for engaging them, and conducted and recorded astronomical observations to foretell destiny. In Egypt they inspired the divine pharaoh-faced lion, Sphinx, the double lions guarding temple and palace entryways, and the sun-carrying transformational Lion of Aker. In the Levant and Mesopotamia they heralded the Lion God-of-the-Sun, Shamash. In Greece, they built the Lion Gate of Mycenae, and in Hebrew and Christian teachings they are echoed in the Lion of Judah. In Buddhism, their influence appeared in the form of the Lion-Throne, the symbol for the seat of enlightenment.

The Bovine-Moon Fellowship, a competing religious alliance, centered on the sacred relationship of cattle and moon dating back to the shaman leaders of herding tribes. They worshipped the bull, cow, calf, oxen, and buffalo as icons for the generative power of the divine. The lunar-powered deities of this priesthood championed fertility, nourishment, creativity, and the cultivation of growth. In Egypt the this clergy was marked by the Apis and Mnveis bulls representing the divine power that created the vital lifeforce (*ka*) and raised the terrestrial world out of the waters, as well as the sacred cow, Hesat, and the Mother

Earth Goddess, Hathor, protector of nature. In Sumer, the tutelary horned-cow Goddess, Ninhursag, depicted the mountain mother-creator of the fertile Earth. The milk-giving mother goddess symbolized the divine female function of nature to nurture humanity with the right nourishment at the right time, just as a human mother's milk changed to respond to each stage of her infant child's development.

The Bovine-Moon worship expressed in Babylon as the bull-calf god of gods, Marduk, and in Nineveh, as Assur (alternative spelling is spelling "Ashur"), the Assyrian bearded king-god with a winged-bull body, reflected a dominant male sovereign. The seductive influence of the Moon God, Sin, appeared in the Hebrew Bible with the worship of the golden calf under the specter of Sinai Mountain. In Greek cultures, the carnal appetites of the bull manifested as Zeus, Bacchus, and the Minoan Minotaur. In the Vedic civilization, Indra, the bull-god and Lord of Light (i.e., the moon) fought the forces of darkness empowered by drinking the Elixir of Immortality (Skt. *Soma*)—a psychoactive "milky" potion also consumed by Vedic shamans (Skt. *Rishi*) as an agent for inducing trance-state.

SUPREME POWER

The first great pantheon-based cosmology was assembled in Mesopotamia. Its gods ruled the divine realm above the sky, the mortal Earth, and the underworlds below it. At the helm of Sumerian theology was a trinity of supreme gods who divided up the world: Anum was God of the Realm of Heaven;

his son, Enlil, was God of Air and Sky, and sovereign Overseer of the Earth; and his other son, Enki, was God of Sweet Waters and Wisdom. An Assembly of Gods (Sum. *Annunaki*) representing hundreds of local communities made the decisions affecting the whole world. All Mesopotamian cities and kingdoms were given a seat at the council table. The Assembly of Gods legislated and advised the supreme gods who, in turn, were tasked with discipline and enforcement.

Enlil presented the stern authority of a supreme enforcer charged with instituting the destinies pre-determined by the Assembly of Gods. The lot of people, merely tenants in the domain made by the gods, was mandated from above. The governance of Sumerian city-states was designed to reflect this model. Each locality relied on an assembly of religious and secular leaders to draw up laws to be enforced by kings who ruled with a strict hand. Even after the Akkadians of northern Mesopotamia invaded and occupied Sumer in southern Mesopotamia, the gods remained the same, although they acquired additional names.

At about the same period of time the cosmic pantheon of Egypt similarly reflected the marshalling of elemental gods to rule from above, but the Egyptians were much more concerned about the afterlife. Their pyramids served the same mondial channeling function as the ziggurattemples of Mesopotamia, but were also designed to assist in sending a royal soul back to the stars.

Next to the lotus blossoms along the Nile, Egyptians built pyramids that in death would enable a pharaoh (i.e., god on Earth) to join his ancestral deities in a resplendent royal heaven. The Pharaoh Khufu built the Great Pyramid at Giza to

enable his afterlife journey with the aid of the sun, the god Rae. It took nearly twenty-five years using tens of thousands of laborers to build it using more than two million stone blocks, some as large as sixteen tons. The polished limestone casings covering the exterior faces of the structure reflected sunlight like a giant mirror producing a powerful brightness visible from the heavens. The alignment of the Great Pyramid, with its four-cornered base pointing at the cardinal points and its vertical axis pointed at the divine cosmic gateway above, had been designed to emulate the Cosmic Mountain of the Mondial Cosmology.

Like the religious institutions in Sumerian/Akkadian city-states, the early Egyptian priesthood also became wealthy. The successful management of the Nile and the mining of gold and other metals made it possible for pharaohs to finance the building of large temple complexes to support the delivery of the royal family to Heaven. Because this funerary-fixation was economically unsustainable, in later centuries new Egyptian religions arose offering adaptations to earlier pantheons. Their large compounds and workforces were refocused on the perpetuation of a stable society by delivering social services that would keep everyone working together in alignment with the original harmonies set by the gods.

At the Karnak complex the priesthood operated an economic enterprise with some 80,000 employees consisting of farmers, fishermen, hunters, food handlers, stone builders and artisans, cooks, bakers, brewers, and administrators. Positions in the priesthood gained through royal appointment or family inheritance were organized according

to specialized functions—ranging from religious duties (such as royal advisors, caretakers of gods, and ceremonial facilitators) to administrative roles (such as scribes, readers, time-keepers, and managers), or civil servants (such as magician-healers, musicians, and dancers).

THE EPIC DROUGHT

The collapse of a farming-friendly climate ended the era of exuberant prosperity. A three hundred-year Epic Drought that began around 2100 BCE brought down the institutions of power and caused a cataclysmic shift in populations. Swiftly, the lingering period of drought, along with intermittent monsoon rains and dust storms, and the occasional impact of an astral object destroyed crops and decimated city-states across a vast territory from Egypt to the Indus.

A dramatic change in the normally humid Mediterranean trade wind path reduced rainfall by 30–50 percent from the Black Sea in the north to Egypt in the south, and from the Levant in the western end of Asia to the Indus in the east. Without rain in Ethiopia, most of the Nile dried up. The disastrous economic consequences forced the Old Kingdom in Egypt to stop the construction of pyramids.

Temperatures plunged across northern latitudes across the globe causing migrations to head south only to find conditions that were worse. Extreme dryness and sand storms ravaged the Middle East. From Canaan to Mesopotamia sweet farmlands turned into salt licks. In the Tigris-Euphrates region the Akkadian Empire, having conquered the ziggurat city-states of Sumer, suffered an economic collapse. Nomad

populations from Eurasia, the Near East, and the northern shelf of Central Asia rolled out their migrations in search of new grassland far from their territories.

Massive loss of farming land severely weakened the prevailing religious, economic, and sovereign structures resulting in power vacuums and inviting conquest or overthrow of bloodlines. In Egypt during the three hundred years of suffering an intermediate kingdom with regional governors replaced the centralized monarchy. It would be centuries later, after the crisis had passed, before Egypt was able to reunify its lands under dynastic kings (Middle Kingdom).

In Asia, anarchy and barbarian invasions added to the economic havoc as the Mesopotamian dynasties disintegrated. It took several hundred years before the power structures could regenerate and by that time the old guard was gone. Who would take their place?

The Epic Drought invited a hard look in the mirror for authentic practitioners of the spiritual arts. A deeper lesson had to be learned. Challengers to the failed priesthoods called for a purge of the corrupting influences wealth, pleasure, and power had on authentic religiosity. The good spirits had departed, the new seers declared. The gods demanded, they said, that religions clean up the chaos and realign with the purity and innocence of their original spiritual commitment.

These dissenters reasserted the need for spiritual purification as the prerequisite for a visionary reconnection with the divine. They challenged the notion that earthly status and power equated with immortal access. Instead, they reaffirmed the idea that making contact with the divine

required a pure soul. They practiced what they preached, rejecting sin and adopting the simple life of a nomadic sage-seer.

Competing with the authenticity movement, religious reformers had a different plan. They were priests who blamed the old gods and their clergy for corrupt acts that brought on the natural disasters, but their goal was to re-establish the institutional role of the temple. Their plan was to transfer divine powers from the failed gods to new gods simply by changing many of the names of old gods to ones associated with the current occupiers.

The reformers prevailed when the city-states made their comeback. They reclaimed the institutions of power by making cosmetic changes. Meanwhile, the dissenters made headway among migratory cultures. They strived to guide humanity back into the good graces of the immortals by accepting the absolute power and laws of the divine.

The challengers focused on restoring the shamanic relationship with the divine by introducing the new role of an authentic “Sage-Savior.” Metaphorically, the savior, unlike a high priest, would guide his people across the desert of hardships to the land of divine salvation. This new kind of shaman would lead the clan to a divinely granted home, an oasis of salvation in the midst of chaos where the flock could lead a simple, safe, and joyful life. In paradise they would find the remedy for mortal suffering and receive the divine blessings that would restore balance between Heaven and Earth.

MONOTHEISM

The Sumerian root word for “god” was *Il*, as used in *Enlil*, the stern deity, Supreme God of Air, Sky and Wind, overseer of mortal destinies, and arbiter of Reward and Punishment. The derivative word *El* meant power, strength, or might and defined an Almighty God. The word *Bel* meant the Lord, or Almighty Lord God.

Living the city life in drought-ridden Mesopotamia, one elderly sageprophet, Abraham, rejected the pantheons he encountered in Babylonian religions. Due to the drought Abraham and his family may have immigrated to Mesopotamia from Central Asia. Originally he may have been a skilled shaman of the Yadu tribe alluded to in the Aryan scripture, the Rig Veda. A stranger in a strange land, he witnessed the vestiges of animistic idolatry. While other religious dissenters blamed the epic drought and the ensuing civil chaos and economic collapse on the failed gods of Sumer/Akkad, Abraham redefined the problem as the worship of false gods and included in that category the entire Mesopotamian pantheon.

Adopting the Mesopotamian name for the supreme deity, El, Abraham assumed the role of the Sage-Savior for his clan. Like the old Spirit-Listeners and Spirit-Callers, Abraham could hear the voice of the Almighty God, call unto Him, and converse with Him. Like the stern Sumerian Sky God, Enlil, the new Elohim also demanded unfailing allegiance to His absolute authority. But unlike the pantheon of gods serving Enlil, Abraham’s God was the sole God and an omnipotent God.

Abraham’s El (Heb. *Elohim*) had the power and goodwill to restore the wayward people on Earth to their original

innocence providing they believed in Him and acted in accordance with His Laws. When Abraham accepted his terms, Elohim charged him with restarting a purified civilization. He instructed his messenger-guide to head west, in the direction of the setting sun, where some day his progeny would be able to worship Him in peace and splendor.

In Abraham's monotheistic version of the Dual Cosmology, Elohim was the one and only eternal being residing in Heaven and the Creator of the mortal world. His divine mind encompassed the Earth but was separate from it, as this place was mortal, while the Almighty God's space was immortal. Echoing the Sumerian view that humans were not meant to cross the line between Earth and Heaven, Abraham considered any such attempt to be an insult to God. Humans, in his view, may neither look into Heaven (i.e., gaze upon God's face), nor enter it in the afterlife. Going to Heaven was not a goal for him. Humbled by the awesome grandeur of God, he refused to see himself as special being chosen by God. Reluctantly, he accepted his mission as a necessary responsibility, a burden placed upon him at an advanced age when another migration hardly seemed like a wise decision.

Following the custom of legally binding contracts among traders in Mesopotamia, Abraham and Elohim made a Covenant. God instructed him to lead his clan to a bountiful land located "between the Nile and Euphrates Rivers" in return for his devotion and allegiance.

Abraham had hoped that his family and their generations to follow would submit to the will of God. In this way they would be able to live the life God intended for them and participate in the completion of their own purpose on

Earth. God promised Abraham that in return for their loyalty he would guide them to paradise on Earth.

THE RIG VEDA

Heading in the opposite direction, following the dawn of the rising sun, a group of high-minded sages on horseback led a host of nomadic tribes. They were also on a quest for paradise, an echo of Sumerian myths describing an idyllic, divine land on the “eastern edge of the world.” They rode in waves through Mesopotamia into south central Asia and India descending from the Pontic Steppes region between the Black Sea in Europe and the Caspian Sea.

Some of these shaman-led Arya tribes found their green paradise in the Indus region where they established the Kingdom of Gandhara (modern day northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan). This was where their sages recorded the poetic Rig Veda, the ancient Sanskrit hymnal. Although the tribes worshipped a variety of gods, their egalitarian seers envisioned them all as many aspects, facets, and faces of a Universal God. His divine expressions were formed of an amalgamation of thirty-three *deva* enclaves (groupings of spirit-beings made of light) representing the beneficial and protective attributes of Heaven.

The Arya migrations had included a formidable alliance of cultures with many languages, beliefs, and customs. Composed of nomadic kingdom-tribes, each had its own military might, the skills for herding domesticated animals, and the ability to practice agriculture where the land would allow. The allied tribes formed a flexible population able to

spread out in multiple directions or unite when needed. They coordinated their movements like the orchestrated cycles in nature, by coming together, breaking away, and re-assembling as needed. Their sages fostered an unambiguous tolerance for differences among the tribes and their beliefs and engendered profound optimism in the face of natural challenges. The people relied on their sage-guides to decipher the patterns in the heavens and in nature before undertaking activities such as military battles, hunting, racing, relationships, and celebrations.

Descendents of the Lion-Sun Fellowship of shamans, the visionary Arya sages had turned to a cosmic igniter, Agni, the god-force who inflamed the mind with the fire of inner awakening. His passion would be needed for penetrating the super-conscious cosmic mind. In an “inflamed” state of meditation, the sage would be able to enter fourteen spiritual worlds, including seven Heavens and seven Hells.

Some of the Arya sages continued from Central Asia across the Indus River Valley into India where they encountered indigenous cultures. There they advanced another new religion, Brahmanism, based on the worship of a supreme divine Creator, Brahma. To establish the rule of their clergy, the Brahmins distinguished between those who were spiritually advanced and the remainder of the population. These seers were first to propose the Doctrines of Rebirth and Soul Reincarnation, an alternative system of accountability, and a dramatic departure from former beliefs in the afterlife. The Brahmins declared that every human soul would be reborn, and in the next life would reincarnate in a body and dimension befitting their behavior in prior lives.

The only way to break out of this cycle would be to evolve spiritually until one's soul was worthy of release from the bindings of the mortal plane. But the option to gain entry into the divine mind of Brahma, however, was available only to the Brahmin caste.

FUTURE STREAMS

Two competing religious cosmologies had emerged as the world was recovering from natural disaster. One defined human life as a single mortal existence; the other subscribed to rebirth. In the first, the virtue of a soul was judged and sentenced in the afterlife. In the second, the soul sought to escape suffering by evolving through repeated cycles of birth.

1. *The Doctrines of the Afterlife and Divine Judgment in a Dual Cosmology* Human beings would experience a single lifetime on Earth. Upon death, the human soul would separate from the body and ascend to appear before the court of the immortal realm. In the name of divine order, the judgment of the soul would be based upon status, merits, or sins accumulated during mortal existence. Once adjudicated, forever more the soul would be reconstituted in a physical form in one of two afterlife realms, transported either to an entombed netherworld or to a blissful paradise the gods had built in a distant section of the Earth. Souls judged to be corrupted or guilty of criminal activities would be served to a monster.

The Doctrine of the Afterlife set the stage for a cosmic

duel between good and evil. Starting with the Persian religion of Zoroastrian, the fate of human beings in the afterlife would depend on one's allegiance in life to a Good God rather than a Devil God. The concept later adopted by Western religions, harbored intolerance for competing deities.

2. *The Doctrines of Rebirth and Soul Reincarnation in a Multidimensional Cosmos* Like all things in nature, mortal beings would cycle in and out of existence. They would experience a multiplicity of lifetimes. Upon death the physical being would pass away and be reconstituted in another form, place, and time. Depending on the purity of one's soul, the resurrected being could manifest in any one of a variety of forms anywhere in the multilevel Universe, including rebirth as human, animal, or spirit. The circumstances and destination of rebirth invariably depended on the purity of the soul.

In this cyclical cosmology good-natured spirits kept the world functioning harmoniously following the laws set up by the Creator, and Overseer of World Order. In opposition demonic forces perpetuated chaos and disaster. Those who followed Heaven by embracing the Laws of Divine Order on earth created social harmony and would be rewarded with better rebirth or escape from the cycle.

These two doctrines would form the foundation for future religions. The Doctrine of the Afterlife had evolved from Egyptian and Sumerian cultures. Aside from the question of monotheism versus polytheism, it would provide the basis for western religions, including Judaism,

Christianity and Islam.

The Doctrine of Rebirth arose from the Lion-Sun shamanic cultures of Egypt and Eurasia. Just as the sun was reborn each morning, the soul would reappear in a new birth. And just as the lion could defeat any opponent, the shaman would aspire to defeat mortality. The seed for this view developed in Arya cultures, emerging in Vedism, became the foundation of Brahmanism and was further modified in the ensuing Sramana traditions of Buddhism and Jaina, until eventually it was encompassed in Hinduism.

Eastern religions were founded on some form of renewal process across cosmic time. However, with the exception of births in a heavenly domain, all other incarnations, including the human condition, would reflect some level of pain and suffering. This system provided an incentive for adopting virtuous actions that might in due course liberate human beings from the grip of cyclical mortality. As a result believers were encouraged to adopt exemplary paths of living, by embracing compassion, charity, doing no harm, and overcoming destructive patterns.

From Domination to Immortality

*Nature nurtured life
Men desired immortality
The rains stopped
Dust fell from the sky.*

Before the three hundred-year Epic Drought brought down the first established civilizations from Egypt to the Indus (2100–1800 BCE), the people had flocked to bejeweled temple centers to praise the gods. They danced on monumental ceremonial platforms among colorful flowers and devotional music as they praised the beneficence they had received from their divine overseers. The success of their farming settlements had created a euphoric belief in the power of the elemental immortals to deliver food, clothing, shelter, and wealth. People gladly made their sacrificial offerings, filled the temple vessels with precious metals, and volunteered to help build the polished housing for the divine ones—the sources of all blessings. The economic, social, and spiritual institutions of permanent settlements were a giant leap forward from nomadic survival in the wild.

In the Mesopotamian city-states religious enterprisers

had been responsible for establishing a society with stability and predictability. The clergy had drawn up a social contract between humans and the deities, an understanding aimed at establishing harmonious Natural Order. As managers of the contract, the priests offered ritual reverence and glorification to the gods and collected appropriate tribute payment for the influence the gods would exert to calm nature's volatile forces. The gods also expected rent for allowing people to live on their land and a usage fee for the natural resources they created. A fair percentage share of everyone's assets could compel nature's forces to cooperate with human needs so that farming and herding can be conducted successfully. Compliance with the demands of the owner-gods was of utmost importance in the daily life of communities. Failure to do so could have dire consequences.

CREATION OF THE GODS

The shamanic legacy of the Mondial Cosmology had opened the way for the deification of the Elemental-Gods of the Sky, Earth, and Water and the Celestial-Gods of the Sun, Moon, and Stars. These two titanic trinities reflected the clergy's effort to humanize the relationships between people and nature with themselves in the role of spokespersons or arbitrators for the gods. By embodying human attributes in the gods—distinct characteristics, physical bodies and features, sensual desires, opinions, job roles and skills—the priests could listen to them, converse with them, and call upon them. In their personified forms, the gods would speak, express thoughts and feelings, wear clothing, want food,

wash, travel, and use weapons.

However, due to nature's unpredictable behavior, the personal aspects of the gods could range from aggressive to graceful, prejudiced to fair, angry to cheerful, clever to rash, skillful to incompetent, and self-centered to cooperative. Nonetheless, in one significant way the gods were very different from human beings. They were immortal. Time, or the lack of it, drew a hard line in the sand between the relative low value of mortal life and the grand highness of the immortals.

Humans, unlike the gods, had to face the inevitability of death and its consequences, but the timing and means of one's demise was in the hands of the gods. A relatively weak, inferior human race depended entirely on the powers and goodwill of Nature gods. Without water, earth, air, or the light from above, no plants, no animals, no nutrition, no fertility and no living beings could exist.

Looking down from above, some gods were better disposed toward humanity than others. They either regarded people as children who needed care or as mere nuisances, like pests. Declaring their absolute authority over society, the Sumer/Akkad priesthood had proposed that human existence itself came about merely because the gods needed workers to dig canals in the dirt. Irrigation canals were used to turn dry lands into fertile green fields. The gods wanted to create a beautiful paradise on Earth for their own pleasure.

The gods created the world, but how were the gods created? The priest-seers sat in trance until the vision of the beginning came forth. The first Creation of the World myth¹⁰ emerged from the Goddess of the Primordial Cosmos, Nammu

(Akkad. *Antu*).

From the muddy womb of the Primordial Mother, Nammu, the God of Heaven, Anum, emerged. Then the semen of the father in Heaven copulated with the dark waters of the Primordial Mother, bringing forth two gods, the Sweet Waters and the Earth. First Heaven's son Enki (Akk. *Ea*), the God of Waters was born, and with him the Fresh Waters, Abzu (Akk. *Engur*) separated from the liquid womb of the Cosmos. Next the terrestrial world materialized as the Goddess of Earth, Ninhursag. She arose from her mother's liquid to produce the landmass that settled over the Fresh Waters. To complete the world, the God of Heaven then impregnated his daughter Earth. She conceived the God of the Sky, Air, Winds and Storms, Enlil (Akk. *Ilu*). He breathed air into the atmosphere.

Each of the three elemental World-Gods, Enki, Ninhursag and Enlil (Water, Earth, Sky) would appoint a priesthood to represent his or her voice. Each of those clergies articulated the mission and vision these gods had for the world, and built around them a divine hierarchy.

The Primordial Cosmos and the God of Heaven continued to reproduce a host of additional gods and goddesses (Annunaki) and assembled them in the immortal realm. These gods, in turn, gave birth to the spirits, both good and demonic, (Sum. *Udug*; Akk. *Utukku*) and with them populated the

Underworld. These creatures prepared and served nourishment for the gods—sacrifices of animal organs, the blood of “sweetmeat” spirits, or the vital energy of burnt offerings.

The Akkadian invasion had unified Sumer’s city-states and synchronized its pantheon (2334 BCE). According to the myths written by the priests of Sumer and Akkad, after the World-Gods had come into being, final decisions regarding life on Earth would be legislated by the Assembly of Gods (Anunaki). The Assembly was composed of all the gods, major and minor, including hundreds of natural phenomena and elemental forces, and deities whom Mesopotamian city-states had adopted as their patron gods.

The Assembly looked down upon the Earth and decided to cultivate her, just as landlords would seek to improve the value of their estate. They instructed the Gods of Water and Earth to produce green pastures. Then, they appointed the Sky God, Enlil, as overseer and charged him with building for them a divine paradise on Earth.

He ordered the youngest gods (Akk. *igigi*) to do the work, but they soon rebelled. Considering the work of laborers to be beneath them, they refused the hardship of toiling the land. As this initial effort failed, the Anunaki decided that they needed to create slave workers. So they made humans out of clay figurines that were mixed with flesh and blood extracted from the food offerings the Spirits provided them.

Hereafter they put humans to work and gave them living quarters. As transient tenants renting property belonging to the gods, their lots would depend on their usefulness to the powers above. But after seeing the poorly dug ditches human labor produced the impatient commander of the world, Enlil, became dissatisfied with their shortcomings. Growing weary of human failures, he banished them from *Dilmun*, the paradise the divine beings had been building.

Three major priesthoods represented the elemental trinity of Sky, Water, and Earth.

A sacred tower-temple was perched on an elevated promontory in the center of the Tigris-Euphrates valley. This was the “House That Rose Like a Mountain” (Sum. *E.KUR*), which for the priests of Nippur (Sum. *Nibru*) was the “Cosmic Mountain,” the axial center of the Universe and the home of Enlil.

As champions of Enlil’s authority, the clergy of Nippur exerted a great deal of influence over the selection of kings in many Sumerian cities. At the elite religious center of Nippur the priests refused to have a king of their own. They deemed the god Enlil to be king, not only for their locality, but the entire world. In him the priests had fashioned the model for divine authority describing the Sky God as a stern autocrat and strict wielder of power. Representing him in the world, they sought to establish a religious dictatorship based on the fearful view that only fealty to his divinity could avert the unleashing of his wrath upon mortals.

They fostered the myth that the Assembly of Gods voted

him to the position of Chief God of Gods, superseding his older half-brother, the Water God, Enki, basing their claim on Enlil's superior proximity to Heaven. In the Sumerian cosmogony the Sky was the domed enclosure vaulting over the earthly disc with only the divine realm of Heaven above it. They reasoned that Enlil's territory, the atmosphere, reached up and touched the realm of the divine Father in Heaven (Anum), whereas Enki's realm of the Waters climbed only as high as the rainclouds. As Enlil had a higher vantage for observing all human activities at once, the clergy of Nippur reported that the gods chose him to oversee the dispensation of human destinies.

Careful not to disparage the dictums of the Annunaki, priests from other Sumerian cities diplomatically resisted Nippur's claim of supremacy by arguing that the divine rights of gods gave each deity the option to intercede individually on humanity's behalf.

In contrast to Enlil's authoritarian disdain for human worth, Enki, the patron deity of the Sumerian delta city of Eridu, embraced humankind. This city, the world's most successful developer of early agriculture, was made possible with the construction of irrigation canals drawn from the Euphrates River. Eridu's clergy attributed to Enki the qualities of wisdom, magical creativity, and compassion for mortals, and depicted his nature as one of "Loving Kindness." Built to honor *Enki*, the Eridu Temple Tower, possibly the first and tallest of all ziggurats, linked the Heavens and Earth. In a great banquet hall within it, the priests hosted celebrations and ritual ceremonies. Atop the ziggurat was a dark sacred room housing the seat of their "holiest of gods," Enki, who

was regarded as the source of both the metaphysical and physical, as well as the cause and the effect of all the bounty in existence.

Eridu formed a pro-human alliance with the herder city of Kish, located in the green intersection of the Tigris-Euphrates. Its priests worshipped the Goddess Ninhursag-Ki. She personified the land that had arisen above the Waters, upon which terrestrial life could grow. As Ki, she was Mother Earth, literally the embodiment of the city-state and figuratively the goddess in her aspect as the Earthly mound-world. As the Goddess Ninhursag, she was Mother Nature, the nurturer of life on Earth, vowing to protect and sustain the emergence of plants, animals and humans. They built red brick ziggurats in her honor and dressed her in a bovine headdress. She was depicted as the milk-giving mother-goddess of men and beasts and the embodiment of nature's power to produce the grazing lands required for herding activities.

THE NEXT GENERATION

Priesthoods from competing city-states addressed inter-city political, social, and geographical issues by using their deities as proxies in negotiations. Their debates were crafted in mythic language. Hidden in their divine metaphors were startlingly deep observations about life and death.

The priests of Nippur, fearful of interruptions in their food supply and upset with the scarcity of other essential resources, declared that the God Enlil demanded greater tribute from the lowland city-states along the rivers.

Initiating a cunning contest between the gods of Nippur and Eridu, they sent a myth-scripted message to Enki's clergy expressing the Sky God Enlil's displeasure with the insufficient amount of foods offered to his capital—threatening to unleash his feared wrath upon those who had failed to pay proper tribute.

Enlil has convinced the Annunaki that the creation of humans was a failed experiment. Respecting his observations on the matter, the Assembly hereby orders Enki, the God of Waters, to unleash a monsoon deluge that would destroy the irrigation canals the humans had built.¹¹

Although normal seasonal floods were desirable for cultivation, Nippur wanted to teach Eridu a lesson they would never forget—the threat of a Great Flood was designed to make the point that Eridu was guilty of hoarding and greed. Nippur's myth of the Great Flood was a curse on Eridu for imposing high prices, rationing food allocations, and providing insufficient donations to Enlil. The punishment of an epic flood in the low-lying areas would drown people, destroy farms and kill the livestock. The Great Flood may have been crafted as a prediction of impending doom meant to intimidate Eridu's priests. Or, it may have been issued after a particularly devastating flood to blame Eridu's lackluster tribute for an event that had already happened.

In either case the priests of Eridu were ready with a response. They took a counterintuitive approach by expanding the scope of the flood story to mythic proportions—a Great Flood that would wipe out the entire world.

Mocking Nippur's elitism embodied in Enlil's threat to rid the world of human beings, they predicted that the flood would be worldwide and cause all humans to disappear, with one exception. Thus they extended the story and added a clever twist to Nippur's plot.

Prior to fulfilling the order of the Annunaki to unleash the Great Flood, Enki, the Water God visited the devout priest and delta-farmer Atrahasis¹² (personification of the sun). Warning of the impending deluge, the god instructed him to build a barge and load it with his family and farm animals. After the Great Flood washed away civilization, Atrahasis would restart humanity and produce a more kind-hearted bloodline in tune with a wiser and more compassionate god.

Symbolically, when the sun re-emerged to dry the land, the dawn of a new era of humanity ensued, thus revealing that the wiser Enki had outwitted the wrathful Enlil.

The sequel myth juxtaposed the "Water Cosmogony" of farm-based Eridu with the "Mountain Cosmogony" of cattle-herding Nippur. For Eridu, having reclaimed the Earth from the swamp, the essential role of the gods was to help farmers grow crops. Enki's response to the Great Flood proposed a new social contract wherein the gods would be more compassionate to people and in return people would be more devout and law-abiding.

Eridu relied on the Sun God to provide sunlight to claim the land. The God of Sweet Waters would then grant them the

ability to siphon the Tigris-Euphrates for river waters before it flowed into the Persian Gulf where sweet waters mixed with saltwater. Eridu conceived of Earth as an “island“ in a Water-World. The Earth sat on top of ground waters and was surrounded by a saltwater ocean.

The countervailing perspective of Nippur was focused on the summit of the Cosmic Mountain, residence of the immortal gods. Their cattle, sheep, and goat herding constituencies worshipped the Moon, but the Cosmic Mountain of Nippur was the divine home of all the Elemental-Gods and the Celestial-Gods, and as such they deemed the mortal world at its foot to be inferior.

The competitive half-brother gods served as proxies in a fundamental disagreement about the universal character of nature and its relation to human vulnerabilities. Embedded in the combined portions of the myth of the “Great Flood and the Savior Sun” was a legitimate debate about the roles and responsibilities of divinity. The debate pitted the proponents of an authoritarian, wrathful god who imposed rewards and punishments against a god that nourished humanity with kindness, harmony, and the wisdom of natural order.

It was here between Nippur and Eridu that the profound argument ensued over the character of the divine. At stake in the battle for divine dominance was the relationship between immortals and mortals, a debate that would continue in a variety of other guises for thousands of years to come.

For the Sumerian clergy, this argument had major ramifications as to the value of human life. Did the gods create humanity only to work them like slaves, or did they have a more generous purpose in mind?

A third clergy from the city-state of Kish stepped in to arbitrate the Nippur-Eridu debate and superseded both positions. They suggested the merger of the gods to facilitate the harmonious operation of Nature. On the one hand they acknowledged that Eridu's reputation for doing business fairly suffered because they had many good paying customers. This led to dissatisfaction by Nippur's clergy. They regarded themselves as deserving of greater consideration because of their special status as Enlil's servants, but Kish could not condone Nippur's angry flood scenario as a legitimate response to the problem.

In their sequel to the Great flood, the Earth Mother priests of Kish offered a new myth that would teach the Water-God a lesson of responsibility. Written in the form of a world-creation mythology, it focused on the inception of nature's growth. In it they pledged an alliance between Ninhursag and Enki to work together for the greater good. Their "plant origin" story would propose that the fertility of nature emanated from the union of water and earth. On another level, this story doubled as a social commentary, offering a cautionary tale about exploitative short-term relationships versus the virtues of lasting relationships. Finally, at its core this myth of Ninhursag and Enki in Paradise¹³ called on wise mortals to recognize and appreciate¹³ the gifts of life received from the immortal realm.

In the earthly paradise of the Gods, Dilmun,¹⁴ a place absent of sickness or death, the Water God, Enki, in an effort to spark life impregnated his bovine half-sister, Ninhursag, the Earth (also

mother of his half-brother the Sky). Their union resulted in the birth of the Goddess Ninsar, Lady of Greenery. As a result the ground became seeded with a grass cover. Afterwards Ninhursag departed paradise to allow the seasons to unravel.

While she was away, the Water God, Enki, encountered Ninsar, but did not realize she was his daughter. Excited by her lush green appearance, he beguiled her. But after a wild night of passionate sex, he realized that she did not compare to Mother Nature and moved on. Unaware that Ninsar had bore him a child, Ninkurra, the Lady of the Mountain, the embodiment of bushes and edible plant life, he soon after came to an area of beautiful mountain vegetation. Thrilled by the sight of Ninkurra he seduced her and impregnated her with his semen. But here too he found himself dissatisfied. Ninkurra gave birth to a daughter, Uttu, the Spider Goddess, also known as the Lady Web of Life. Endowed with the ability to spin nature's patterns, she was also the weaver of awareness. But once again Enki had been oblivious to the outcome of his actions.

At this time Ninhursag returned to Dilmun and was perturbed to learn of Enki's lustful escapades. She cautioned Uttu to stay clear of riverbanks and swamps where Enki might spot her and use his charms like he did with the others. Although Uttu kept her distance, Enki came across

her and bearing gifts of fresh fruit from the Garden of Life he convinced her to let him come near. Once they were close he was able to impregnate her, but in the morning he departed like he did with the others. Disappointed, Uttu immediately consulted her great-grandmother, Mother Nature, about Enki's intentions. Ninhursag encouraged her to learn from this experience and in the future choose a lover willing to commit to her before granting him sexual access.

But first, she advised Uttu to abort her pregnancy by removing Enki's seed from her womb and depositing it in the ground. In a matter of days Enki's seed grew into eight primal trees, each containing a blessing for the growth of Life, the last of which was Ti, the Tree of Life. Seeing these luscious trees, Enki, eager to learn how they tasted, ate a piece of each one.

Enraged by his irresponsible and selfish ways, Ninhursag had become fed up with his greed and philandering. Face to face she scolded him for his irresponsible actions of taking advantage of young and naive women, leaving them with the burden of childbirth, and showing a total lack of consideration for their feelings. She cursed him to suffer for his indiscretions and departed for a far away place. Her remonstrations helped Enki become aware of his errors, but it was too late.

Having consumed tree limbs containing his own semen, he fell gravely ill. The organs in his

body began to swell to an enormous size (i.e., flood) and wounds appeared on the Water God's body (i.e., destruction). Watching his agony, the Sky God (Enlil) and the Assembly of Gods (Anunaki) concerned for his failing health called on Mother Nature to request that she withdraw her curse. Learning that Enki's life was on the line, she hurried back to his side and tenderly wrapped herself around him. One by one Ninhursag removed the tree genomes from the Water God's body and implanted them in her own womb. She then gave birth to a suite of divine herbs including the god of medicinal plants from which elixirs would be made, and seven goddesses, each respectively able to cure Enki's wounds in his jaw, hip, tooth, mouth, throat, limbs, and ribs.

The last of the healing goddesses was Nin-Ti, the Lady of the Tree of Life. She cured his wounded ribs. Fully recovered, Enki lauded the heaven-sent power of the Tree of Life (Ti) to "animate beings" with the gift of joyful living.

Feeling truly alive, his consciousness raised, and his health better than ever, Enki thanked Ninhursag for teaching him an important lesson. Together, they pledged their love to one another and vowed to spread life, love, and fruition throughout the world.¹⁵

On its surface this myth was about the creation of nature. Earth in her union with the Waters brought forth

greenery, flowers, fruits, and trees, creating the heavenly paradise of Dilmun in the physical plane. But beneath the surface, its writers offered an intimate social lesson about appropriate relationships. They espoused the importance of fidelity and tenderness by contrasting casual sexual affairs with a deeper self-sacrificing love indicative of long-term relationships. Using the gods as models for this message they provided an audience of young women and priestesses in service of Mother Nature with wise counsel, while, on another level, they metaphorically addressed the underlying breach between Eridu and Nippur.

The writers of Kish were advising Eridu, the center of Sumerian trade, to act more responsibly and fairly with consciousness for the impact their actions may have on other city-states. The myth encourages Eridu to anticipate consequences and take a longer-term view, so as not to engender the ire of other clergies, such as Nippur.

Yet the deepest purpose of this story was a profound revelation about the origin and meaning of life. In addition to the social issues and personal relevance addressed therein, Sumerian myths were embedded with coded wisdom inherited from earlier shamanic storytellers. Containing insights into Universal Truth, the myths reflected the heritage of messaging aimed directly at the unconscious mind.

The Kish writers used Cuneiform symbols, the Sumerian script invented in 3200 BCE. In telling of the cure for Enki's ribs, they chose a glyph that at once stood for "ribs" as well as the sacred "Tree of Life." In this most subtle way, they communicated an extraordinary suggestion of an inter-world

synergy between the physical body and celestial energy wherein: (a) the ribs represented the human skeletal system, the internal scaffolding holding up the human water-based body, and (b) the tree represented the cosmic nervous system, the spiritual aqueducts through which Heaven conducted the “magical” lifeforce that animated living beings on Earth. These two systems, the myth advised, were inseparable.

Consequently, embedded in Kish’s observation was the view that nature had a far more intimate relationship with humans than the other clergies had appreciated. Here was the profound revelation of the three great universal gifts the gods had bestowed upon mortals: (1) the Sacred Tree of Illumination represented the Universal Gift of Life; (2) the Spider-Weaver was the Universal Gift of Consciousness; and (3) the medicinal plants were the Universal Gift of Health. The mere existence of these gifts meant that human beings were more than just slaves made by the gods out of clay. Human beings were endowed with the divine channel of life itself. It was this inheritance that caused them to be aware of the dangers inherent in existence and connected them with the plants they needed to treat illness or injury to survive the threat of death.

THE CELESTIAL ROAD

In the middle of an observation circle erected with megalith stone markers on a raised sacred mound spirit-seers from several mountain tribes would huddle around the fire. Their arms outstretched they induced visions by repeating

incantations and consuming a euphoric elixir. Closing their eyes, their minds received the wings of flight. Quickly they entered a trance state that carried them to the starry sky above and through the gates of Heaven. Hours later their eyes opened and they shared with one another their visions of the night's journey. Returning to their tribes, these shaman allies each reported how their den roared like lions to open the sky channel. They told of shining a beam of sunlight from their mind's eye into the realm of the gods. A cheer arose from their audience when they reported having seen the God of War preparing to destroy their enemies.

In prehistoric times two major streams of tribal nations had originated in Africa some 20,000–40,000 years ago. One settled and developed its original identity in northern Africa and the southern coast of the Mediterranean where prior to the desertification of this region a lush “Green Sahara” flourished. The other group migrated from the eastern coast of Africa into Asia across the Egypt-Levant land bridge up the eastern Mediterranean coastline. They settled all around the transcontinental region across Europe and Asia, and the northern Mediterranean coast along the Aegean and Adriatic Seas.

Due primarily to a series of major climactic shifts, including rapid cooling and heating, floods and droughts, the Eurasian populations intermittently had to relocate (11000–1000 BCE). Tribal collectives moved slowly in migratory waves in a generally eastbound direction across a wide band from the European side of the Black Sea to the Steppes in Central Asia. In time, they descended from northern to southern locations crossing through a vast region from Mesopotamia

to the Indus and Ganges.

These populations shared a linguistic root identified in modern times as Indo-European. This common characteristic represents the languages of European and Central Asian tribes that evolved over time into Sanskrit, Armenian, Greek, Slavic, Persian, Hindi, English, German, and others.

At the helm of these nomadic populations were the Aryans, the spiritual descendants of the trance visionary Lion-Sun shamans. They led an amalgam of tribes on mass migrations in the direction of the rising sun. Wherever they went—as they moved from colder northwestern to warmer southeastern climates—the sun blessed them with protection. As needed, the Lion-Sun tribes coalesced into large nomad federations or spun off on their own. They either decided to camp in one place or continue on to attack civilizations they came across or to avoid populated areas. Testifying to their ancient legacy, their lion symbol representing the visionary and divining powers of their shaman-seers appeared in various guises in pre-historic Europe and in Egypt, but eventually had its greatest impact on a vast stretch between Anatolia (Turkey) and the Ganges (India).

The other major source of early religions was equally responsible for the development of language. The Afro-Asian tribes created the Semitic languages (Arabic, Aramaic, Hebrew, Ethiopian, etc.). Their shamans embraced the Moon as their primary deity and Bovines (such as Bull, Cow, Ox, and Calf) as their symbols. Their cattle-associated worship was derived from their sponsor populations—those responsible for initiating the domestication of farm animals and herding activities.

The Saharan tribes originally migrated eastward as the northern African region began to turn into a desert. The first wave entered Egypt where they merged with other tribes that had migrated from the southern portion of the Nile up along the east coast of Africa. Massive death of animals ensued as the Saharan climate continued to deteriorate over several thousand years. Waves of migrations came to settle in Egypt or continued through it and across the continental land bridge into Western Asia, venturing into Arabia, the Levant, and Mesopotamia.

Due to a cataclysmic and intermittent Great Freeze (10000–8000 BCE) the Lion-Sun stream moved into Central Asia from Europe, and the Bull-Moon worshippers entered Central Asia from Africa. Both shaman traditions provided the underlying mythic legacy inherited by Egyptian and Sumerian religions and other cultures as migrations expanded.

Both shared a common penchant for the exploration of celestial movements. They subscribed to a common view that the celestial bodies appeared and departed routinely through the opening and closing of unmarked celestial gates on the horizon.

The shamans identified divine order by observing the regularity with which the sun and moon tracked across the sky dome. They used ritual mounds and circular monoliths as axial entry points and observatories to measure seasonal progressions and astral events. With the establishment of settlements priests took these prehistoric celestial practices to the next level—developing the skills required to read the sky like a book.

The Sumerians had invented a rudimentary form of geometric mathematics and a glyphic marking system with which they painstakingly charted the patterns in the sky. Their three Celestial Gods of Light— Moon, Sun, and Stars— complemented the Elemental World-Gods—the Sky, Earth, and Waters. In the gender-based language of mythic personalization each trinity of gods was composed of two males and one female each.

The Moon was the astral father. The Sun and Stars were his progeny. Accordingly, the Moon God, Nannar (Akk. *Sin*), appeared first from the union of the Lord of the Sky (Enlil) and the Lady of the Air and Wind (Goddess Ninlil). He provided the first light in the dark Universe when the world emerged. Then, the Moon God and the Great Lady Goddess of the Delta (Ningal) begot a son, the Sun God, Utu (Akk. *Shamash*), and a daughter, the Goddess Innana, derived from the Sumerian Nin-Anna “Queen of the Stars” (Akk. *Ishtar*).

The city-state of Ur worshipped the Moon (Nannar), wise father of the celestial gods, at the Great Ziggurat of Ur (2600–2400 BCE). They practiced astronomical observations in conjunction with priestess-led rituals in praise of the waning and waxing phases of the Moon. Nannar, his long lapis lazuli beard a symbol of the starry night sky, was depicted riding a winged bull portraying the moon’s ability to fly and to cause fertility. From full to crescent to full again, the monthly rhythm of the moon aligned with the female cycle of fertility, which the “Bull of Heaven“ (Enlil) would use to know the right time for conception. With this power of regeneration Nannar regulated the seasons and the timing cycles, from seed to harvest.

The city-state of Sippar dedicated itself to the rising sun (Utu). Their Sun-God religion celebrated the open “channel” between Heaven and Earth through the sun’s rising from and receding into the Cosmic Mountain. According to Babylonian writings of the pre-Great Flood era, the lifetime of Sippar’s patriarch king and chief priest Enmen-durana had reached 365 years of age, a number equal to the days the sun traversed in one year.

The city-state Uruk bowed to the stars in the form of its patron goddess Innana. She was associated with the planet Venus¹⁶ in its aspect as evening and morning star. The planet was deemed to be the ruler of the stars. Personified as an independent female, her bright, dominant station in the sky led to her distinction as the Queen of the Stars. Because innumerable stars crossed her path in the heavenly dome she was depicted as having many star-consorts. Linked both to love and war, in mythic terms, she represented ambivalence. Regarded as a universal seductress (i.e., goddess of love) and jealous vixen (i.e., goddess of war), in the evening she could be a loose woman with numerous casual partners, but, in the morning, she might awaken in a nasty mood. Her popularity was due primarily to the intensity of her passion. People admired in her nature the intense desire for growth, abundance, harvest, and the healing power of love.

Whereas earlier seers used only their internal telescopes to observe the works and intentions of the gods, stargazing priests began to study the movements of celestial bodies in determining how the divine powers would dispense destinies. Combining visionary trances with celestial observations they made a critical decision about what they were looking at.

They assumed that the sky was like a clay tablet for the gods to write on and that the patterns they observed were a form of writing containing divinely inscribed messages. Secondly, they concluded that by repeatedly studying and recording the outcomes of social events in relation to celestial positions and alignments, they would be able to decipher and predict the intentions of the gods. Sumerian kings employed them to interpret omens written in the stars and foresee favorable or unfavorable outcomes, align with divine timing, and anticipate downturns or upturns.

By collecting data about historical events and matching them to astral charts they arrived at the Doctrine of Cycles. From the cyclical phases of the moon to the repeated patterns of human behavior, the identification of cycles became the basis for divination readings. But, in actuality, the astrological oracles whispering in the ears of kings, still relied substantially on the ancient arts of clairvoyance and intuition to interpret the meanings, intentions, and destinies written in the stars.

READINGS

Divination priests were in high demand for readings. It fell upon them to advise kings on political matters and military decisions, as well as social, religious and economic considerations, such as the appropriate time to go to war, build a temple, hold a ceremony, trade with a neighbor, or order plantings.

If they divined that the king would be in danger, they would send a substitute to take his place, usually a prisoner.

After the switch, if an attempt was made on a king's life, the imposter would be the victim, and the ruler would be safe. Both the ability to anticipate events and the duty to protect kings belonged exclusively to the stargazing priests. This responsibility had been handed down among royal advisors in Mesopotamia for more than a millennium.

The public also relied on priests for divinations. Most people were pious worshippers. They offered supplicant prayers, displays of reverence, and submissive prostrations before their idols. They worshipped with the understanding that blessings would come as a result of harmoniously synchronizing life with the intentions of the gods.

Fearing injury or poor health, they called on neighborhood priests to chant incantations that would ward off demons, hired them for healing rituals or sought to fix chaos-producing misalignments with the divine. Ceremonies of repentance designed to expiate the consequences of regrettable actions were offered as the means for surviving the wrath of Heaven.

For personal readings, priests might apply the skills of divination to the inspection of a sacrificial sheep or goat's liver. This spot, believed to be the housing for the soul, would be the gate where a god may enter. Markings on the liver combined with celestial clues would be diagnosed and used to decipher messages from the divine. Less expensive forms of divinations were offered as well, including interpretations of smoke rising from incense or readings of oil patterns in water.

Priest healers had developed an understanding of internal organs working with human cadavers and sacrificial

animals. Consequently, they ably conducted physical examinations with an understanding of internal factors.

Therapeutic diagnosis and prognosis were based on a combination of past knowledge about the patient, the person's present symptoms, and divine conjecture as to his or her future. In conducting health evaluations they connected a person's symptoms, appearance, body temperature, skin marks, hues, and colorations to various internal organs and parts of the body, including neurological and gynecological ailments.

Prescriptions¹⁷ in the form of elixirs, bandages, creams, and pills, would be mixed to assist recovery, but the most important feature of medical care was to align the person with the cosmos. Healers sought to stimulate divine energy channels by harmonizing a person's physical system with the patterns of the cosmos.

THE SOUL OF EGYPT

The seers of the earliest Nile Delta civilizations divined a view of universal creation similar to that of Sumer. The Universe began with the union of Heaven and the liquid Primordial Cosmos giving birth to Air, Fresh Waters, Earth, and the other forces of nature. For Egypt the forward motion of existence started during the Eon at the Beginning of Time (Egy. *Zp Tpj*). The gods emerged from the universal womb of the Primordial Goddess, Nu (her name echoing the Sumerian *Nammu*), she, a dark, boundless liquid space with the consistency and qualities of silt mud. Egyptian seers envisioned creation in this way:

At the Beginning of Time, the primordial dark, muddy liquid of Nu, awoke from a lifeless stationary state, and began moving and churning. From this primeval chaos, the first God emerged, Atum,¹⁸ the self-created divine source and Creator of Existence. He fathered two sons: Ptah, the cosmic designer and God of Universal Order, and Amun, the transcendent Supreme God of All Gods. The Creator next initiated the generation of a host of Egyptian deities each fulfilling various roles of nature, representing various territories, here and beyond.¹⁹ Then, from the “Cosmic Swamp“ emerged the terrestrial mound of Earth (Egy. *Benben*) and above it loomed a galactic-size pyramid-shaped mountain, the Cosmic Mountain whose height reached to the stars.²⁰

The Creator fathered two other children: the Goddess of Rain (Tefunt) and the Air God (Shu).²¹ Then this brother and sister copulated and gave birth to the Land and Sky. The Air standing on the back of the Land (Geb) held up the Sky (Nut). Then the Land and Sky bore Isis, mother of the Underworld, protector of souls. Then the Sky let go of the Rain so her water may descend to Earth, and held up the Sun (Rae) so that sunlight would shine upon the world, thus the Goddess of Life (Hathor) was awakened. Life arose again and again as the sun was reborn each day, crossing the sky from east to west, disappearing and reappearing.

Rae and Tefunt made an abundance of sunlight and rainwater to bless the world with joy, stability and compassion.

Competing visions prompted Egypt's priestly centers to debate the creation of the world. Using symbolic language and mythic expression they embellished on or edited the roles of gods. Over a period of some 2,000 years, they produced a number of different editions of the Egyptian pantheon, not a single view. For example, the birth of the sun was related in these three myths:

A giant, waddling Blue Goose, representing the meandering Nile, made a nest upon the newly created Earth and laid a Golden Cosmic Egg. When the egg hatched, the sun arose from it and began its procession. In another version the bird laying the Golden Cosmic Egg was an ibis, representing the moon,²² thereby proposing that the moon brought forth the sun (same as Sumerian). Yet another clergy saw the birthing of the sun as an arising out of the unfolding petals of a colossal Cosmic White Lotus (Egy. *Sesen*).

As the lotus flower grew near the muddy edge of the Nile's riverbank, on a cosmic level the Giant White Lotus was deemed to be the first plant in Creation itself arising from the Primordial Waters, Nu. Therefore, it represented the first organism—the origin of *all* living things. In addition, the lotus blossom possessed a unique quality being the only self-cleaning flower in nature; therefore it denoted the purest

form of life. And as it was also the most beautiful blossom on the river, it also represented the gift of beauty from the gods. The Egyptian priests regarded the lotus as the mother of the sun and the symbol of renewal. At night its petals would close and sink underwater until dawn, when in response to the sun, they would rise above the water and again open wide to receive the light.

While the calculus for the origin of the sun's appearance received a great deal of attention from the Egyptian clergy, the creation of human life seemed to be an afterthought. As was the case in Mesopotamia, they believed that the gods had made humans out of clay, but contrary to their neighbor's scenario in Egyptian lore human creation was not a one-time event but an ongoing creation.

Human infants were formed from Nile clay on the potter's wheel of the ram-headed god, Khnum, who held up the figurines to the Sun to transform them into flesh and blood and then inserted them into their mothers' womb. At the instant of birth another god "blew" the soul into the infant's body causing the Ka to initiate the spark of life. Each soul was made of five parts: the heart (Ib), shadow (Sheut), name (Ren), persona (Ba), and life essence (Ka).

The Ka, the vital life essence of the soul, animated the body at birth and was liberated in death whereupon it acted as a vessel to carry the deceased and his treasures to the Underworld realm. Upon the death of a pharaoh, Isis, the protector of souls, would assist the soul, like a wife would her husband. Her son Horus, the falcon-headed symbol of kingship was charged with

affirming that the soul was of royal stature, and his four sons would protect the four canopic jars containing the pharaoh's organs for reconstitution in the afterlife beyond.

The departed one's primary "soul-treasure," the Heart (Egy. *Ib*) contained emotional, mental, and physical information. It would be examined by a tribunal of gods at the court of the chief magistrate, the jackal-headed Gatekeeper of Heaven, Anubis (originally conceived as the son of the sun). The Heart of the Soul would be weighed on the balance scale of Justice against the counterweight of a feather representing Universal Truth, Harmony, and Order (aka *Maat*). Should the soul prove to be heavier, a crocodile-headed she-demon called Ammut²³ would devour it—an end to that individual. But this would never be the case for a pharaoh. When the two weights balanced well, the soul would be granted passageway on a voyage forward. A priest-guide would appear to help the soul find its way to the gate of immortality in the stars.

Even the sun had to survive the crossing of the lower Duat, the cosmic space on the underside of the world. According to funerary texts,²⁴ when Ra, the Sun God, set below the horizon in the west he turned into Kepri, brave sojourner god of the underworld. Suddenly, he would be attacked. Apep, the Serpent of Darkness, the cosmic counterforce to light, was always attempting to prevent the

sun from rising again in the east.

A soul could face three possible afterlife destinies: annihilation, rebirth, or reconstitution. Those guilty of chaos or shame would have their Soul-Hearts devoured. For good people the best outcome they could hope for was rebirth. For the pharaohs, the objective was to reach immortality. To do so it was essential that the soul's vital essence (Ka) and its persona (Ba) be kept together like a pair of wings carrying the other parts. It was imperative for a pharaoh's soul to reach the Sun God who would guide it to its final destination.

If the tomb of a deceased had been disturbed during the soul's long cosmic journey, the "essence" and the "spirit" portions of the soul could slip apart, causing it to become confused about past memories. This might result in the soul losing its way forcing it to fall back into a lower state. Rebirth was feared as a cursed fate, although not the worse. Because each Egyptian soul had a name and body, or, in other words, a singular identity, if the soul's parts separated the resulting memory loss would cause the loss of one's identity. The reincarnation of an amnesiac soul could result in a body without physical form, like that of a ghost. Without memory of self, any connection with the deceased's consciousness would end. The ghostly soul would be doomed to wallow in unfulfilled appetites in the underworld. Egyptians came to believe in a subterranean "Entombed City" populated by hungry "lost souls"—shadows of broken-hearted people who lost their minds.

The underworld was located in the underbelly of the earth. Below it was the Duat, the space surrounding the world. Its topside was the star-studded space. As long as the

Ka and Ba remained linked, the “traveling” spirit of a king could cross the maze of stars until it found its way to a gateway star. The soul would then enter through it into the heavenly dimension. Once the whole soul of a royal person arrived in the divine realm, it would “reconstitute” its human identity in an eternal divine form. All its keepsakes, treasures and comforts would likewise reconstitute to provide the reincarnated with the opulence deserving of a deity.

The Egyptians developed an elaborate process and a dangerous journey to the stars across the vast layers of the Duat in order to keep immortality difficult for anyone to reach other than those born to royalty. They regarded the stars to be intricately involved in the origin of human life, and, as such, returning to them in the afterlife was a natural course.

In observing comets or shooting stars plunging to earth, the Egyptians welcomed the arrival of “stardust” sent from the stars. They believed that the gods sent Stardust to seed life on Earth. It then turned into a kind of “clay” material that the gods used to make human beings. In the afterlife either the human stardust-body would return to the stars above or fall below into an underworld of dust.

Egyptian priest-astronomers were charged with mapping the pathways for souls to move in and out of this world. To do so they had to adjust for the movements of the celestial bodies and align the soul’s timing and destination relative to the positions of the stars and constellations, as well as the solstice, equinox, and ecliptic transits of the sun and moon. Their complex targeting and harmonic navigation process required mathematical measurements derived from sacred

geometry and the power of unseen “force fields” to propel the soul, reflecting their discovery of magnetic minerals at key locations.

Based on the Mondial Cosmology’s global alignments and astral gateways, Egypt’s religious establishments developed the concept of mummified star migrations, wherein the axial-aligned portals would be used to return the soul’s star-made essence to its original home. For proper trajectory Khufu’s Great Pyramid was configured for vertical articulation along the north-south axis. Its base was aligned with the four cardinal points (NEWS) to achieve pinpoint true north accuracy.

The priest-architect Imhotep built the first funerary step-pyramid for the Pharaoh Djoser (2667–2648 BCE) at Saqqara. This initial design echoed the Sumerian ziggurat, but its construction materials were made of solid carved blocks to stand the test of time. Concerned about the potential disturbance of the soul, Egypt continued to experiment with the shape and location of the structure. The Red Pyramid of Pharaoh Snofru (2613–2589 BCE) successfully eliminated the steps preventing the possibility of climbers scaling it. It also perfected the pyramid’s ideal axial measurements. His flat-faced pyramid was surpassed in grandeur only by his descendants, Khufu and his sons, who pursued their afterlife path to the sun and beyond in the Giza Necropolis complex (approx. 2560–2460 BCE).

The Egyptian pyramid emulated the Cosmic Mountain wherefrom the sunbeams of the rising sun would light the way for the soul as it traversed space to the stargate of Heaven. Khufu’s travel advisers designed his mega pyramid to

act like a “compass” in order to provide an accurate directional track to the stargate.

However, they were concerned about the first leg of his journey through the underworld toward the rising sun. The soul needed the sun’s help to escort it to the stars. After his death they appeared to have had some second thoughts about how well they prepared for this earlier part of his journey. The priesthood influenced Khufu’s son Djedefre, “son of the Sun God,” that his father needed additional modes of transportation to get across the underworld.

Djedefre (approx. 2530 BCE) appeared to have buried two long boats at the foot of his father’s Great Pyramid to facilitate his trip. The boats would be used on the underworld equivalent of the Nile River that ran through the tunnel the Sun God used to cross the world during the night. It ran from the gate of the setting sun (where the soul entered the underworld) to the gate of the rising sun (where it would be launched into the stars).

Another part of the effort to insure that Khufu would not be troubled during his underworld trek may have been the reason for Djedefre to build the Sphinx. The image may have been designed to represent Khufu’s sovereignty over Anubis, the golden-jackal judge of the dead, the god of embalming, and guardian of Heaven’s gate. In the Sphinx, the depiction of Anubis, who was usually imagined in the form of a human body with a jackal head, seems to have been reversed with the lionized head of Khufu placed on the prone body of the jackal god. The Sphinx was laid exactly on the east-west axis of Giza, facing due east at the rising sun, confirming Khufu’s conquest of the underworld and the success of his solar

resurrection propelling his soul towards the stars.

Djedefre's modifications appeared to have assuaged the concerns of the priesthood. As their mission was to insure the soul's crossing, they were determined to put at a pharaoh's disposal all possible assistance for his soul to cross the underworld. As a pharaoh was too important to be challenged by the Scale of Destiny at the court of Anubis, Khufu and his entourage would sail through non-stop. Once the boats reached the sunrise gate the Sun God placed them on a beam of sunlight that carried them across space to the Orion stargate through which the pharaoh entered the realm of heavenly rebirth.

Given the potential pitfalls of such a long and arduous journey, the priesthood developed detailed navigational guidelines (*Pyramid Texts* or *Book of the Dead*) later inscribed on pyramid tombs, temple walls, and sarcophagi. Inside the burial chambers the *Pyramid Texts* provided a map of the star paths. "Accompanied" by the sun, the soul would navigate through the branches of the "Cosmic Tree" (paths to the stargate) until it reached its destination and crossed into the eternal realm beyond.

Even with the aid of the guide maps, however, the vast distance across the great divide of space was deemed to be exceedingly precarious. Therefore, as an additional guarantee for a successful crossing, during the funerary "Opening of the Mouth" ceremony, the high priest in his role as shaman-seer (Egy. *Sem*) would enter a trance state wherein he "previewed" the journey, evoked incantations for safe passage, and signaled the moment for the procession to commence.

A RACE TO THE TOP

Before Egyptians built any pyramids, the idea of a man-made Cosmic Mountain first appeared in Sumer (4000 BCE). Evolving from the prehistoric Cosmic Mountain of the shamanic Mondial Cosmology, the larger structures of the Era of Divine Architecture represented the Cosmic Mountain in the center of the world and its channel access to Heaven. Sumerian builders constructed multilevel ceremonial platforms with temples on top designed to overlook the city-state. Each of these platform towers (Sum. *ziggurat*) defined the location of an axis mundi and provided a landing base prepared to receive a patron god. Egypt first constructed (3000 BCE) similarly shaped step-pyramids (Egy. *mastaba*), but their “Houses of Eternity“ were built in remote areas of the desert. Evolved from the ancient uses of sacred mounds and megalith temples, both types of structures were deployed for reaching the heavens.

Passionately driven by a growing desire to connect with the immortals, Egyptian and Sumerian models expanded in proportion and grandeur over time. Sumer built increasingly larger ziggurats with interleaved terraces and stairways topped with a home fit for a god. Their purpose was to draw the public to worship and provide their priests with sacrificial platforms. Egyptian designs evolved into flat external surfaces sealed to keep people out and off the structure. But Egypt had an edge in engineering, building pyramids of large granite stones so they would last undisturbed and impenetrable for eternity. Sumer primarily used mud bricks and limestone.

But why was it necessary to build structures of such colossal size?

The megalithic stature of Khufu's Great Pyramid (approx. 2600 BCE) may have been the pinnacle creation of a race to the top between two kings seeking personal immortality—one headed for Heaven through soul-transport, while the other tried climbing to Heaven while he was still alive.

Khufu's counterpart, the Sumerian King of Uruk, Gilgamesh, was ruler of the largest city in the world at the time. With an estimated population between 50,000–80,000 residents Uruk was an urban magnet for people of many tribal origins speaking a variety of tongues. King Gilgamesh (approx. 2600 BCE), the legendary seeker of immortality²⁵ in Sumerian myth, had aspired to raise his city's monumental ziggurat, the Anu, "Stairway to Heaven," to its ultimate height.

Finished with white gypsum plaster, the towering ziggurat's mirror-like facings would produce a blinding reflection of sunlight. But Khufu's Great Pyramid also boasted bright reflective facings aiming its signal beams to the stars. The Great Ziggurat of Uruk and Khufu's Great Pyramid may have been designed to compete for the attention of the gods as the brightest spot on Earth.

Fourteen times, once every century or so (4000–2600 BCE), the kings of Uruk kept adding to the Anu Ziggurat widening its base and pushing it higher and higher. Perhaps due to the structural weakness of its limestone and mud-brick frame, their heavenly tower may have collapsed before Gilgamesh would see its head raised to the top. Could the

collapse of this Ziggurat have been the basis for the *Epic of Gilgamesh* wherein he climbs to the top of the Cosmic Mountain in quest of immortality—only to fail at the end? Could it also be the model for the Mesopotamian-inspired biblical story of the Tower of Babel?

If so, it would appear that Khufu won the race to immortality.

THE SUN OUTSHINES ALL

What was the origin of the Egyptian fascination with the astral plane? Nabta Playa located in the south of Egypt was a pre-historic site (10000–9000 BCE) decorated with megalith stone circles. Its thirty calendaring stone circles were measuring devices used to track celestial alignments, such as the summer solstice. To Egypt's shaman ancestors this was their celestial observatory. In particular they focused on the brightest objects in the night sky such as the megastar Sirius (Egy. *Sopdet*) or the three super-giant stars in the belt of Orion. The data collected here was later used by Egyptian clergies to develop the astral knowledge they needed to accurately direct the celestial leg of the soul's journey toward the divine gates of Heaven.

When the ancient shaman astronomers began their studies the constellation Orion was at its lowest position near the horizon. Aker, the God of the Horizon and one of Egypt's earliest deities, took the form of twin-lions. The lions represented the two ends of the day, dawn and dusk. They guarded the two peaks of the Cosmic Mountain, Manu, to the west and Bakhu in the east, thus symbolizing the cosmic

polarities of beginnings and endings. The two peaks were the location for the cosmic gates. The gates were a polar portal with three missions: (a) the east and west gates the Sun used to enter and exit the world, (b) the gates for engaging with past wisdom and future knowledge, and (c) the gates to and from the Underworld and Heaven. The twin lions were the symbol of the shamans charged with guarding the gates to the celestial knowledge of the unseen realms. With a visionary roar these lion-shamans could open the gates and peer into these remote dimensions.

In those early days of the Old Kingdom, Hathor, the bovine-faced goddess of the Nile Delta, personified the life-nurturing aspect of nature. Like Ninhursag, the Sumerian milk-giving Earth Mother, Hathor also brought forth the green pastures, inspired the domestication of the cow and the establishment of Egyptian farms. Just as the Sumerian deity had been designated the cosmic Mountain Goddess, Hathor was associated with the emergence of the galactic Cosmic Mountain, the portal to Heaven in the Egyptian creation story, thus she served to inspire the religious compulsion to build pyramids.

Memphis was located right on the bank of the Nile. A high wall designed to keep the floodwaters out surrounded the city. The dam stood as proof of their civil engineering prowess. This was the religious center of the Old Kingdom dynasty during the Age of the Pyramids. They were also the inventors of mummification for preserving the body through its journey to the divine heaven where it would be reincarnated.

Their god, Ptah, the designer, modeler, director, and

crafters of Universal Order, created the concept of a Pyramid Universe and willed it into existence with a single word. Simply by naming an idea or a god, Ptah could conjure them into being, which he did when he named the creator Atum, who built the layers of the world just as Ptah had conceived of them. Complimentary with Ptah's considerate nature and grand imagination, his lion-headed goddess consort, Sekmet, embodied inspiration, which Egyptians admired as the generative spark of the creative mind. The Memphis priesthood was first to recognize Rae, the Sun God, as the one who gave the world the light that Ptah had conjured.

Another clergy, the priest-seers in the city of Iunu (aka Heliopolis), capital of the Nile Delta (aka Goshen), embraced the Creator, Atum, the god charged with making the world. In their edition of Creation, at the Beginning of Time, after he produced all the forces and elements (that is, the other gods), Atum finished his work by merging with the God of the Midday Sun, Rae. These two gods were deemed to be interchangeable or were worshipped as the One God, Atum-Rae (Heaven-Sun).

Atum-Rae first emerged from a blue Cosmic Lotus, the color of birth and rebirth. When he became a boy he cried and his tears formed the creatures on Earth. Then Atum-Rae proceeded to create the Air and Rain and then the Land and Sky.

After the Epic Drought brought the era of pyramid constructions to a close, the Egyptian clergy erased Hathor's cow-face and morphed her into the Goddess of Beauty, Joy, and Love²⁶ although they kept her headdress of long horns

holding the Sun Disc to honor her traditional Earth Mountain role. The reformation of nature's divine personalities into more adored figures had been inspired by Egypt's new priestly cult centers. Influenced by political and popularity factors they sought to craft myths empowering their favorite deities to respond to wider audiences.

The scribes of the priesthood of Khmun (aka Hermopolis), located between the Upper (south) and Lower (north) sections of the Nile Delta, developed a pre-creation pantheon named the Ogdoad, featuring four pairings of frog-gods and snake-goddesses. Together the four frog-snake couples represented the elements of creation endowed within the imperceptible, mysterious, boundless, and chaotic Primordial Cosmos—the original dark ocean of space. Their patron god was the ibis-headed Thoth, the god of scribes, initiator of knowledge, magic, healing, and writing. He provided the world with the wisdom and power of stability, thereby preventing its collapse back into the primal state of endless chaos. Originally conceived of as the God of the Moon, Thoth had laid the Cosmic Egg that hatched the Sun. Because of his role as the igniter of the celestial light bodies illuminating the day and night, he was also hailed as the God of Justice, the illuminator of Truth. Using his knowledge and wisdom about darkness and light to arbitrate disputes, Thoth gave his clergy the mantel of judicial power in a decentralized Egypt following the Pyramid Age.

But it was the priesthood of Thebes (aka Waset) who would dominate religion in the Middle Kingdom (2100–1800 BCE) and New Kingdom (1500–1000 BCE). Their temples at Luxor and Karnak in the southern part of Upper Egypt

heralded their patron champion, Amun, the transcendent Supreme God of All Gods, described as the self-created universal force hidden behind all phenomena.

His all-encompassing scope reached from the heavens above the sky to the low realm of the underworld. He was the One who made the First Sound that broke the stillness of the Nu, propelling the Beginning of Time and causing the world to form. Amun embodied the unseen essence, nature, and scope of the Divine Mystery in that he was concealed even from the other gods.

As the era of the Epic Drought finally came to an end, and the Nile rains returned to normal, the country experienced an economic recovery. Thebes claimed credit for realigning the land with divine order. But by this time a weakened Egypt had broken apart. Foreigners²⁷ entered its lands in the north, as the pharaonic system collapsed in favor of territorial governors. The Thebes clergy held their own in the south, but desperately sought a way back to national glory by again unifying Egypt under a pharaoh.

To bring Egypt back together again they merged the invisible god Amun with the visible Sun-God Rae. Amun-Rae declared Egypt to be the manifestation of divine purpose and claimed his dominance over the pantheons of other patron-god centers in Egypt. When the pharaohs re-established their sovereign primacy and unified Egypt's many gods under one roof, it was Thebes that ruled the day.

After the Age of the Epic Drought had finally passed the

clergy gained strength by wisely expanding the accessibility of immortality in the afterlife to wealthy governors, powerful individuals, and, in time, even made it available to ordinary people. Because they were willing to make religion more inclusive, influential families could purchase their way to afterlife glory.

They reorganized the gods into families to reflect the mainstreaming of Egyptian religion. Some gods were killed off and replaced with new gods, a few were promoted to higher status, others were reconceived, and several deities were syncretized into one. During this period, most Egyptian cults agreed to merge the Sun God with their favored patron deities, indicating the importance of the sun's role in the present and the afterlife. His power to light the way to the stars and to bring forth days was the essential element for existence, without which the world would fall into never-ending darkness, and all souls would fall into the abyss of doom.

The Amun-Rae reformers replaced Anubis with Osiris, signaling their willingness to grant access to the immortal realm to a much wider audience. As the new judge of the underworld, Osiris would be more compliant and forgiving, willing to let souls of good law-abiding citizens go through on their voyage towards immortality. Thereafter, people would be allowed to aspire to eternal life if only they passed the test of moral fortitude and made positive contributions to social harmony. These Egyptians enjoyed life but believed in an easier one awaiting them in a heavenly afterlife, if they could get there, that is. Henceforth, anyone contributing to the harmony of Egyptian life or living a "clean" life free from the

stains of pernicious behaviors, could hope for a chance at immortality.

The clergy of Thebes promoted the god Amun-Rae as a nearly monotheistic deity, with all other divinities considered mere aspects of him. But his dominance was challenged during the reign of Akhenaten (1352–1336 BCE), a pharaoh who decided that it was time for Egyptians to truly embrace only One Immortal God. Akhenaten (aka Amenhotep IV) established a pseudo-monotheistic religion banishing all gods but one—the Sun Disc God, Aten. He abandoned the Amun-Rae center at Thebes where he had resided with his queen, and built a new capital and religious center at Amarna (pop. 20,000).

Akhenaten and his wife Nefertiti were designated as the earthly manifestations of the god Aten and his cohort goddess. Ordering massive idols to be erected in their image meant that they would be worshipped as living gods. With the death of Akhenaten, the Amun-Rae clergy of Thebes, much offended but never more powerful, reclaimed their dominant role in Egypt's religious establishment. Immediately they ordered the obliteration of Amarna and its "God" from historical records. Although during Akhenaten's reign Egypt stretched as far north as Syria, his religious experiment had drained the nation's treasury leaving it too weak to hold on to its occupied states. After this episode, Egypt became more insulated. As the golden days of its religious creativity dimmed, its clergy became more bureaucratic. Increasingly, they focused on providing ritual functions and social services.

IN SEARCH OF IMMORTALITY

Egypt's priests had no qualms about the deification of pharaohs as living gods with an immortal destiny, but the Sumer/Akkad clergy resisted the idea of royal immortality. Declaring themselves as the Sons of Gods, they held fast to the notion that the gods were not and never could be human beings. They believed that to acquiesce to the demands of kings to be given the full stature of immortal gods would bring the wrath of heaven upon them all. Reflecting their position on this matter, they wrote the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, about a tyrannical, self-centered ruler based on the legendary King of Uruk²⁸ and his quest for immortality. Although he was born a demigod—one-third human, two-thirds divine—he was haunted by the looming prospect of his ultimate demise. Undertaking an adventurous quest to obtain immortality he traveled up and through the Cosmic Mountain into the celestial lands, but at the end he failed to achieve his purpose. Unable to undo the inevitability of death he returned to his city a wiser and kinder man reconciled with his mortal destiny.

In the beginning of the story Gilgamesh befriended a hairy wild man, Enkidu, whom the Earth Mother (Ninhursag) had placed in the earthly Paradise (Dilmun), an area to the east of Uruk. Enkidu may have represented primitive peoples living in the beautiful wilderness east of Sumer but west of the Indus civilization at Harrapa (4000–2000 BCE). The Harrapans were a serene, non-threatening, culturally-advanced people. They lived near the Saraswati River, a long lost river²⁹ that once ran parallel with the Indus from the Himalayas to the Arabian Sea.

The Indus-Saraswati civilization was Sumer's source for

lapis lazuli stones. Its planned cities featured wide streets, public buildings and baths, reservoirs and wells, three-story brick homes with bathrooms, sewer and drainage systems, and beautiful art and jewelry. Clearly, the lush river valley (prior to the Epic Drought), gems, and demeanor of the graceful Harappan culture made for the ideal model of Dilmun, mythologized as the Paradise of the Gods. The Sumerian legends populated the beautiful forests of Dilmun with two kinds of people, innocent-wild primitives and advanced-civil beings, indicative of two co-existing human cultures representing the past and the future.

The relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu started with the king attempting to lure the primitive man out of Paradise:

The tale opened with citizens of Uruk accusing the uncivilized Enkidu of interfering with their hunting activities, prompting their clever king Gilgamesh to send a prostitute to seduce him. After their sexual encounter she was able to lure Enkidu out of his paradise. Exposed to civilized Sumerian society, Enkidu gained knowledge that awakened an awareness of his own nakedness.

Through this character the writers of the myth made a historical observation regarding the changing landscape of human cultures evolving from hunter-gatherer tribes to urban-centric farming civilizations, therein prophesying an end for humanity's primitive past.

Gilgamesh required excellent lumber for a tower

he was building in his city. Needing the assistance of a strong man, he struck up a friendship with Enkidu and together they embarked for the Cedar Forest (in Lebanon). But to acquire the lumber they would have to defeat the protector of the forest, a ferocious dinosaur-like guardian (Akk. *Huwawa* or *Humbaba*). With the help of the Sun God (Sum. *Utu*) Gilgamesh unleashed eight powerful winds³⁰ that subdued the Forest Monster. Although he begged for his life, Gilgamesh and Enkidu showed no mercy and killed the beast. Next they cut down the cedar trees and sent them back to Uruk.

But certain gods were upset with the murder. They blamed Enkidu for an unjustified killing, and as a result he fell gravely ill. On the verge of death, he told Gilgamesh of a dream he had about a terrible fate that awaited all deceased humans. In his haunting vision he had descended into a barren netherworld located below the underground waters. There he was able to look into the “House of Dust,” literally a dead-end where all mortals ended up in the afterlife. Even past kings and priests were there, as they were doomed along with ordinary people and criminals alike to live out the afterlife as ghosts with their appetites still in tact, but with nothing to eat but dust and clay. Enkidu died haunted by the fear of this place in his eyes.

Deeply shaken by his friend’s desperate

death, Gilgamesh suddenly became fully aware of his own mortality, and for the first time he experienced his own vulnerability. Feelings of anxiety, grief, and fear of impending death gnawed at him. Determined to avoid Enkidu's fate he embarked on a perilous odyssey in search of everlasting life.

Distraught by Enkidu's afterlife scenario, Gilgamesh decided to use his demigod powers to obtain immortality. He determined to climb to the summit of the Cosmic Mountain, and ask the gods for entry into Heaven.

In the Sumerian/Akkadian cosmogony, the Cosmic Mountain, Mashu ("twin-mountain"), featured a pair of peaks representing eastern and western horizons. Like its Egyptian counterparts, Manu and Bakhu, the two peaks represented the gates between Earth and the unseen worlds. In the evening the sun existed through the western gate and descended through the underworld tunnel until it reached the eastern gate at sunrise. Although these two horizon gates were bolted shut, at dawn and dusk they opened to allow the celestial body to pass. To insure that they worked properly, Sumerian temple centers conducted rituals focused on opening the gates when the sun needed to complete its intended journey. Above these gates, at the celestial summit of Mashu was Heaven's Gate, believed to be the portal for the immortal gods.

At the highest level of the Cosmic Mountain (Akk. *Mashu*), Gilgamesh would seek there the wise counsel of Utnapishtim, priest of the Sun God.

After he had saved his family and a variety of animals from a great deluge that covered the world, the Gods had led Utnapishtim and his wife (priestess of the Stars), the only survivors of the Great Flood, to dock their vessel at the top of the Cosmic Mountain.³¹ For their heroism the Sumerian gods had granted the couple the gift of immortality, an exclusive one-time honor they had not bestowed on any other mortal, but not entry into Heaven.

Gilgamesh, determined to find Utnapishtim, had embarked on a perilous journey no one else had ever attempted. He would face a host of dangers on his quest. Coming to the mouth of a long tunnel that was the night path of the sun under the world mountain, he encountered scorpion-men, guards of the Sun gate. They finally relented to let him go through tunnel. After twelve hours in total darkness and bitter cold he emerged from it into the Garden of Celestial Lights, an orchard of jewel-bearing trees brightened with the fruit of lapis lazuli, carnelians, and odier precious gems.

Believing at first that he had reached Heaven, he soon discovered that there was still further to go. Coming to the bank of the River of Fatal Waters he met there a priest with a ferryboat. The priest warned him that the waters of this river would turn flesh to stone. Undeterred, he engaged the priest to bring him across. On the other side

Gilgamesh arrived at the abode of the immortal one he so keenly sought.

Upon meeting with Utnapishtim he implored him for liberation from the ghostly destiny that awaited everyone in the world below. Reluctantly, Utnapishtim gave Gilgamesh a chance to achieve his goal. He would have to avoid sleep for seven nights, and if he did so he would be awarded immortality. But in spite of a valiant effort to stay awake, haggard as he was from his arduous journey, Gilgamesh fell asleep.

Feeling sorry for him, Utnapishtim decided to give Gilgamesh a second chance to regain his youth. Unfortunately, outwitted by a snake, Gilgamesh fell short in this task as well. After diving to retrieve the Plant of Regeneration (Cosmic Lotus) rooted in the deep lakebed floor, and bringing it to the surface, Gilgamesh took his eyes off the plant. As he washed off the mud stuck to his body, a serpent (i.e., a cloud) stole the plant. Consequently, a humbler Gilgamesh returned to Uruk empty-handed, resigned to live out his life with compassion for all mortals.

Through this myth the Sumer/Akkad clergy declared that rulers, no matter how powerful—even those recognized as demigods—were not immune from aging or death. All mortal beings must accept that only the gods possessed the elusive prize of eternal life. Humans made of clay would return to the dusty, gloomy, and barren Sumerian netherworld. They would live as ghosts (Sum. *Gidim*; Akk.

Ettemu) with their lifetime memories, personalities, and desires kept intact. The ghosts, although they had departed the physical domain, would still be able to peer into the living world. But watching the living eat and drink, they would again crave real food. Therefore, family and friends, in consideration for their deceased loved ones, would make nutritional offerings at funerary services and memorial ceremonies. Otherwise, they feared, the forgotten and neglected hungry ghosts may haunt the living, and enraged ghosts, those who met with violent ends, might cause infections or foster mayhem.

Through the specter of the afterlife underworld the clergy sought to communicate a fear of death and a greater appreciation for life. Death had no redeeming value, and, as such, one should try to live as long as possible. On the other hand, the gods had placed mortals in a colorful living paradise bestowed with the extraordinary gifts of nature. Even though people struggled with hardships, the greatest gift was the divine prize of life.

In Mesopotamia the clergy managed to deny immortality to their kings, but they did so at their peril as the issue would arise and again. When the Akkadians descended like locusts into the Fertile Crescent (2334 BCE) their king, Sargon of Akkad (aka Sargon the Great of Agade), demanded to be recognized as a god. The Sumerian clergy explained that they only had the power to honor him as a demigod. Referring to the *Epic of Gilgamesh* they showed that even the greatest king the world had ever known could not achieve immortality.

Accepting the sober advice, Sargon anointed himself High Priest of Heaven and Sky, making him the first king to

head the clergy. His daughter, Enheduanna (2285–2250 BCE), became high priestess of the Heaven and Moon at the Temple Ziggurat of Ur. She composed a suite of incantations and hymns³² to honor the host of gods and their various Temple Ziggurats. In her poetry she claimed for herself the role of spiritual consort of the Moon God whose generative power inspired creativity and the destructive power to smite one's enemies.

Sargon's autocratic reign lasted for sixty years. After his passing, the territorial scope of the Akkadian Dynasty was reduced and its grip on Sumer slowly weakened. While in decline Sargon's royal bloodline held on until its collapse when the centuries-long Epic Drought caused a mass exodus from the cities.

The economic and religious collapse of the Sumer/Akkad city-states left them vulnerable to the ensuing invasion by the Gutti tribe. They came from the east descending like a tidal wave from the northern region of the Zagros Mountains (Iran). They destroyed the defenseless cities, trampled farms, raided temples and looted precious objects of worship.

BABYLON'S GOD

The three-hundred-year Epic Drought that began in the 22nd century BCE had collapsed the food production system and brought down the deities of Mesopotamia and Egypt, and with them the kings, pharaohs and the clerical establishments. The contract between the divine and humanity had been broken. Who would be held accountable?

Eventually, slowly, as the seasonal cycle of rains

returned, the restoration of political and economic stability required religious reformation. A new social contract would have to be drawn, one that would rebuild confidence in the ability of the religious class to get the cooperation needed from the divine. To prove that they had the skills, the reformers placed more emphasis on the use of “magic.” They conjured items from thin air, claimed to have achieved miraculous cures, and took credit for returning the rains to their normal state.

Back in the time before the Epic Drought, from among the “thousand gods” suddenly the God of Farming and Fertility, Telepinu,³³ went missing. As a result, all of fertility failed. Plants and animals died, while humans and gods both appeared helpless. Without the seasonal rains, chaos and devastation spread and people abandoned their lands.

The gods searching everywhere could not locate Telepinu, until one goddess sent a bee to look for him. The bee found him sound asleep. To wake him the bee stung Telepinu. Aroused in pain, he became furious. Enraged he unleashed windstorms and sandstorms that destroyed settlements, dried or diverted rivers. The climate went from bad to worse.

Eventually, a sage-healer stepped in and used magic. He extracted the raging spirit from Telepinu and cast the god’s anger into metal containers located in the underworld where they

would remain sealed forever. Finding calmness again, Telepinu came to his senses and restored the rains. Thus the rivers began to flow, vegetation returned, and the world was blessed again with natural fertility.

Change was in the air. Reform was needed, but rebuilding and restoration would require stability. The Fertile Crescent had been run over by marauders, the result of migrations caused by the Epic Drought. But among the new cultures coming into the region one nation had the leadership needed at that time.

The Amorites, a sheep-herding nomadic collective, probably of southeastern Central Asian origin, had migrated west along the southern coast from the Indian Ocean through to the deserts of southwest Asia (Saudi Arabian peninsula). Next they turned north and entered the Levant where they subsumed the local Afro-Asian tribes and established a new homeland, Amurru. They settled on a stretch from the Canaanite low lands to the Syrian mountains, bordering on the northwest corner of Sumer/Akkad. Following the Epic Drought, they expanded their territory by circling back into the Tigris-Euphrates region. They took what had been Sumer/Akkad and founded there a new capital city they named Babylon (1894 BCE), the Gate of God, and thus established the first Babylonian Empire.

Under the rule of Emperor Hammurabi (aka *Hammurepi*), a shrewd king who admired administration and a well-functioning bureaucracy, the Amorites restored order and built a stable and dynamic new society. Amorite Babylonia adopted the oral language of Akkad for civil uses, but it kept

the written Sumerian language (Cuneiform) for the articulation of sacred myths, ritual ceremonies, astronomical recordings, and social laws. As the climate finally returned to normal, Hammurabi was able to address economic, social, familial and criminal matters. The king established a secular Law Code absent religious dictums. It was primarily designed to restore economic stability addressing the rules for contracts, appropriate wages and inheritances, and the processing of justice.

Although the clergy regarded his Laws to have been received from the Sun God (Shamash), they depicted him as its divine administrator. But Hammurabi was uncomfortable with a reliance on the Sumer/Akkad Gods. He was suspicious of the power their clergy had exerted over past kings, and the control they had imposed on the economic management of the city-states prior to the Epic Drought.

Particularly aggravating to him was the pivotal Gilgamesh myth, which appeared to be insulting to his Amorite ancestors. He may have viewed the primitive and wild characterization of Enkidu as elitist because of its depiction of “eastern people” as uncivilized. The old clergy seeking to reassure him that they had reformed, and could be trusted, submitted a sequel to the original epic to offer a clarification about immortality. Again they turned to a demigod character, but this time their hero was a wise seer, not a king like Gilgamesh. Adapa, the likeable mortal son of the compassionate Water God Enki, they proposed, had brought the creative arts to Sumer from the “eastern paradise” (Dilmun). The tale credited the cultures to the east as the source of beauty and talent received from the gods.

This analogy, showing that the priests acknowledged the “eastern people” as an advanced culture, may have been intended as an apology to the Amorites. However, by the time of this writing the Epic Drought had dried the Saraswati River forcing the glorious Harappan culture to abandon its home. Nevertheless, the myth showed respect for the superior legacy of the original Indus civilization.

At the same time, to the north of Amorite Babylonia, seers of Arya tribes were proposing that they could attain immortality. Concerned about this trend, the former clergy of Sumer/Akkad, having banned the old kings from achieving immortality, had to assure the new authorities that they were not eyeing that lofty goal for themselves. Through the story of Adapa, the once mighty priests of Mesopotamia now attempted to assuage the suspicions of the Amorite Babylonian King.

Once when Adapa took out his fishing boat, the South Wind tried to overturn it. In defending himself he broke the wing of the Wind Goddess, Ninlil, the consort of Enlil. For this crime he was called to account before the God of Heaven, Anum. Preparing him for his hearing his father, the God of Water, Enki, advised him to be truly sincere in his apology and also warned him that if he was served any food, not to eat it, for it might be the Food of Death. After speaking with Adapa in person and being truly impressed by his humility, the God of Heaven instead offered him the Meal of Immortality. However, following his father’s advice, Adapa declined to eat and humbly passed

on his chance for everlasting life, for it could have been poison.³⁴

The myth was a warning. Be careful what you ask for. Immortality could be a poison. Chasing it was an illusion that could make a person lose their mind. This point of view was meant to assure the Babylonians that the seers were aware of this trap. But the myth could not dissuade the new government from holding the old gods and their clergy responsible for their epic failure to protect the world from cataclysmic drought. Hammurabi wanted fundamental religious reform and a new contract between religion and his imperial rule. He wanted a new Babylonian clergy and called upon it to clean house.

The Babylonian religion would retire the aloof God of Heaven (*Anum*) and have him pass the torch to a successor: the new chief God of the Gods, Marduk, the patron God of Babylon City. With this move the Amorite Babylonians asserted their religious dominance over other city-states represented by the Annunaki, including the gods of the past. With Marduk raised to Supreme God status they designed a new divine infrastructure that mirrored the dominance of Babylonian rule from the Mediterranean to the Zagros.

The new Babylonian religion issued a revised Creation Story recorded in the Seven Tablets of Creation, the *Enuma Elis*:

In it the Babylonians declared the Lord God (Akk. *Bel*) of Babylon to be Marduk and ordered him to defeat the primordial Sumerian deities who were responsible for withholding water from the world.

The Sumerian account featured two kinds of giant water dragon-snakes (*Nagas*), the male Fresh Waters (*Abzu*) and the female Salt Waters (*Tiamat*). These "Titan Beasts" had produced many of the immortal gods. But, according to the tablets, Abzu complained that their offspring made too much noise, and became agitated. After obsessing about it, he finally decided to kill the children. The gods, learning of his intention, plotted to rid themselves of their titanic parents.³⁵ The God of Sweet Waters (Sum. *Enki*; Akk. *Ea*) captured the wild Abzu and put him to sleep in an underworld lair. Thus he created still waters that forever more would be accessible through wells and lakes allowing living things to quench their thirst.

In this edition, the victorious God of Sweet Waters was also the father of Marduk, the god of Babylon. Thereafter the Assembly of Gods (*Annunaki*) called upon Marduk to slay the wild dragon Goddess of the Salt Waters (*Tiamat*). She was responsible for sinking boats by causing deadly destructive storms and high ocean waves. She symbolized the unbridled, wild state of Nature.

Her monstrous visage scared off even the God of Heaven (*Anum*) when he sought to retrieve from her the stolen Tablet of Destiny (Sum. *Dup Shimati*)—upon which the destiny of the world was inscribed. Whoever held the tablet controlled the fate of existence. The Sky God Enlil would consult

it before dispensing the predetermined destinies. But it had fallen into the hands of Tiamat who had sent a giant bird, Imdugud, to steal it.

Marduk armed himself with twelve weapons he would use to repel her army led by twelve ominous creatures, symbolizing the twelve months of the year. Riding his sun-chariot, he brought the light of wisdom to battle against her and her demons. Although the gods were immortal, they feared one unspeakable caveat—the power of one god to harm or kill another. The *Enuma Elis* now invoked this power by declaring that Marduk killed Tiamat and retrieved the Tablet of Destiny. He also captured and disarmed the twelve creatures at her beck and call, thus making the world safe year-round.

To complete the test of Marduk's credentials to take the helm of the pantheon, the Assembly of Gods ordered him to destroy the Universe and then reconstitute it in a new form using only the power of his Word.³⁶ This he did causing the world to evaporate upon his command. Next Marduk refashioned a new cosmogony from the parts of Tiamat that he tore into pieces. From half of Tiamat's body he recreated the astral paradise ("Bright House of Heaven") and the netherworld ("House of Dust") and from the other half he recreated the Earth. From her head he crafted the mountains; from her spit he conjured rainclouds; and from the water in her eyes he made the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

Why did Marduk rip Tiamat apart?

This act may be read as a rejection by the Babylonian clergy of the Sumerian female priestesses, such as those dedicated to the worship of the Moon God (Sum. *Nannar*; Akk. *Sin*). The new clergy identified Sinners, the Moon Worshipers, with chaos and darkness, a view tied to stories of corruption and sexual depravity associated with the Sumer/Akkad clergy prior to its fall. The killing and dismembering of Tiamat suggested that the all-male Marduk clergy held the priestesses responsible for the Epic Drought. Tiamat's portrayal as a dangerous female dragon expressed their disdain for women priestesses. They considered the nature of women to be sensual and mercurial, which they equated with destabilizing the proper worship of the gods. By killing her they symbolically erased the entire lineage of gods and spirits who had been her progeny. With that action the blame for the Epic Drought had been placed on the feminine aspect of nature represented by women whom the new priests equated with undermining the stability and order of society.

The underlying message delivered herein would have profound consequences for generations to come. From this point forward, for millennia, male-dominated societies would spread forth from Babylon. Built on the premise that "women must be controlled to prevent them from creating chaos," this gender bias expanded. Henceforth, the inclusion of the "weaker sex" in leadership positions would be limited, especially in regard to religious institutions. Religious dogma demanded that men must take charge of women because they were too weak to harness their inherent nature on their own.

From this point forward, Babylon declared that the male form would be depicted as the source from which all gods emanated. Marduk was the new model for deities, no longer born of intercourse between male and female gods. He was called upon to display the superior strength and mental toughness of the divine male-source who recreated the cosmos.

Marduk, the newly established Almighty God, went forth to redesign the sky sectioning it into twelve constellations of stars. By doing away with the old cosmos he proved that he could make stars disappear at dawn and by creating a new Heavenly dome he showed that he could make them reappear at dusk. He also assigned the stars three paths and appointed the three overseer gods of Heaven, Earth, and Waters (Anum, Enlil and Enki), now demoted to his underlings, as their guides. He also designated three primary stars³⁷ to the twelve constellations, honoring the three kingdoms encompassed by the Babylonian Empire. But the three lands also had a symbolic meaning that proposed a revolutionary cosmic idea: in every direction of astral space there were other “planets,” each with a triple-tier structure like this one—each with its own Heaven, Earth and Underworld. This meant that Marduk was the God of the Universe.

Having established a new imperial cosmos and a new hierarchical natural order, Marduk next added humanity to

the Earth world. Inviting his wise father, the Water God, to create the first man called Lullu out of blood and bone, he then instructed Man to proliferate his kind so that the gods may have a reliable partner in maintaining the stability of world order, ever vigilant of the threats to it by the demonic forces of disorder.

To celebrate his victory and the establishment of a new cosmic order, Marduk built the Esagila, a towering temple in the midst of Babylon. At the “Gate of God” he gathered all the gods around him and appointed them to various stations in Heaven. To complete the reformation hundreds of new younger gods (Akk. *igigi*) surrounded Marduk and showered him with praise. They lauded him with fifty-one honorary names, including sole recognition of the holy title Lord God (*Bel*), which associated him with the largest of the planets Jupiter³⁸ (Sum. *Nibiru*), and conferred upon him many more reverent epithets, salutations and appellations. In concert, all the gods, both old and new, took their place in the Esagila rotunda (representing Marduk’s Universe) and pledged their eternal allegiance. Finally, Marduk declared that all the gods had emanated from Him³⁹ putting an end to the creation of gods by sexual means.

With the ascension of Marduk the Hammurabi reign would be backed by an authoritative, almighty and fair Supreme God capable of creating, with the power to

deconstruct or recreate the Universe at will with a mere Word. He was the master enabler and Prime Mover of all Nature, and the Universal Lawmaker, bringer of order to Heaven, Earth, and the Underworld.

The grandeur of Marduk's new ziggurat temple at Esagila, and the scope of his legions testified to his supremacy and commanding authority, and by association, reflected equal attributes upon the Babylonian king, Hammurabi, the earthly host of the dominion of the King of the Universe, and the builder of Esagila.

But keeping hold on his vast territory would prove to be challenging. Having invaded his neighbors, Elam (southern Iran), located to the east of Babylon, and Assyria to the northwest, he would have to spend the rest of his days engaged with the expansion and defense of the Babylonian Empire. Hammurabi's effort to dominate his neighbors and to rein in lawlessness required that he go to war continually to keep numerous tribes from invading parts of his large domain.

MOUNTAIN LIONS

Metaphor-embedded messages had been the vehicle seers used for advancing various cosmic and ontological concepts in an ever-evolving debate. Their "dream" literature recorded their engagements about the origins, challenges and meanings of life. But the ability of seers to produce new mythic visions waned among the city-state clergy just as a new wave of nomad visionaries were delving deeper into the cosmic realm.

The Lion-Sun shamans (Aryans) from Eurasia had been conversing with the deities for thousands of years. They represented the religious beliefs of many tribal traditions, including the Hittites, Mitanni, and proto-Steppes People. The Aryan sages were at the vanguard of a federation of hundreds of tribes carrying with them numerous ancestral traditions and many god or spirit names. This amalgam of sages fostered a tolerance for all deities numbering more than a thousand.

Starting with the Epic Drought hundreds of Arya-led tribes migrated in waves along a west-to-east swash across Eurasia (39°–40° N. parallel) from Eastern Europe to the Black Sea across to the Caspian Sea and the Steppes. They moved on wheels drawn by oxen and horses. Driving across vast regions they searched for lands to exploit, whether they were open or required conquest.

On the way they encountered the Amorite Babylonians and other Mesopotamians and learned about their religions. Beginning in earnest from 1650 BCE to 1450 BCE they drove southward settling along north central to south central Asia in Greater Aryana (today Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and India).

Like all established religions of their time, the Lion-Sun Fellowship also inherited a vital version of the Mondial Cosmology, as well as a rich mystic language, Sanskrit. Holding ceremonies around the worship of fire the Lion-Sun seers composed poetic hymns replete with cosmic concepts proposed by their active trance-visionary shaman culture. The Aryan shamans were engaged in an ongoing

identification of deities and conversations.

Eventually when they reached the Indus Valley, they unveiled their cosmology in the collected hymns of the Rig Veda, a composition of their journey to paradise. At the beginning, they worshipped a pantheon of solar gods who lived along the upper reaches of Meru, the Cosmic Mountain of the Arya sages, including:

Mitra, the God of Heavenly Light, who binds the world using the sun's illumination to bring harmonious order

Varuna, the God of the Moving Sky who oversees the sun's travel at night through the Underworld, and the regulation of Nature, Earth and the Waters, Mitra's complementary counterpart

The solar twins, **the Nasatya**, representing the heat of the sun and its elemental fire in the ceremonial altar

Indra, the Lord of the Sun's Power, the one who lifts up the sun at dawn, and the great protector who causes the rain by stabbing the Great Rain Serpent (Vrtra) with thunder and lightning

The nomad forces of the Aryan Hittites felled the defenses of Babylon and had carried off the idol of Marduk. After nearly 300 years the Amorite dynasty fell. But choosing not to occupy the area, they made room for the arrival of the Kassites, a Zagros Mountains (Iran plateau) culture who repeatedly tried but failed to take the city. Once they gained control of Babylon, however, the Kassites honored the history of the city. They immediately negotiated with the Hittites for

the return of Marduk to his temple in Esagila where he would resume his post as chief God. They also kept the effective administrative bureaucracy Hammurabi had established.

The Kassites ruled from Babylon for nearly 400 relatively stable years (1595–1157 BCE). During their caretaker era,⁴⁰ Babylonia was no longer a threat to its neighbors. The Kassites preferred to live and let live. They had no desire to dominate other parts of the region. Focused on diplomacy and economics, they did manage to keep the peace with surrounding lands through royal marriages and beneficial trade relationships. They turned Babylon into a wealthy commercial center. They acquired and distributed Nubian-mined gold from Egypt and lapis lazuli stones from mines in the Central Asian mountains (Badakhshan in Afghanistan). They specialized in dealing with the import and export needs of surrounding countries from the Mediterranean to India.

The Kassites upheld the Babylonian pantheon of Marduk to keep the peace, but personally their royal family kept their faith in the mountain deities of their homeland, where Mashu, the Mesopotamian name for the Cosmic Mountain, was itself the personification of the “Supreme God in Heaven.”

COSMIC MOVEMENTS

Ancient seer-astronomers followed the motion of celestial bodies in and out of the firmament, the sky dome separating the world from outer space. At dusk the Sun (Akk. *Shamash*) opened the western gate of Heaven (Akk. *Ganzer*) and descended down a lapis lazuli (astral) stairway into the

Underworld where it would undertake its nightly crossing. To insure the Sun's uninterrupted transit throughout the night the temples held Opening of the Gate⁴¹ ceremonies at dawn to pray for its successful voyage. In Sumerian myths the gates were located high atop the Cosmic Mountain. For a man to cross into Heaven or the Underworld, he would need to reach the gate by "flying" on the back of a cosmic eagle,⁴² pass into the other side by "walking" through a dark cold cosmic cave-tunnel,⁴³ and after that find the cosmic stairway⁴⁴ connecting the mortal realm to the tiers below and above and use it to "ascend or descend" into the other worlds.

The hidden gates provided a theological explanation for the celestial movements. But, behind it was an understanding of the cosmic order and the possibility that they could predict it. The Sumerian seer-astronomers were following up on the work of prehistoric observers who had made markings on megalith stones to indicate the positions of the astral bodies. But Sumer, the inventors of writing, added something new to the practice. They invented a basic mathematical system they could use to measure distance, time and relationships of celestial objects.

Sumer devised the sexagesimal number system (base-60 and its divisible or multiple numerals) allowing for measurements related to celestial dynamics. For example, time (sixty minutes), calendar (twelve months), circle (360 degrees), constellations (twelve divisions of 30 degrees each). This rudimentary math allowed for measurements of earth-sky angle coordinates like the ecliptic path of the sun, azimuth, and procession of solstice and equinox.

But not until the advent of Babylonian astronomy would

anyone figure out the periodic repetition of celestial movements. Astronomical observation had a particularly strong resurgence once Kassite-occupied Babylon became an Assyrian vassal (1330 BCE). During this time, commercial enterprises demanded the divination services of the clergy. The work required more research and the collection of past efforts in this area.

The Babylonians embarked on a large-scale project to detail astronomical information and perfect their proficiency in identifying auguries written in the sky. Using the Sumerian system they measured celestial data and linked it with calendar dating and historical references forming a massive relational database they would use for predictive analysis. During this lengthy and productive period they recorded the *Enuma Anu Enlil*,⁴⁵ a comprehensive digest of omens and advisories attempting to align the positions and behaviors of the moon, sun, and stars with datestamped data on weather activities, social and natural events. Assuming a coincidental link between phenomenal events on the ground and the celestial configurations observed at the same time, the clergy interpreted what could happen, where and when. They concluded that the cyclical repetition of astral “patterns” relative to earthly “experiences” would provide foresight in anticipation of favorable versus detrimental outcomes.

The astronomer-scribes (*tupsar*) of the first and middle Babylonian Kingdoms (1950–1157 BCE) had chronicled the paths of the moon and the visible planets, solar conjunctions, intervals between star appearances, heliacal risings (stars becoming visible in the eastern horizon at dawn). They identified paired constellations, those that rise and set

together, as well as zenith-horizon pairs. They also invented sundials and water clocks, and the solar calendar.

The Babylonian star catalogues⁴⁶ demarcated the sky with a grid graph composed of declination and ascension lines enabling the expression of stars in degrees and relative mathematical coordinates. They plotted the three brightest “celestial gods” lighting the sky (Moon, Sun, Venus), but ran into a problem in trying to record the countless numbers of stars. As it would be impossible to deify so many “smaller gods,” the priest-observers organized them into constellations. By connecting the brightest points in a section of the sky, they drew animistic pictograms, relating the star clusters to animal spirits.

The Babylonians imagined the “World System” to be shaped like a spheroid divided by the surface into two mirror-image hemispheres. The top half, a convex hemisphere, included the atmosphere, sky dome and three layers of Heaven. The concave underside hemisphere consisted of the terrestrial land and below it groundwater, and further down was the netherworld.

Arising from the world sphere was the Cosmic Mountain, the invisible centerpiece anchoring the triple-tiered world-system. It represented the visible solar system as well as the unseen spiritual domains. The celestial bodies, the Sun and Moon, gained access into the sky dome through its horizon gates and continued their motion through the underworld. The brightest objects in the sky were deemed to be far-away Cosmic Mountains with gateways to other distant heavens.

THE OBSERVATORY

For nearly a thousand years the shadow of Assyria hung over the head of Babylon. Under the thumb of Assyrian Kings, Babylon was too weak to defend the territory of the Old Babylonian Empire. As it became a vassal of the Assyrians, its influence diminished.

Several Semitic nations moved into its neighborhood during this period (1000 BCE) including the Chaldean and Aramean people. The Chaldean Kingdom settled in the vicinity of Babylon at the head of the Persian Gulf. The Arameans made a home, Aram, in northeast Mesopotamia (southern Syria) bordering with Israel. Over the next few hundred years both cultures would have a profound influence on Babylon.

Easily adaptable Aramaic evolved into several dialects that became the day-to-day spoken language across Mesopotamia from Canaan to Babylon.

The Chaldean seaport, established near the ruins of ancient Eridu, became a hub for trade and information from other cultures, and a stopover for seafaring explorers using the stars to navigate. This connection inspired the Chaldeans to rekindle interest in the astral explorations and mappings initiated by the seer-astronomers of Sumer/Akkad.

Nabonassar (aka Nabu-Nasir), a Chaldean king of Babylon (747–733 BCE), reawakened the city to its cosmic heritage. With him came significantly stepped up efforts in recording the precision and frequency of astral movements. The new impetus for astronomical observations inspired the mapping of celestial placements and alignments, the development of celestial brightness metrics, and the discovery of the eighteen-year lunar eclipse cycle. Although sun-moon

eclipses were originally associated with evil omens, the stargazers of Chaldean Babylon saw them in a different light, as one of the critical alignments for unlocking the mysteries of the Universe.

The Assyrians had allowed the Chaldeans to take charge of Babylon as long as they paid proper tribute. But Nabonassar failed to hold onto the city when the Assyrian kings decided to assert direct dominance over Babylon. After its repeated attempts to become independent, the Assyrians grew weary of its rebellious nature and razed Babylon to the ground. It would be some one hundred fifty years before the Chaldean King Naboplassar united with the Medians, also under the occupation of a brutal Assyrian regime. Together the allies would finally turn the tables on their common enemy. They conquered the Assyrian capital of Nineveh and looted its temples. From the ashes of the Assyrian Empire emerged two new powers the Babylonian and Median Empires.

Naboplassar and his successor, his son the King Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562 BCE) re-established Babylon as the seat of the Neo-Babylonian Empire from southern Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean. While consolidating his territories Nebuchadnezzar ran into resistance in Judea. To display his might and send a message to all the new vassals of his empire, he sacked the capital of Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple of Solomon.⁴⁷ Following the practice of deportation invented by the Assyrians, he ordered the capture of the Judeans and their exile to Babylon along with precious items looted from their temple and treasury. Religious relics of conquered peoples were installed in

Marduk's Temple complex to show that their gods had become subservient to Babylon.

The original Hebrew nation under Kings David and Solomon had been divided into Judea and Israel. More than one hundred years before the Babylonians took Judea (597 BCE) the Assyrians had invaded Israel (722 BCE), razed it to the ground, and scattered the ten Israelite tribes. One group of skilled Israelites, excellent chariot riders and horse trainers, were sent to the far-off land of Medes (northern Iran). Becoming part of that nation, they helped the Medians grow stronger. Finally, their mutual hate for the brutal Assyrians dislodged the occupiers from Medes. But the mighty Assyrian Empire did not fall until the Babylonians joined in the effort.

Nebuchadnezzar made an ally of the Medes by taking a wife of royal Median descent. She, in turn, introduced him to the Median clergy, the Magi Order, whom he brought to Babylon to manage the rebuilding of the Esagila Temple in the center of the city. The Magi assumed the roles of divine advisors, stargazers, and scribes to the king.

Nebuchadnezzar reconstructed⁴⁸ the Esagila temple complex in the heart of Babylon to once again reclaim the city as the center of the Universe, as it had been during the Old Babylonian Empire some twelve hundred years earlier. Its main temple housed Marduk's idol.

Visitors entering the Marduk temple walked into a large oblong court overlooking a fountain pond whose pure water symbolized the *Abzu*, the primordial Water Dragon-God tamed by Enki in the Sumerian creation story. A smaller court ahead hosted a shrine housing an inner sanctum displaying

the statues of Marduk and his female consort (Sarpanit), and featuring the god's reclining couch and throne. Smaller temples on the grounds contained various idols or relics from conquered territories now part of the new Babylonian Empire. Repeatedly, when Babylon was sacked in the past, its victors would abscond with Marduk's statue, only to return it when the next sovereign to capture Babylon demanded its return to Esagila. Now the Babylonians held the gods of others under the shadow of their dominance.

The jewel of the Esagila complex was its Watchtower, the Etemenanki Ziggurat ("The Anchor of Heaven on Earth"). Its name heralded it as the visionary axis for channeling between Heaven and Earth. The tower climbed one hundred yards high. One could enter it through any of six bronze gates located around its four hundred-square yard base aligned with the four cardinal points. Above this platform arose seven stepped tiers (*tupukati*) with sloped facings—each representing a gateway to one of seven Heavens. Four doors all led to a causeway inside the platform intersecting at a lapis-paved spiral stairway in the center of the ziggurat. It led up to a penthouse chapel at the top, a sanctuary containing no statue, but regarded among the priests as the holy seat where the transcendental Lord (Bel) would come to observe the whole city.

Although charged with caring for Marduk's Esagila, the Magi Order embarked on an interfaith policy. They invited leaders and scribes representing the spectrum of religions in the realm. Experts in divination, trance-meditation, and astronomy joined their ranks, and kindled a new era of debate and examination of beliefs. The Magi Order infused in

Babylon an active pursuit of Universal Truth and the meaning of God. Among the first Magi advisors serving Nebuchadnezzar was a Judean noble, Daniel,⁴⁹ described in the Hebrew Bible as a dream interpreter who survived being placed in a den of lions.

The Esagila Ziggurat was the leading celestial observatory of its time, used for the study of the cosmos. Its Babylonian Magi stargazers took turns to collect astronomical data for use in mathematical charting and as visionary guideposts for divine prophecy. A divination practitioner, prior to advising the king, might consult a lapis lazuli tablet. The golden flecks in the deep blue marble would simulate his meditative trip to the stars. Looking into it, he would enter a trance state. Seeing the Earth covered completely with water, he would then observe Stardust pouring out of the stars. Once it fell to Earth it transformed into the land and people. Next he envisioned miners toiling in the dirt for precious metals and earth minerals when out of the ground a beam of “energy” appeared. The miners went to the source of the beam and there extracted a tablet containing the dual elements of Light and Heaven—gold and lapis. The seer now possessing this magical slab looked into it and found therein a light beam that came from a stargate. Entering it in his mind he experienced a rush of spiritual knowledge bestowed by the gods.

When a few acolytes surrounded the Magi sage later that day, he cautioned them that the use of such a tablet was replete with difficulty and danger. A multitude of possible paths would appear, and unable to choose among them, an amateur or vain imposter may become lost in illusion for an

eternity. Without appropriate training and guidelines, he warned, those who attempted to “walk among the stars” could awake into a bewildered state of mind, fall into a coma bedeviled by scary demons, or be trapped in a delirious dream-state whereby they imagined the world of the living to be different from the way it really is.

Crossroads

The morning sun splashed into the castle monastery in the Saka city of Babil,⁵⁰ as the young students assembled for this day's lectures and debate (550 BCE). Three teachers of the interfaith Magi Order, each wearing an amulet carved with a symbol of their belief, entered the hall and took a seat. On this day their topic would be: Who is the Supreme Being?

A Levite scholar, disciple of the dream interpreter Daniel, expressed his view that there was but One Almighty God, Creator and overlord of the world.

“The Supreme God, Elohim, had two natures: Reward and Punishment. God punished sinners, but was even harder on those who should know better. That is why he had sent the Assyrians and Babylonians to cast my people, the Israelites and Judeans, from our Promised Land,” he said. “God had made it clear to us that we had failed to listen to him. Because we prayed to idols, and betrayed his laws, he punishes us like a parent punishes his children. His purpose is to teach us believers that the reward of his protection is reserved only for the faithful, pure of heart, and those worthy of salvation.”

In exile, the Levites preached that only by accepting Elohim exclusively, as the one and only true Supreme God,

would the people of Abraham and Moses receive his forgiveness. Then and only then he may allow them to return to the Promised Land he bequeathed to Abraham in his Covenant with God.

“Penitence is the path to God’s merciful and eternal embrace. It is for the glory of our God that we, the Levi religious caste, ask for his forgiveness. Having been exiled to Babylon and other lands, we, the scribes assembled here in Babil have joined the Magi Order so that we may compile the “Story of our Journey” (aka the Bible), so that our people may know God’s word and find their way back to him. May we be blessed to be alive to see the One-Who-Comes to Declare the Truth, like Moses before him, come to liberate us, God’s outcasts. May we return to honor our God’s Name by rebuilding his sacred Temple in Jerusalem.”⁵¹

An Assyrian cleric responded. He said that the first gods of his heritage were the gods of the ancient Akkadians led by Enlil, the God of the Sky, whom Nippur recognized to be the Supreme Being. Once he ruled the world with an iron hand and dispensed the destinies the Assembly of Gods had decreed. But as human beings had failed to do as he bid them, the rains stopped falling from the sky and Akkad’s empire fell. Rising from its ashes, the Assyrians embraced the God Assur who gave them the power to conquer their neighbors and defeat Marduk of Babylon. Thus Assur became the Supreme God over the world of men.

“Although he rewarded us, the Assyrians, with tribute from many vassals for nearly one thousand years, the empire fell when Assur’s glory was undermined because people followed primitive gods and demons and acted in uncivilized

ways. As has been foretold, the time will come when the One-Who-Comes to Declare the Truth will appear to lead the people back to glory. We pray for our Supreme God of All Gods to conquer the demons of our dark natures—ignorance, depravity and laziness,” he said. “Eventually, the good nature of the Supreme Being must destroy the forces of darkness and when that is done the world will be transformed once again into a peaceful Paradise, as the gods had intended from the beginning of time.”

“It is to make clear the difference between the forces of day and night that we, the Assur clergy, have joined the Magi Order. We turn our eyes to the winged disc,⁵² the soaring spirit of our heavenly host, Assur, the Bull-Moon God, also known to my Arya colleagues as *Varuna*.⁵³ It is his spirit that has guided us here to Babil where we are recording the “Story of Our Journey” from the beginning of Creation to the end of days when the victory of God, may his names be many, prevail over the beast in us all.”

Next, a Vedic Rishi expressed the view that the Supreme Being had many aspects. “When the hymns of the Rig Veda were written we wore the face of Agni, the progenitor of inspiration. He is the god who produces the Fire of Life that is the pure spark and essence of our soul, the engine of thought, and the fire of desires that burns in the human heart. A wise sage should recognize that it is “sin” that puts out the Fire of Life, and it is “purity” that lights the Fire of Immortality freeing the soul from a world of enduring suffering. A great sage may light the eternal flame and merge as one with the Supreme Being.”

“We have long celebrated the “Songs of Our Journey”

(aka the Rig Veda) and now our sages are charged with recording “The Journey of the Soul” (aka *Upanisads*).⁵⁴ For this reason we have gathered here in Babil to prepare the way for the One-Who-Comes to Declare the Truth. We pray that this savior come soon to show us the way.”

Among a group of children studying at the Babil Sanctuary of the Magi Order, one curious twelve-year-old boy listened intently. Siddhartha Gautama, the son and crown prince of the Saka nation, persistently asked several questions of each speaker. Impressed by his eagerness to learn, they agreed to answer, but often the answers did not seem to satisfy his bottomless curiosity. Excelling in all religious studies, the ever-inquisitive prodigy would soon be sent to Babylon for advanced studies at the Magi Conservatory in Esagila.

ARRIVAL OF THE MAGI

Waves of Arya-led Eurasian tribes from the Black Sea region (today Turkey, Russian Steppes, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) had descended southward into Central Asia (1800–1000 BCE). They established the vast Vedic territory of Greater Aryana (Skt. *Uttarapatha*)⁵⁵ between the Black Sea, Zagros Mountains and the Indus Valley.

The northwestern sector of Aryana encompassed the pastoral plateau of Medes (today northern Iran), a vast green plain located south of the Caspian Sea. Six tribes (the Magi, Budii, Arizanti, Busae, Struchates, and Paretaceni) shared this idyllic herding region. They were often at odds with one another, but would unite when threatened by external

enemies. As the Magi tribe looked and behaved differently from the others, it had some difficulty being accepted by the rest.

The Magi were led by a highly secretive religious order whose practices reflected the advance of Lion-Sun shamanism into the area. Although they subscribed to the cosmology of the Luminous Gods (Deva) as described in the Rig Veda hymnals (aka *Samhita*) of the Aryans, the Magi nonetheless believed in a nameless Supreme Being. The other Medes tribes worshipped local gods and spirits, numbering in the hundreds, depicting the various forces of nature and the light-giving celestial bodies.

The Magi had developed a tolerance for all beliefs as they applied their talents with little concern for the deities being worshipped. In due course they provided other Median tribes with the services of their shamanic order. Magi seers could be relied upon to use their skills for divination, healing, trance meditations, ritual offerings, and sacrificial fire rites. Honoring the wishes of their “clients” they respected the deities of many worshippers.

But when the Assyrians invaded their land, no prayers sufficed, and no sacrifice would do. For the next one hundred years, with little to no hope of liberation from their oppressors, the six tribes of Medes suffered brutal oppression. Their men were forced into hard labor and were required to provide massive agricultural tribute to feed the conqueror’s military. But never could they have expected what would follow. Suddenly the Assyrians placed tens of thousands of strangers in their midst, people deported from a far away land. The arrival of many exiles from Israel (starting

735 BCE) brought into Medes a defeated nation of slave laborers. The Assyrians needed horses for their military, and wild ones roamed the Medes planes. The Israelites would be used to train them.

The open-minded Magi Order had survived the Assyrian occupation by accepting into its ranks religious beliefs representing many gods, including the Western gods of Assur and Marduk; the Eastern gods of Indra, Brahma, and Agni; the Sumer/Akkad celestial divinities of Shamash, Sin, and Ishtar; as well as the local tribal gods of Medes. The Israelite faith in YHWH (Elohim was a later Babylonian rendition) had included his female consort, Ashera,⁵⁶ and the worship of various female goddess figurines. But by the time they arrived in Medes, any association with female Assyrian deities would have been hard to maintain. The Israelites felt the wrath of God.

The Magi Order respected their counterparts, the Levite clergy, as they were also adept at ritual practices, prophesying, and mythic writing. But the Levites were troubled. They found it difficult to assuage the anger among many of their people who could not cope with the thought that their God abandoned them.

Although their insertion into Medes was forced, the Israelites found some comfort in their shared suffering with the indigenous tribes. The Assyrian occupation unintentionally had made allies of the locals and foreigners. Under the tent of the Magi all the tribes of Medes held secret discussions and invited the Levites of Israel to join in on behalf of their people. They prayed for vengeance for the cruelty that had befallen them at the hands of their Assyrian

captors.

The Magi shamans may have secretly convinced the disparate populations of the area, the Median tribes, Israelites, as well as their Elamite neighbors to the south, to put aside their differences and unite. Their common desire for liberation catalyzed an underground movement preparing for an overthrow of Assyria.

The land of Elam (southern Iran) boasted a rich and old history. Located to the south of Medes, on the coast of the Persian Gulf just east of Babylon, Elam was one of the world's earliest established economic powers (2700 BCE), and boasted the world's most skilled artisans. Elam's capital since ancient times, Susa, had acquired precious stones from Harrapan miners and traded them with Egypt and Sumer. All admired Elam's exceptional craftsmanship with gold, lapis, and other precious stones and metals, as well as its decorative pottery and architectural creations.⁵⁷ Mesopotamian kings and those in far away countries jealously sought their services for decorating ziggurats, temples, and palaces.

The Akkadian Empire (2350 BCE), the world's first major military power, conquered Elam for the first time, prompting it to develop its own armies. Although Akkad fell as a result of the Epic Drought, Hammurabi's Babylonian Empire (1764 BCE) became a new threat. For centuries Elam was in nearly perpetual conflict with its Babylonian neighbors. They sacked Babylon (1168 BCE), and imprisoned its last Kassite king. They absconded with the statue of Marduk from the Esagila temple until Nebuchadnezzar I attacked Elam and retrieved the statuary (1105 BCE).

The earliest religion of Elam echoed both Aryan and

Sumerian influences. Their pantheon of local and celestial gods featured solar, lunar, planetary, and astral bodies. Their titular triad of gods, following the classic two-male, one female configuration, placed particular emphasis on the Earth as the middle level between the light of Heaven and the darkness below. Elam's God of Light, Sky, and Air was Khumban; its Earth Mother Goddess was Kiririsha (aka Kirisha) and Inshushinak was its God of Darkness and the Underworld, for whom Elam had built the largest ziggurat of its time at Choga Zambil (1250 BCE).

The Elamite clergy practiced animal sacrifices, but it held the bull to be sacred, reflecting the early influence in Elam of moon-worshipping shamans. Their devotional ritual sacrifices to Varuna, the moon, would align the god's "wisdom" with that of the sun, represented by the solar deity, Mitra.

In the final Assyrian invasion of Elam, the King Assurbanipal (640 BCE) destroyed the Ziggurat-temple. After the attack its deities disappeared, but the distinction the Elamite religion made between the forces of Light and Darkness reappeared in the next century when the Persians emerged out of the ashes of Elam as the new lords of that land.

BRUTALITY

Assyria surged to power in north Mesopotamia where initially it had been a vassal state of the Akkadians. Over a period of five hundred years (17th–12th century BCE) Assyria was vulnerable to intermittent conquests by Babylon or the

Mittani-Hittites, their Black Sea neighbors. But beginning with the reign of King Assur-uballit I (1365–1330 BCE) and for most of the next seven-hundred and fifty years Assyria emerged as the dominant military force in the world.

Initially, it preferred to rule through proxies, but it increasingly took steps to impose greater direct control. When an internal power struggle for the crown of Babylon deteriorated into the murder of a sitting king, the Assyrian King Asur-uballit I sacked Babylon and placed his preferred Kassite vassal on the throne, cementing the alliance through marriage with an Assyrian princess. Reflecting its military dominance over Babylon, the Assyrian clergy sought to eclipse Babylon in the cosmic realm. They elevated their God Assur, deity of the Old Assyrian capital city of the same name that was once an Akkadian-language city located in the upper region of the Tigris River, from a city-god to the ruling God of the empire. Displaying their conquest of the Babylonian pantheon, they adapted Babylon's Seven Tablets of Creation called the *Enuma Elish*, but in their edition Marduk (Akk. *Merodach*) was replaced with Assur investing in him the title of superseding Lord God (Akk. *Bel*). Their Supreme God, Assur, like Marduk before him, would rule over the subservient gods of conquered states. In the Assyrian version of the World Creation story, it would now be Assur who slew the chaos-creating monster (Tiamat) and it would be Assur who recreated the world and placed mankind in it.

As to the personality of their God the Assyrian clergy preferred to emulate the Akkadian Enlil, wrathful overlord God of Sky and Storms, a more fitting model for Assyria's ruthless kings. Whereas Marduk had reflected the kinder face

of the Water God, the Akkadian Ea (Sum. *Enki*), Assur would be revered and feared for his intolerance of wrong doers. In the Assyrian cosmology, Assur now ruled the movements of Heaven,⁵⁸ a role that Marduk had taken from the Sumer/Akkad God of Heaven (Anum). Incorporating both Babylonian and the Akkadian mythologies, Assyria's clergy crafted a Supreme God with the attributes of the Creator, King of Heaven, the God of Sky and Storms, and the God of All Gods, leader of all pantheons past and present.

With the growing domination of Assyria's empire and the further deterioration of Babylon's role, the Neo-Assyrian Empire achieved the pinnacle of domination during a three-hundred-year period (915–612 BCE). Imposing its will on its neighbors it thrived by building a level of organized brutality unlike any perpetrated by its predecessors. The Neo-Assyrian Empire moved its headquarters from Assur to Nineveh, the largest city in its realm. It became the administration center for governing an area from the Black Sea to Africa and from the Mediterranean to Aryana. The Assyrians imposed a ruthless system of extortion, deportation, and genocide on conquered peoples, and designed its bureaucracy to execute these policies at a peak level of intimidation and efficiency.

The Assyrian Empire sought its reputation for brutality to make sure that all would fear it. When destroying a target location, their goal would be to leave it unrecognizable, thereby erasing the prospect for its indigenous population to return. To crush all hope of resistance, they cultivated fear through a scorched-earth policy; they flattened homes, sacked temples, burned farms, and even uprooted trees. Either they left no one alive or deported whole nations,

leaving no one behind but the elderly and infirm to fend for themselves. Leveraging their reputation for annihilation they would give potential victims an alternative option of a crushing extortion. Only local kings comporting with their “pay and we’ll let you live“ offer would be able to avert obliteration. The acquiescence of a city or state would allow the Assyrians to take control without any military cost, while vassals handed over the contents of their treasuries and accepted oppressive taxation on an ongoing basis.

Shalmaneser II, King of Assyria, captured, annexed, and enslaved Medes (836 BCE), but brutally razed Elam because it had put up a strong resistance. Assyrian monarchs regarded outlying areas as inferior, uncivilized, and deluded by weak gods and superstitions, and they showed little tolerance for their local religions. But the majority of the Assyrian people had a healthy fear of the divine powers of many gods, and respect for seers skilled in divination.

During the reign of King Sennacherib (705–681 BCE) the Assyrians at Nineveh encountered Jonah, a Prophet of Israel,⁵⁹ who spent three days crossing the “City of the Big Fish,” so-named because its population had grown to 120,000. At the behest of his God, Elohim, Jonah reluctantly berated the citizens of the city warning that if they did not repent for their depraved behaviors, His God would wipe them out. When Nineveh’s residents showed themselves to be penitent, God told him that he would forgive them.

It was natural for ordinary people of that time to fear a prophecy of doom. There was a widely-accepted understanding of the wrath of God, who had many names: Elohim, Marduk, Assur, and others. People were willing to

express repentance for their immoral behavior rather than risk divine retribution coming true. However, for Jonah, it was difficult to accept God's forgiveness, especially as he foresaw the devastation the Assyrians would exact upon his people.

The Assyrian kings, on the other hand, considered themselves to be the hand of god. What Elohim would not do to the Assyrians, Assur would do to the Israelites. He would smite all those who resisted their rule. After decades of assaults on the area, the Assyrians invaded Israel (738 and 720 BCE) and deported some 27,000 to 40,000 Israelites. Many were forced to walk a trek of nearly 3,000 miles from the Galilee to Nineveh (today Mosul, Iraq) and then further east to Medes. Many Israelites were unable to complete the journey, either because they died or were sold as slaves along the way.

The Median tribes were equine experts who knew how to capture, tame, and breed horses, while the Israelites had shown themselves to be excellent horse trainers and skilled riders of chariot cavalry. The Assyrians, needing to resupply their warriors with some 3,000 new horse-drawn chariots per month, combined these enslaved nations to meet their requirements.

But their policy appeared to have backfired when King Dayukku (aka Deioces) unified Medes and founded its first intra-tribal dynasty (722 BCE). Contrary to Assyrian expectations, Medes had been strengthened by the arrival of the elite Israelite chariot squad. Bringing the Israelites and Median tribes together may have unified Medes for the first time in its history. Dayukku's next step was to surreptitiously

expand his reach in the south. The Elamites were glad to cooperate with the Medians after the devastation wrought on them by the Assyrians. Dayukku was able to marshal the architectural skills of Elam and the managerial skills of the Magi to build Ecbatana (Hamadan, Iran), Media's strategically located new capital in Elam (710 BCE).

From there, he conducted surprise hit-and-run attacks on Assyrian bases, finally expelling them completely from ancestral Medes in 675 BCE. The king ruled for fifty-three years, but his successor found it difficult to hold on to Elam. The Scythians, their eastern neighbors, were able to take Elam's northeastern territory (653 BCE), and the Assyrian King Assurbanipal (646 BCE) recaptured Susa by entering Elam's ancient capital from the southwest.

During the reign of Dayukku, the Magi Order had elevated their practices and influence and became accepted and revered across Medes, Elam, and Eastern Aryana. The Magi Order set up their religious center at Rhagae (Tehran, Iran), creating a community devoted to research, study, and teaching, and from there they established Magi schools to educate future religious and thought leaders.

Under the next Median King, Cyaxares,⁶⁰ the military union of Median, Israelite (aka Ishkuzai⁶¹), and Elamite tribes had matured into a superior force. Nearly one hundred years after the arrival of the Israelites, new generations born in Medes shaped the alliance into a formidable and well-managed cavalry capable not only of resistance but of venturing beyond its own backyard. Its armies pushed out the Scythians back into eastern Aryana (today Seistan-Baluchistan in southeast Iran and Pakistan), chased the

Assyrians out of Susa (626 BCE), and then united with a new king in Babylon to raid Assyrian cities deep inside their empire (615 BCE).

The Medes King, Cyaxares, in alliance with the King of Babylon, Nabopolassar, destroyed the Assyrian capital of Nineveh three years later (612 BCE) and finally ended the heavy-handed Assyrian domination of the region once and for all.

The Assyrian kings had come to lament their original investment made generations earlier when they sent the Israelites into Medes. Assyria no longer existed. In its place, the allies divided the fallen empire into the Babylonian and Median Empires. The new Medes Empire reached across the northern latitude from the Black Sea in the west to Central Asia (today encompassing Iran, northern Iraq/Syria and Turkey). The resuscitated Neo-Babylonian Empire now encompassed the southern latitude from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean coast (today southern Iraq/Syria, Lebanon, Judea, and Arabia).

With the rise of the Median Empire the influence of the Magi Order would extend beyond its original borders. Its interfaith legacy would have a profound impact on the beliefs of future civilizations and the development of religions yet to come.

BABYLON RESURRECTED

Although Babylon had been the cultural prize of the Fertile Crescent, after the fall of the Kassites, its local kings had few victories in defending it from outside invaders. Babylon's

sense of entitlement repeatedly caused waves of destruction and renewal. After King Nebuchadnezzar I overthrew the Elamites and recovered the sacred statue of Marduk, he devoted himself to rebuilding projects aimed at restoring the majesty of Babylon. But the Assyrian defeat of his son and successor⁶² ended this initiative for independence. Again the city fell back into a cycle of anarchy and failed attempts to rule it.

Between the reigns of King Nebuchadnezzar I (1124–1103 BCE), and Emperor Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562 BCE), some five hundred years had passed. During that period Babylon was invariably a nuisance to colonizers because of its strong cosmopolitan identity, historicity, key location, and cultural pride. Its public institutions and indigenous rulers were quick to express dissatisfaction with the authority of occupiers, demanding rectification or apology for any offense or insult against them and, if given the opportunity, they would rebel.

Assyrian leaders, most of them admirers of Babylonian culture and religiosity, permitted the city of Babylon to be ruled by indigenous kings as long as they accepted their role as tribute-paying vassals. But when the Assyrian King Tiglath-Pileser III marched into Babylon (729 BCE), he was determined to impose his will. He had already crushed any attempt at independence throughout his empire; he sacked Damascus, ravaged Israel and Aramea, and destroyed other outposts before taking and annexing Babylon. Tiglath-Pileser III initiated the policy of mass deportation by moving whole populations from Israel and Aramea to forced labor in Assyria⁶³ and its colonies. His successor Sargon II followed with a second invasion of Israel (720 BCE) and orchestrated

the wholesale deportation and resettlement of Israel's tribes, primarily to Medes.

Prior to the destruction of Israel, two of its twelve original tribes, the Tribe of Judah, and the Tribe of Simon, seceded and formed the land of Judea, centered primarily in Jerusalem and territory to its south (9th or 8th century BCE). Because of its cooperation with Assyria, Judea became a protected Assyrian vassal.

The clerical tribe of Levi, providers of religious services, divided their allegiance between Israel and Judea. Some of its members were attached to the Temple of Elohim built in Jerusalem by King Solomon (965–925 BCE). Other Levites sided with the remaining tribes of Israel gathered in the northern region and these religious leaders were included in the deportation of the ten tribes of Israel.

Soon after the exile of Israel, the Assyrian King Sennacherib (705–681 BCE) invaded and sacked Babylon, laying waste to the city, and then subjugated Elam for its involvement in that rebellion. Sennacherib's successor to the Assyrian throne, Assurbanipal (668–627 BCE) crushed Babylon and destroyed Susa (646 BCE) after another attempted insurgency. But following his death Assyria's ambitious generals vied for power and the "Empire of the Winged Sun" began its descent from prominence as a raging civil war drained its military resources.

The next opportunity for Babylon to rebel came under the leadership of King Naboplassar (reign 625–605 BCE) of Chaldea,⁶⁴ king of the marshy kingdom located just south of Babylon. Taking advantage of Assyria's internal conflagration, he ejected them from the city. Meanwhile King

Cyaxares of Medes had likewise taken the opportunity to overthrow the Assyrians and liberate Elam. Gaining the popular support of most inhabitants and tribal centers in the region, the resistance movement against the Assyrians propelled Naboplassar and Cyaxares to cement an alliance (616 BCE) that also included their neighbors, among them the Saka (aka Scythians), to join in an all-out attack on Assyria. In southern Mesopotamia only the old guard of the wrathful Sky God, Nippur, continued to side with the Assyrians. The final downfall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire came in 607 BCE with the allied invasion of Nineveh.

The rebuilding effort of the newly liberated Babylon would fall to Naboplassar's son, King Nebuchadnezzar II, heading the Neo-Babylonian Empire. He ascended the throne (604 BCE) fully prepared to return Babylon to its glory days, a role similarly undertaken by his namesake, Nebuchadnezzar I. Babylon, the largest city in the world at this time, encompassed a diverse population⁶⁵ of 125,000 or more, composed of a cross-section of cultures, faiths, and languages with Aramaic now serving as the *lingua franca*⁶⁶ for civil administration and clerical functions.

Through the royal marriage of Nebuchadnezzar II to Amytis, daughter or granddaughter of Cyaxares the Great, the Babylon-Medes alliance would continue and the empires would refrain from attacking one another. Nebuchadnezzar held her in great esteem and sought her counsel on matters regarding the restoration of Babylon. He may have built the Hanging Gardens of Babylon for his wife, because, legend has it, she longed for the mountain scenery in Medes. When Nebuchadnezzar II had described to her his plans to rebuild

Babylon's historic center, the Esagila Temple and its Etemenanki Ziggurat, Amytis could have advised him to bring in the Magi advisors from her homeland. The Magi Order not only possessed knowledge of religion, history, divination, and ceremonial duties, but most importantly, they had acquired experience with architecture, construction, and administration starting with Dayukku's building of the capital of Medes at Ecbatana.

After rebuilding the Esagila complex, the interfaith Magi would manage it. Under their leadership the ziggurat observatory would be used to conduct a deeper study into the real nature of the cosmos by using all possible means, including astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, and visionary intuition. While they were charged by Nebuchadnezzar to restore Marduk's place in the center of Babylonian religiosity, they sought to discover an all-encompassing Universal Truth that could bring together all religions and the many names that they attributed to the divine.

The duties of the Magi Order included the administration and record keeping of land ownership. They managed the allocation of land grants, produced maps, and set official border stone markers (*kundurru*). To illustrate their worldly scope the Magi drew the first World Map (600 BCE) based on the classic ancient view of a world landmass surrounded by an ocean moat. The "Babylonian continent" appeared at the center of the world with eight small triangles (*Nagu*) pointing in the ordinal directions—indicating the Magi's awareness of distant unexplored regions at the ends of the Earth, as well as their view that other worlds existed in every direction of the cosmos.

Among the Magi were prophets from a host of different religions all of whom foretold of the coming of a master sage. He would possess an enlightened vision able to see beyond the boundaries of the World Map, beyond the stars, beyond Creation, and fully reveal the unseen works of the Universe. This One-Who-Comes to Declare the Truth would lead them to discover the source of Universal Truth.

THE EMPEROR'S DREAM

When Naboplassar established the Neo-Babylonian Empire, he sent his son, General Nebuchadnezzar, to bring under control his father's newly acquired western territories of Aramea, Phoenicia, Judea, and Arabia. Nebuchadnezzar attempted to convince the Kingdom of Judea, at the time under the protection of Egypt, to switch its allegiance to Babylon. A few months before his father's death and the start of Nebuchadnezzar's forty-three-year reign as Emperor, the Judean king acquiesced to being a Babylonian vassal. The agreement resulted in the recruitment of some of Judea's brightest and most attractive young nobles for training in Babylon in service of the royal court (605 BCE).

Unfortunately, soon after this, the Judean king made a fateful decision to switch back his support to Egypt. The young Nebuchadnezzar II, having just succeeded his father to the Babylonian throne, had to show his muscle or appear weak. The new emperor ordered an attack on Jerusalem to make sure they understood the punishment of disloyalty. He captured the Judean king, Jeconiah, and his household, nobles, clerics, and some three thousand Judeans and

deported them all to Babylon. He then placed a new king Zedekiah, on the throne, charging him with the payment of tribute. In spite of warnings by the Judean prophets of his day, Zedekiah repeated the mistake of his predecessor and also chose to go back on his pledge to be a vassal of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar responded again with a siege of Jerusalem (599 BCE), blockading the entry of food and drink until the city fell thirty months later. Payback for Zedekiah's miscalculation included the sacking and destruction of the Temple of Solomon (597 BCE) and deportation of 11,000 Judeans to Babylonia.

Since Babylonian military policy for punishment of conquered nations included the removal of religious items from their temples, certain relics of the Judean Temple were probably carried to Babylon. In addition, Jerusalem's Levite clergy, among them its prophets,⁶⁷ scribes, and temple caretakers, would have been brought to the newly built Esagila, where idols and exalted objects of other conquered gods were stored in sacred rooms inside the ziggurat. The Judean clergy would have been assigned compulsory duties in service of the Marduk complex, although they would be expected to continue personal worship of their God and to care for their own temple treasures. They also would be invited to participate in the Magi initiative to collect, record, and debate views of Universal Truth.

The young Hebrew nobles brought to Babylon prior to the sacking of Jerusalem had already received training in the arts of divination from the Magi. Among these dream interpreters in the Magi's den of Lion-Sun sages, was a Hebrew named Daniel, given the Babylonian name of

Belteshazzar (meaning Prince of the Lord).

Nebuchadnezzar, suffering from intermittent swings between depression and euphoria, would display fits of extreme cruelty, especially where loyalty was concerned. This was followed by spurts of manic dedication to grandiose projects.

Daniel played a critical role when King Nebuchadnezzar began to experience a tortured and puzzling dream. The sleep-deprived Emperor was bedeviled by a giant metallic figure sculpted of human features. The haunting image repeatedly terrorized him. Demanding that the Magi rid him of this cursed nightmare, the king became enraged as various seers skilled in prophecy failed to unravel its meaning. When the king threatened to execute the entire Magi Order, Daniel prayed for a revelation and received God's communication.⁶⁸

Putting his life at risk, and those of his colleagues, Daniel volunteered to advise the king, being confident that Elohim had revealed to him the meaning of the dream. It referred, he declared, to the fate of the world in times yet to come. The various types of metals composing the body of the "robotic figure" represented the future empires of Babylon to follow after Nebuchadnezzar's establishment of a Golden Era. The succeeding second kingdom to his would be inferior, Daniel said. The third, however, would spread Babylon's rule across the world. The fourth empire will be given a choice of two paths, one ruthless and the other peaceful. As these two ways of governance

cannot be integrated, the fourth empire will choose to take the path that will make it the greatest of all powers. But in the end its fateful decision will bring upon it the fire of annihilation.

Daniel revealed that the dream was a divine premonition worthy only of a great king. The four metals composing the figure were symbolic of the king's reign and the three regimes that followed.

The four metals of the giant's body would identify the four "Babylonian Empires" in Nebuchadnezzar's dream as follows: (1) Gold – the Chaldean Golden Age of Nebuchadnezzar II was followed by (2) Silver – the Moon-worshipping kings who caused the deterioration of Babylon. Next, it would be overtaken by (3) Bronze – the Empire of Persia of Cyrus the Great and his son Kambujiya followed by the opportunity to choose a peaceful path. However, after a coup, the (4) Iron Empire would begin with Darius the Great at the helm. It would become the most expansive empire in the world up to its time.

Although the dream predicted a fiery end for the last empire in the vision, Nebuchadnezzar felt relieved and honored that his contributions would lead to a Golden Age, represented by the gold metal head of the figure. To show his appreciation to Daniel for unveiling the dream's meaning he awarded him with the political position of viceroy-overseer of Babylon. Having saved his fellow Magi from execution, Daniel's colleagues also chose Daniel to be their Chief Magus. Ironically, Daniel became the "chief lion" in the Magi den. Henceforth, the Chief Magus of Esagila could fulfill both religious and political duties, and the position would be

chosen only on the basis of skill and wisdom rather than any particular religious affiliation.

Daniel served his king well by repeatedly interpreting other mysteriously haunting dreams. Through one of those dreams Daniel established the direction the Magi Order would pursue in the future. He predicted the coming of a savior.

In another of Daniel's interpretations, the emperor's "Dream of Four Beasts," he foresaw the coming of a savior who would lead the way to a bright future, this One-Who-Comes to Declare the Truth had the mission to initiate the establishment of World Peace:

*His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass
away,
and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed*

—DANIEL 7:1 (HEBREW BIBLE)

Although the Bible's Book of Daniel suggested that he lived to the age of one hundred, this number may be indicative of his legacy, not the lifetime of a single individual. At the time, highly respected names were converted into honorific titles. It may be that the Magi Order later bestowed the title of "Dana" on important personages of high esteem who pledged to continue Daniel's legacy of wise counsel.

THE ROOT

With many religions congregating in Babylon under the influence of the Magi Order, the name of Marduk had taken on a generalized meaning. References to him were replaced with the title of Lord God (Bel), to reflect the view that the Supreme Being had many names, Marduk, Enlil, Amun-Rae,

Elohim, Assur, and Brahma, among others.

The Babylonian Magi sought to bridge all beliefs with an all-encompassing understanding of Universal Truth. They invited clerics from across many cultures to join them in a comprehensive effort of research and debate. Espousing mutual respect and tolerance, they embarked on a philosophical approach aimed at investigating and debating the universal meanings of life and the relationships of Heaven and Earth.

The Magi clerical community assembled under their roof master scribes skilled in mythic storytelling. They were tasked with writing a historical genealogy that would link all nations and tribes with a common origin. With great ferocity and brilliance, Babylonian scribes gathered evidence dating back to Sumer and Egypt. They collected stories about ancestral heroes, prophets and prophecies, and migratory histories linking the past to the present. They created a lineage that over many generations forked into all the nations and cultures known to them.⁶⁹ Looking back at the story of Nippur's "failed human experiment" and Uruk's ark builder, written some 2,000 years earlier, they assumed that the Great Flood marked a new starting point for the human race.

Like their predecessors in Sumer/Akkad and earlier Chaldean explorations of celestial movements, the Magi also turned to the stars. At the Esagila Ziggurat Watchtower (Etemenanki) the Magi stargazers and mapmakers worked in tandem with adepts seeking to unravel the cosmic laws. They chartered the night sky, made mathematical measurements and calculations, and looked into their lapis lazuli tablets in

hopes of seeing patterns underlying the laws of universal dynamics.

The wise sages in their midst came from some fifty kingdoms throughout Babylon, Egypt, the Levant, Assyria, Lydia, Greece, Medes, and Greater Aryana. They may have had an influence on the Hebrew *Genesis*; the Zoroastrian work of sacred hymns, the Gathas; and the Buddhist sutras. From the earliest shamanic fellowships to the organized religions of Sumer/Akkad, Egypt, Babylonia and Assyria, and the nomadic challengers of Aryan and Hebrew beliefs, all had espoused some sort of harmonious Universal Order that integrated nature and the divine with societies and individuals. The Magi were looking for a common theme such as this at the core of all religions.

They were searching for an overarching Universal Truth governing all Existence—one underlying infrastructure that would encompass cosmic, divine, natural, and human Laws. Universal Truth extended beyond the visible world, beyond death, beyond time and space. It regulated the cosmos, synchronized all that moved, and bound together the fate of beings. It went by the names Ma'at, Emet, Arta, Rta, Asha, Arche, and Dharma.

In Egypt's Old Kingdom the Pyramid Texts of Unas (2375 and 2345 BCE) referred to Universal Truth as *Ma'at*. Egyptians associated harmonious human actions—social interactions, good deeds, ritual acknowledgment of the gods, and the benevolent acts of their rulers—with proper alignment of the heavens and the earth. They regarded the behavior and truthfulness of a person in relation to divine Cosmic Order to be the determinant factor in achieving a quality life for

individuals, their families, and communities. The Hebrews, whose language originated in Africa, used a similar sounding word for Universal Truth: *Emet*,⁷⁰ which they defined as the stable and consistent wisdom of God.

All agreed that the disturbance or interruption of the harmonious continuity of Universal Truth would result in chaos and threaten nature's equilibrium. For farming cultures, the bounty of the land depended on the orderly cycle of the seasons and the consistent performance of the elements. For seafarers, alignment with Universal Truth meant calm seas. For nomadic tribes, Universal Truth related to the practical objectives of migration, such as finding food, clothing, and shelter. In all cases, when the Universal Truth disconnected with Nature, the gods would fall from grace and humans would suffer.

The Sumerian word for Universal Truth, *Arta* (Akk. *Riddum*) suggested that the gods infused the rule of divine order and harmony into Nature and social law. The Aryans echoed that Sumerian word for Universal (Skt. *Rta*⁷¹), but added the concept of pure wisdom to its meaning. The Arya tribes migrating from the Black Sea region (Europe, Hittite Anatolia, Lydia, and the Steppes) across to Greater Aryana (Medes, Elam, Scythia, Gandhara, and Indus) embraced hundreds of gods, but their common spiritual destination was to merge the soul with Universal Truth and become one with the gods. By the time the Vedic teaching, the Rig Veda, came to be recorded in the Indus Valley (1500 BCE) the word *Rta* appeared to have become the divine wisdom that created Universal Law, Cosmic order, and Universal Truth.

The Orphics, who were sages of the Aegean Sea area and

represented the westernmost enclave of Eurasian shamanism, transliterated *Rta* to *Arche*. They described this principle as the essence of Reality. Accordingly, in its archaic state the “*arche-type*” of Universal Truth gave form to the world. It encompassed all that could be and would be and contained the first cause from which Existence emerged. Like the Vedic Rishi who had migrated east, the Orphics shared the view that essential chaos, in the form of original sin, was embedded in Universal Truth, and it forced souls to cycle repeatedly through reincarnation.

The Brahmanic cosmology, as elucidated in the Upanisads, transitioned *Rta* into Dharma. This was defined as the divine Universal-Consciousness underlying all of existence, unifying cosmic and social laws. Through mastery of divine thoughts and ritual practice, the Brahmins of the Indus and Ganges Rivers (today Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India) believed that they could “climb” to the Heavenly City of the Creator-God Brahma located at the top of the Cosmic Mountain. The privilege to break the bounds of mortal suffering was reserved exclusively to those born into their religious caste. Only the souls of Brahmins could merge with Brahma’s Divine Self in the afterlife, simultaneously achieving immortality in Heaven and ending the cycle of reincarnation.

ASCETICS

With the passing of King Cyaxares (625–585 BCE), builder of the Median Empire, his son Astyages (reigned 585–550 BCE) inherited the governance of an empire stretching from Lydia

to Scythia. During his reign, an era of relative stability and success, the independent Sun-Lion sage thrived. In Medes the Magi Order had embraced this role of the Arya sage-seer as the seeker of Universal Truth. Having studied cosmologies from near and far, they explored new vistas, offered prophecies, and invited proposals for new ways to cross into Universal-Consciousness.

The most powerful influencers among the Magi Order in the east, the Scythian Magi, were primarily Rishi of the Vedic tradition. Among them a radical new movement known as asceticism was gaining popularity. Its practitioners were independent seers, the Sramana,⁷² who left their tribes to go into the forests and mediate day and night. They turned away from the rules of society and institutional religions, instead choosing to pursue the full-time practice of trance-meditation. They used denial of the material world as a means for purifying their soul to free it of social and spiritual ills. These seers predicted with great excitement the impending arrival of a sage of all sages, the One-Who-Comes to Declare the Truth.

On the coast of the Aegean in the far western reaches of the Median Empire, the ascetic Orphics were in line with the goals of the Magi. They derived their name from the legend of Orpheus, the musician, poet, and prophet, who descended into Hell (Grk. *Hades*) in search of his wife. The story echoed a Sumerian myth whereby Ishtar descended to the netherworld "House of Dust" in search for her husband, testifying to the cultural link between the Orphic Greeks and Mesopotamia.

When Mesopotamian mythologies reached the Aegean shores they inspired a spurt of adaptations to the epic Greek

Mythos⁷³ that began more than a thousand years earlier.

The initial source of Greek beliefs was the island of Crete, home of the Minoan civilization (established 2800 BCE), a prodigy of ancient civilization featuring multilevel buildings, streets, squares, plumbing, sewage, artwork and industry. Its creativity was contemporary with the advanced Harrapan culture in the Indus-Saraswati region, perhaps linked in some way with Crete, developer of the first sea-faring culture, as it made trade possible between Egyptian, European, and Mesopotamian neighbors.

The primordial deities of the Greeks⁷⁴ were reminders of the Sumerian and Egyptian creators of Earth and Heaven. Their priests through contact with those other religions developed a similar cosmogony beginning with primordial time when *Chaos* agitated the *Arche*, giving rise to the ground of Mother Earth (Grk. *Gaia*) who then gave birth to the sky (Grk. *Uranus*). The Mother Earth Goddess, *Gaia*, was contemporary with the Egyptian Hathor and the Sumerian *Ninhursag*. Her body was the world mountain where the gods took residence.

The Minoan shamans traveled the seas in search of the Cosmic Mountain in order to mark the center of the channel connecting Heaven and Earth, the so-called navel of the biosphere. They landed⁷⁵ in Delphi, where they established the divination temple of *Gaia* at the *axis mundi* of Mount Parnassus. They appointed a female shaman, the Oracle of Delphi, to channel the divine words of the gods, which they transcribed into hymnals of destiny.

The Greek Supreme God, *Zeus*, was modeled after *Marduk*, and the battle between the Greek Titans and Gods

was influenced by Mesopotamian mythology. Based on the Babylonian story of the gods overthrowing their forerunners, the giant, bestial old deities who hated their own children, the Greeks created a narrative to explain how their human-bodied gods rebelled against the older generation of Titan beasts. The fall of the Titans and takeover by the Greek Gods appeared after the collapse of the Minoan culture. Its cities, ports, and crops were destroyed by a volcanic eruption, Shockwaves, and an ensuing tsunami (1630 BCE), the largest in recorded history.

Emulating Akkadian and Babylonian myths, *Zeus* and his fellow Greek Gods forever banished the monstrous Titans to the Underworld (Grk. *Tartarus*), a bottomless abyss beneath the ground of Existence. In a rage, the Titan Chronos unleashed a Great Flood, a relentless nine-day deluge of rain that reached the top of Mount Parnassus (8,000 feet high). Only two mortals survived in an ark to restart civilization. To prevent human beings from repeating the sins that caused the Deluge, thereafter *Zeus* would use his thunderbolt (an echo of *Marduk* and the Vedic *Indra*) against any who blasphemed the gods. Fear of his wrath would keep people in line, thus making civilized behavior possible. Natural catastrophes were deemed to be expressions of his anger. But the immortal Greek Gods were not perfect either. Like humans, they used their powers for selfish reasons and failed to see the future. They suffered from the human flaws of emotions and desires.

To establish stability *Zeus* needed an advisor, so he turned to the Titan Goddess *Themis*. She represented Divine Law (Grk. *Logos*), the inherent wisdom of the Universe.

Serving *Zeus* through her transcendental voice, she espoused the universal value of character (Grk. *Ethos*) and provided instructions for humankind about justice, morals, piety, virtues, goodwill, and the consequence of violating the *Ethos*. She espoused the Egyptian view that in death souls would be judged, and sinners would be sent to a hellish abyss below.

The emotional temperaments and vulnerabilities of the deities and their territorial sovereignty over Nature gave rise to the view that the achievement of an ethical life was the singularly greatest accomplishment possible for a human being and a challenge even to the immortals.

By the 6th century BCE, from one end of the Median Empire to the other, Lion-Sun shamans developed an ethical foundation to the understanding of the *Arche* or *Rta*. Both the Western Orphics and the Eastern Sramana turned to asceticism as the vehicle for achieving ethical purity. In increasing numbers their practitioners abandoned institutional religion and social responsibilities to pursue their authentic spiritual aspirations in isolation. They rejected temptations, ego-gratification, and material possessions. Adopting an ascetic lifestyle in pursuit of purification, the ascetic freedom movement used mystic initiatives (Grk. *teletai*) tied to euphoric trance journeys in search of Universal Truth.

The ascetics defined four principles upon which they based their total commitment:

1. Nature is cyclical; existence is cyclical. Therefore, it follows that the soul must travel through a cycle of successive births.

2. The cause for cyclical reincarnation, repeated rebirth into this world of suffering or lower worlds of greater sufferings, is one's attachment to physical and material seductions. The soul's attachment to sin carried over from prior lives. This is the basis for original sin, sin that starts from birth. Those who can purify the soul of sin would be rewarded with rebirth in Paradise, a divinely reserved dimension at the far edges of the World to the west (Grk. *Elysium*) and east (Sum. *Dilmun*).
3. Total liberation from the cycle of rebirth and reincarnation required continuous devotion to God through hymnal chanting and self-denial.
4. The accomplishment of divine purity will cause the soul to become weightless in death. Free from mortal encumbrances it will float up to the higher regions of the Cosmic Mountain where it will abide forever in a state of immortal bliss

To honor the ancient legacy of the Lion-Sun tradition, Lydia (Turkey), a rich trading kingdom on the eastern coast of the Aegean, produced the first-known coin in history featuring the stamped image of a roaring lion head with a sunburst emanating from his forehead. The coin's image ordered by Lydia's King Alyattes (610–550 BCE), the model for the legendary Midis, a king with a golden touch, lauded the power of the visionary seer to emit from his mind a spotlight on Universal Truth. As a Black Sea nation, Lydia celebrated the region's history as the origination point of the Arya traditions, and simultaneously it heralded the prediction in

its day that a messianic Lion-Sun figure was coming soon, the One-Who-Comes to Declare the Truth.

King Croesus, successor to Alyattes, shed light on another path represented by a contemporary sage whose wisdom was conveyed without mythic imagery. Thales of Miletus (624–546 BCE), credited later by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle as the father of Greek philosophy, was a mathematician and cosmogonist. He represented an alternative approach among sages, the concept of Philosophical Naturalism that used deductive reasoning and observation to offer an explanation of natural phenomena unrelated to the dictates of deities.

In addition to the ascetic Lion-Sun seers seeking eternal liberation, the wide spectrum of the Magi Order also encompassed a philosophical movement called Naturalism. Philosophical Naturalism, a view that began with the Magi stargazer-philosophers in Babylon, explored the underlying properties, elements, and behaviors of bodies in motion. It premised that whatever has been set in motion no longer required the attention of deities because it became governed by Natural Laws. This approach served as the foundation for the development of observational reasoning.

Thales and other Greek philosophers who had traveled to Mesopotamia to study Naturalism also subscribed to ancient creation myths. Their rational approach did not preclude their belief that hidden Truths could be accessed by intuitive inspiration. Consistent with mythic views, Thales regarded the original state of the World, the Arche, to be the primordial “ocean,” the dark-liquid-space-mud from which all Life arose. He deduced from this pre-existing state of

Existence that water was the first of the five basic elements.⁷⁶

CYRUS

Disagreements among the Greek gods became an essential theme for explaining conflict. Their competitions reflected a new era of militaristic Greek city-states that evolved in response to the constant threats posed by their neighbors. The first historical recount of battles in Greek mythology, the Trojan Wars, described the attack of the Mycenaean Greeks (1500 BCE) from the west coast of the Aegean Sea on the Hittite city of Troy (aka Assuwan Wilusa), a port city in Anatolia (Turkey), located on the sea's eastern coast.

War had become a means for achieving wealth and power. Politically, however, it was wiser for kings to propose that they were proxies in a battle between the gods. Peace between conquerors was always a precarious state at best.

The Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562 BCE) and King Cyaxares of the Median Empire had brought peaceful co-existence to a region bedeviled by the brutality of the Assyrians for hundreds of years. But their relatively weak successors and the spoiled noble classes of the Babylonian and Median Empires had left them vulnerable. They had made it fairly easy for a shrewd, military-minded Persian king to gain control.

The Parsa tribe came into the area during the Arya-led migrations. They settled in the ancient southeastern Elamite city of Anshan (approx. 600 BCE), located between the western Elamite capital of Susa, the Saka kingdom to the east, and the Medes capital at Ecbatana to its south. The third city-

king of Anshan, Kurash, also known as Cyrus II (550 BCE), was the grandson of Achaemenes, founder of the Persian dynasty that would grow into a world power. The ambitious Cyrus the Achaemenid leveraged his considerable political skills to rise to the head of the Median Empire's military, a position that led to his marriage to a daughter of King Cyaxares. Now a member of the Median royal family who also had the allegiance of the military, Cyrus maneuvered to dethrone Astyages, son of Cyaxares. His saw to it that his ascension to Emperor of the Median Empire would benefit the wealth and prominence of Persian nobles, who were delighted to emerge from under taxation and regulations imposed by the Median nobles.

Resistance to his dominance came only from the farthest western border of the Medes Empire. King Croesus of Lydia (560–547 BCE), said to be the wealthiest monarch since Solomon, and the admirer of philosophical wisdom, was renown in Greece for his opulent gifts to the Oracle at Delphi. Croesus feared that the Persians would attack and enslave Lydia, whose border with the Medes Empire had been fixed at the Halys (Kizil) River in a treaty with Cyaxares (585 BCE). He sought the divine advice of the Delphic Oracle to learn if he should attack first. Receiving the message that “a war would destroy a great empire,” he assumed that the prophecy referred to the defeat of the Persian enemy.

Learning that Croesus negotiated an alliance with Babylonia, Sparta, and Egypt, Cyrus became perturbed that the Babylonian Empire would breach the peace treaty between Medes and Babylon. He moved his army toward Anatolia where an overconfident Croesus planned to meet

him on the battlefield. But Lydia's allies failed to show up.

After the battles ended in a draw Croesus disbanded his armies, as was customary during winter months, but Cyrus did not. He attacked the Lydian capital at Sardis and took Croesus as a prisoner. Cyrus allowed Croesus to continue his rule, but only as a vassal with diminished power, stripping Lydia of its economic holdings and leadership role among Aegean city-states. Cyrus had sent a clear message to his neighbors. The Persians should be taken seriously. He then went on to capture some of the other vassal states pledged to Babylonia.

His next step was to develop strong personal alliances in Babylon through the diplomacy of marriages, rewards to nobles, and his backing of the Magi Order. Cyrus understood that to sustain his rule over a vast empire would require good management and adaptation to local customs and beliefs. He embraced the Magi Order because of their inclusive regard for all religions. Personally, he did not hold strong views on any particular belief. For him religion was primarily a diplomatic tool useful for fostering his "live and let live" approach.

King Cyrus II saw the opportunity to absorb the entire Babylonian Empire by taking its capital of Babylon. Having acquired the Median Empire through political maneuvering, he aimed to do the same with Babylon, by planning to take the city without damaging it.

The city was in the hands of an Arabian, Nabonidus (556–539 BCE), who took over after the death of the last Chaldean in Nebuchadnezzar's line of weak successors. Nabonidus did not care to keep peace with the Median-Persian Empire, even

showing contempt for Cyrus by making alliances against him, like the one he had with Croesus of Lydia. But Nabonidus had a weakness that Cyrus planned to exploit, his neglect of Babylon. He had spent more than ten years away from the city preferring to live in Tayma, Arabia, where he built an alternate capital of his own. During his absence his incompetent son Belshazzar ruled as governor of Babylon.

Nabonidus must have received word that Cyrus planned to take Babylon. He rushed back to the city and immediately dismissed his son and other administrators. Panicked, Nabonidus, a devout worshipper of the ancient Moon God, Sin, ordered high priests from city-states across the Babylonian Empire to immediately bring their idols to Babylon. He would provide the old gods of Sumer/Akkad protection behind the high and wide fortress walls of the great city. As he, himself, was a devout patron of the old ziggurats and temples at Kish, Nippur, and Ur, he feared that Cyrus could undermine his divine support by destroying the sacred images of the Babylonian Gods.

Cyrus labeled Nabonidus a “backward, absent and incompetent” ruler, “low-born oppressor” and “unfit to lead” and charged him with “stealing” the “idols,” an insult to the gods. Although he supported the upkeep of Babylon’s Ziggurat at Esagila, for years Nabonidus had ignored the Magi advisors, perhaps because of their non-denominational approach. Hearing the arguments Cyrus was making against him, Nabonidus, and his supporters suspected the Magi Order in Babylon to be a fifth column allied with the Medians and Persians.

Cyrus proclaimed⁷⁷ that were he the King of Babylon

instead of Nabonidus, he would never do harm to its people, culture or institutions, like “Nabonidus, the oppressor of Babylonians.” On the heels of his campaign of accusations and blame, Cyrus, now positioned as a liberator, sent his military to lay siege to the city. As his troops surrounded it, he negotiated directly with Babylon’s military leaders who were facing substantial casualties in defense of Nabonidus and wisely decided to demure. A month after the siege his successful diplomatic effort resulted in surrender. Cyrus the Great marched into Babylon (539 BCE) and seized the throne of the entire Babylonian Empire.

Showing his skills at the art of propaganda Cyrus declared that he had taken the action to overthrow Nabonidus at the behest of Babylon’s God, Marduk. The Lord God, he claimed, had anointed his invasion after personally appealing to Cyrus to restore peace and improve the lives of Babylon’s citizens. Cyrus met no resistance from the people of Babylon. They opened the city gates and cheered his arrival. Careful to stand behind his pledge to do no damage, he quickly repaired an area of the city wall where his army had broken through.

Making a show of his religious tolerance, Cyrus immediately ordered the return of the venerated idols and their priests to their original residences— accusing the deposed king of having taken them against their will.

Combining the Median and Babylonian Empires into one Persian Empire, Cyrus began his Achaemenid Dynasty by establishing a reputation as a benevolent benefactor. He allowed for the repatriation of peoples removed from lands and displaced by hundreds of years of Assyrian and Chaldean

policies. Showing respect for all religions under his rule, he encouraged the rebuilding of temples previously destroyed throughout the empire.

Cyrus the Great decreed (538 BCE) that the tens of thousands of Judeans whom Nebuchadnezzar II had forcibly removed from Judea nearly seventy years earlier were free to return home. He encouraged the Judeans to return to their ancestral land and rebuild their God's Temple in Jerusalem.

The Levite priests calling for the reunification of their people and purification of their faith in Elohim rounded up a group of 42,360 who were determined to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem and ready to embark on their return home to the Kingdom of Judah.⁷⁸ But many Israelite expatriates chose to remain behind. Among them were several generations born in Medes and Babylon. Many had intermarried with locals, or immigrated to other lands to the east, or drifted away from their original beliefs.

During their captivity the Magi Order in Babylon and Medes supported the effort of the Judean scribes to make a record of their heritage. Their "Gate to God," the Bible, was enhanced in exile with stories of Creation, genealogical histories, and migratory journeys to the Promised Land.

With his advocacy of religious tolerance Cyrus made it possible for the Magi of Babylon to regain their relevance and confidence. But having endured the decade-long absence of the former king, the Magi Council immediately reasserted an old rule mandating that once a year during the annual New Year Harvest Festival (*Akitu*) the King of Babylon, or his chosen successor, must come to Esagila to be anointed by the Chief Priest. Failure to do so would result in his throne being

vacated.

Since the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, the Magi of Babylon had earned the respect of the city's citizens for their roles as temple caretakers, astronomers, masters of divination, and purveyors of tolerance. Babylon had grown to a population of two hundred thousand, but their diverse cultures widely held Babylon's Magi Order in high esteem. The Persian nobles, on the other hand, regarded the original Magi Order based in Ecbatana with some suspicion. They worried about the ethnic origin of the Magi in Medes and their relationship with the Median nobles, whom the Persians suspected of harboring a plan to restore the old Median Empire to its former glory.

Zoroaster, a Persian sage and advisor to its nobles, may also have been a member of the Magi Order. His religion was growing in popularity in Persia. He introduced the eschatology of "Good versus Evil," which he associated with good and evil religions. He proposed that his religion was that of the God of Good, whom he identified as Assura Mazda (Per. *Ahura Mazda*), the Creator God who instructed him to reveal the Universal Truth (Per. *Asha*). Although heralded by his followers as the prophe-sized One-Who-Comes to Declare the Truth, most of the Magi found his new religion to be an attack on the *Deva* beliefs of the Rig Veda.

The inception of Zoroastrianism may have started some years earlier with the composition of hymns dedicated to the supremacy of God. By the time Cyrus came to power (539 BCE), the current leader of this religion, Zarathustra Spitamas, had become the champion messenger of Assura Mazda. Emulating the Prophet Abraham's personal

relationship with Elohim, this Zoroaster similarly made claim to being the chosen prophet and sole recipient of God's word.

While Zoroaster defined Assura Mazda as pure Goodness, he also warned that he had an evil twin, a Devil God, a trickster who seduced people into wickedness. He equated the Vedic Gods as emanations of this satanic deity and regarded all non-believers as people possessed by his demonic spell. Assura Mazda, the Supreme God of Good, had instructed him to save the world from fundamental Evil.

In their original oral form, the Gathas (seventeen devotional hymns), the earliest compositions of Zoroaster, emulated the hymnal meter of the Rig Veda. The Zoroastrian hymns expounded the *Asha*, the divine essence of Universal Truth, and celebrated the aspiration of the believer to achieve Goodness by living the righteous path as God directed. However, those who would oppose Assura Mazda's path were exposed as evil in his "Treatise Against Demons," the *Vi-Daeva-datta* (aka *Vendidad*). In it he portrayed the *Devas*, the light-emitting spirits and deities of the Rig Veda as *Daevas*, evil spirits spreading sin. Since Creation, he charged, the *Daevas* worked under the direction of the Devil God, *Angra Manyu*. They tempted and seduced humans, causing them to become primitive and sinful. These demon-spirits, in possession of the souls and bodies of infidels, could be exorcised only when their victims accepted faith in Assura Mazda and adopted his strict moral prescriptions. The primary sinners in Zoroaster's mind belonged to believers in the Lion-Sun traditions, the Vedists, Brahmanists, and Sramanists.

He painted his religious competitors as evil ones. But his

views did not distract the Magi Order from their tolerant focus or derail their conviction that perhaps one among them might break the code of Cosmic Laws, attain boundless awareness, and lead them all to salvation through universal wisdom.

THE RELUCTANT EMPEROR

In the Saka region, the Magi Order's Sanctuary at Babil had educated new generations to understand visionary cosmologies from various perspectives and to cultivate a passion for finding the elusive meanings of existence. As a young student Siddhartha Gautama had shown a remarkable appetite for consuming wisdom-enhancing practices. He had been exposed to debates on the relative influences of deities and universal laws in determining the circumstances of existence. He learned about the legacies of the shamanic Cosmic Mountain and Sacred Tree, the fellowships of the Lion-Sun and the Bull-Moon, the primordial powers of creation, the Supreme Gods named Mitra, Marduk, Assur, Rae, Elohim, Zeus or Brahma; and the scriptures of Egypt and Sumer/ Akkad, the Vedic hymns, and Hebrew Bible; and, the studies of Babylonian cosmology, philosophy, and trance-visions.

During his childhood, his father may have taken him to witness the Akitu festival at Esagila, where visitors had to disarm, as the wearing of weapons was sacrilegious in the holy temple. He might have been a young intern prodigy in Babylon's Magi Conservatory. He could have returned to Babylon at the age of twenty-three to embark on a career in

the Magi headquarters in Esagila. He may have been there when Cyrus came to power.

His ability to honor anyone offering even a single word of wisdom and his compassion for all he met made him very popular among the Magi sages. Given his talent for astronomy, they gave him the opportunity to develop his observation skills at the astral Watchtower of Ete-menanki. As he accepted greater responsibilities, the people of Babylon grew to know and admire him. In due course Siddhartha's colleagues selected Gautama to be their Chief Magus, a role that also included the position of viceroy of Babylon (Bhagapa).

Cyrus was killed during a campaign against a Scythian tribe (530 BCE). But the Achaemenid Dynasty continued for the next eight years under the reign of his son Kambujiya (aka Cambyses II). Following his father's death, Emperor Kambujiya invaded Egypt and declared himself pharaoh, basking in his role as a living god. But his failure to return to Babylon to attend the Akitu Festival for three years could have forced the Magi Council to vacate his throne. To assure the population that they had their interests in hand, the Magi Order would appeal to Gautama to govern on behalf of the throne—at least temporarily until the emperor realized his error and returned and apologized for his absence.

Reluctant to accept the position, Siddhartha Gautama agreed after an understanding was reached that he could use the post to declare edicts that would bring the citizenry some peace from oppressive taxation and stop the bullying of minority religions or people from foreign cultures. His prompt actions to engender hope among the poor, the aged,

and infirm, may have generated deep concerns among the Persian nobles.

But Emperor Kambujiya failed to return. He died on the way back. Rumors of his sudden death surprised the Magi. At that time kingdoms throughout the relatively new Persian Empire were still recovering from the interminable string of bloody wars as Assyrians, Babylonians, Medians, and Persians fought to dominate. Only fifteen years after Cyrus had taken Babylon, the Persian nobles worried that their land holdings outside of Persia could be at jeopardy.

One evening while standing alone at the top of the Esagila tower, the Chief Magus, having become a reluctant King of Babylon, looked up at the starry sky and decided that he must abdicate his position as temporary ruler. There had been rumors that the Persian military might attempt to take back the throne. Readings of the stars indicated that Gautama's life might be in danger. Just in case, the Magi sent an imposter to sit on the throne in the royal palace, a traditional precautionary maneuver to protect the king.

From childhood Gautama was motivated to alleviate the suffering of people by solving the mystery of life and death. Earlier he had joined the ascetics in the forest and made the effort to become enlightened, but failing to do so he went to Babylon. There his responsibilities had drawn him away from his destiny. He must resign, he thought, wishing to return to the forest and be among the shamans where he could continue to probe the secret of Universal Truth.

At that moment two of his Magi lieutenants excused their interruption and introduced a third man wearing a rider outfit.

“Your highness, a Budii messenger has arrived with urgent news.”

Gautama’s Magi allies in Ecbatana had sent the messenger from the Budii tribe of Medes, admired for their silence and trustworthiness. “They have confirmed that the Emperor Kambujiya had been killed by foul play on his way back to Babylon,” he said. “The Achaemenid General Darius, with Zoroaster’s blessings, and the support of the Persian nobles now intend to take the throne. Their coup attempt is imminent.”

Gautama turned to look at the sky. He picked out the planet Nebu (Mercury), the star of knowledge and prophets. “It is time,” he said turning to the Magi aides.

“Please, World-honored One,” the Budii messenger said. “I am here with my brothers. The Saka king, your honorable royal father, Sud-dhodana, has instructed us to escort you to the Indus. He will protect your family while you are away. Please wear this robe I have brought for you. You will be one of us Budii now. No one will know of your whereabouts.”

The smiling Gautama turned to his Magi colleagues, clasping his hands together, he bowed to them and said: “I will remember you, always, my dearest friends. Let’s congregate again in the stars when the Sun, Moon, and Venus are in perfect alignment. Please assure the others that I have embarked on my journey to liberate all the people from suffering. If you hear news that I have been killed, do not accept it, for in death my life begins anew.”

With Gautama’s departure the Achaemenid bloodline resumed under the helm of the new Emperor, Darius the Great. On the face of a gorge in Bisutun in Persia five columns

of etched inscriptions speak with the voice of Darius describing his predecessor. The Persian Emperor claimed therein that for a few months an imposter who pretended to be the brother of the deceased King Kambujiya, a Magi named “Gaumâta,” had sat on the stolen throne belonging to the Achaemenid family.

Leaving Babylon

TTrue to their word, the Budii safely escorted the deposed Chief Magus and former King of Babylon to the lower Sindhu (Indus River) forests. They may have taken Gautama on a northern route through Medes toward the Kingdom of Gandhara then across the Punjab to Kuru. Or perhaps they went from Babylon along the Euphrates River to its mouth at the Persian Gulf near ancient Eridu, and then by sea route along the southern coastline to the mouth of the Indus. Most likely, they took a southern land route along the Saka held coastline through Makran⁷⁹ to the spot where the Indus meets the Arabian Sea (part of the Indian Ocean).

Meanwhile, the new Emperor, Darius I, took control of the crown. He had sent out agents to find Gautama with instructions to send detailed reports on his activities. If the opportunity to kill him presented itself, they were to make sure that it looked like an accident.

But his physical whereabouts would remain unknown.

Standing at a river's edge Siddhartha Gautama spotted a large white lotus flower balanced on top of the water. His eyes followed its stalk to the root in the muddy bottom.

“What is the secret of the blossom, World-Honored

One?” asked his lead companion.

“From the beginning of time,” he replied, “the light of Existence emerged from the swamp of chaos. So shall it be again.” He smiled fondly as he recalled his youthful studies with the religious teachers in Babil and his earlier sojourn in the Vedic forest, his astral research at the Esagila tower, and his most recent efforts to bring compassionate relief to the people of Babylon. Now on the run, with agents of the Persian army on his heels, he reflected on where he was headed.

“Near by are my old mentors of mediation, the watchers of the Cosmic Mountain. Let us find them. They will help us open the portal to peace for this suffering world,” Gautama said.

When the Achaemenid General took power, he claimed that he had averted a conspiracy of Median interests, a plot by Median nobles and the Magi to reclaim the status they held during the former Medes Empire. Immediately after the Achaemenid Persians were restored to power, a number of rebellions broke out throughout the empire. Emperor Darius I was prepared for this development. He launched a military campaign to consolidate his territorial dominance crushing the opposition in Media and other parts.

He would go on to attack areas or leaders who supported the deposed Gautama or those foolishly inclined to seek a return to independence.

Darius declared that his selection to the throne was a divine act requested and sanctioned by the Supreme God. He no longer felt compelled to follow the strategy of Cyrus the Great, the late Persian Emperor who acknowledged the God Marduk in establishing his right to the Babylonian throne.

Darius instead honored Assura Mazda, the Persian Supreme God espoused by Zoroaster, his religious advisor since his youth in Anshan.

Darius would declare Mazdaism to be the state religion. He would place Zoroaster at the head of a new Magi Order after a purge of the clerical community. Any sages not willing to join in the new state religion would be relieved of their duties. The Esagila temple would no longer be relevant. Henceforth, the Magi would be an exclusively Zoroastrian Order, a training ground for priests (*Per. Athravan*) to conduct state and religious ceremonies. Their outdoor fire rituals became the exclusive franchise for honoring the emperor, and keeping the empire pure of lascivious influences. Because Assura Mazda had given only human beings control over fire, and not animals, this meant that those who controlled fire were his chosen and blessed followers.

Darius, a military and political mastermind, and his advisor, Zoroaster, a master of strategy and mythmaking, had planned and executed a complex coupe and purge. It was ambitious in scale and consequence and shrewdly executed. Its obfuscations fooled many, but its true intention would not evade detection by the Scythian and Indian peoples east of Persia.

THE INSULT

Cyrus the Great established the vast Persian Empire, becoming its first emperor by consolidating the Median and Babylonian Empires under his rule. He reigned for thirty years and built the first Persian Empire capital at Pasargadae

(546 BCE) in Parsa (today Fars Province, Iran). From this fortified center his administration organized a system for the efficient operation of provincial nations, acting much like a federal government for the mutual benefit of the empire and its states. His conquests facilitated the acquisition of wealth from raided treasuries, the takeover of mining resources, and the levying of taxation. His neighbors became vassals forced to carry the burdens of heavy taxation.

His military appetite compelled Cyrus to enlarge his eastern holdings. He personally led a great army to battle (530 BCE) against a confederation of Scythians (the Massagetae)⁸⁰ in northeastern Aryana (today Afghanistan). Tens of thousands were killed on both sides including Cyrus himself. At the end, the Persians were forced to withdraw, taking the body of Cyrus for burial at Pasargadae. Of his two sons, the elder Kambujiya had long since been deemed to be his successor.

From the moment he took power, Cyrus sought to reestablish the traditional relationship between the ruler and the clergy and avert the religious clash his predecessor had with the Magi Order. He granted the Magi of Babylon their request to reinstate the popular twelve-day festival honoring Marduk, an ancient custom dating back to Old Babylon's founding in the era of Hammurabi some 1,300 years earlier.

The event had been interrupted for ten years (549–539 BCE) during the reign of Nabonidus. Cyrus leveraged the neglect and insult of the Magi in his campaign to demonize Nabonidus before capturing the city. Although a Persian, Cyrus understood the long history of Babylon's assertiveness against foreign royals and was careful not to offend the

historical sensitivities of the proud city. He made an effort to act like a Babylonian native—shrewdly declaring that he would put the interests of the people of Babylonia ahead of his own.

By restoring the New Year's Harvest Festival (Akitu),⁸¹ a celebration coinciding with the vernal/March equinox, he gained the support of the city's citizens and leaders immediately after his defeat of Nabonidus (539 BCE). Now he would prove his intentions were sincere when summoned to Esagila to honor the Magi Order's dictum requiring the annual reaffirmation of the king. However, this ancient ceremony calling for Marduk's annual acceptance of a sitting sovereign included a "humiliation ritual" where the king is made aware of his mortality and, therefore, his inferiority to the immortal Lord. While acknowledging its socio-political importance, Cyrus wanted to avoid attending this scene personally.

Upon his takeover of Babylon, he sent word that he was unavoidably detained. Military business required his presence elsewhere in another part of the kingdom. In his place, he sent his son, Kambujiya, to attend the Akitu Crowning Ceremony at Esagila on his behalf. Cyrus had groomed Kambujiya (aka Cambyses II), to inherit his throne, and in sending him to Babylon, he declared the prince to be his royal successor.

The traditional role for the King of Babylon was to lead an elaborate procession festooned with ornamental decorations, colorful streamers, flags, and chimes. As the celebration headed for the Esagila temple, the king would be given the honor to preside over the resetting of the yearly

calendar's alignment with the solar cycle. When the king "took Marduk's hand," the Lord God would restart the cycle of existence, initiating the first season, spring. Readings of the scripture⁸² reminded all in attendance that Marduk had originally created and set the cosmos into rhythmic motion. The people lined the street cheering and praying as display carts carried breads from the barley harvest, gifts to the bull god-idol (Nebu), and sheep to be offered to all the gods in the pantheon for their bestowal of bounty and fertility.

Representing the new king, Kambujiya arrived at Esagila to formally receive the confirmation of his father Cyrus as the Lord's selection to rule Babylon.

Although the sacredness of the location and certain rules of the ceremony were publicly known, Kambujiya had not been prepared for it. Entering the temple gate of Esagila, he and his entourage were dressed in full Elamite regalia and inappropriately armed with swords and other weapons. Kambujiya wore a princely crown on his head, and held a scepter in one hand and a mace in the other.

Following the cleansing of the temple with holy water purification rituals and drum beatings to exorcise demonic spirits, the Master of Magi Ceremonies (*sesgallu*) met Kambujiya in front of the Lion of Babylon, a black rock sculpture dedicated to the Magi Order by Nebuchadnezzar. Shocked by Kambujiya's seemingly unwitting desecration of the sacred ground, the priests scolded him and his men and ordered them to disarm. Embarrassed, surprised and seething with anger, still Kambujiya held his tongue. He was then told to order his bodyguards to stay behind as he was escorted to wash his hands before being allowed to enter Marduk's Inner

Sanctum.

The clerics surrounded the rattled prince and removed his regalia— crown, scepter, and mace—placing the objects at the feet of Marduk's golden statue. Facing the prince, the High Priest then slipped into a trance and suddenly, with all his might, slapped Kambujiya across the cheek. Grabbing him by the ear, he pulled him down in front of the idol declaring that the King of Babylon was not any more important than any other mortal in the eyes of the Lord. Kambujiya, on his knees, was told to beg Marduk to give his father, the king, his powers and privileges. Next, he was given a prayer to recite, wherein on behalf of his father he pledged the purity of the king's intentions, his allegiance to Marduk, and readiness to accept his royal duties for the benefit of the city's citizens. Still in trance, the High Priest, now channeling the voice of Marduk, changed his mood. Upon hearing the pledge his tone shifted from reprimand to mercy. Through him the Lord God addressed Kambujiya, saying that he had decided to permit Cyrus to sit on the throne for the upcoming year.

Kambujiya had endured the treatment in order to receive the prized acknowledgment of the Persian Achaemenid takeover. After his royal dress and accessories were returned to him, the High Priest, still speaking as the vessel and oracle of Marduk, granted the new king the destiny of a successful reign. Just when he thought it was over, the channeler, his voice resonating with divine power, suddenly stepped forward and slapped the prince once again with another stinging blow to his sore cheek. Seeing tears well up in his eyes, the clerics in attendance rejoiced and appeared to be relieved, for they regarded royal tears to be

indicative of humility before God, a harbinger of good fortune to come. At sunset, Cyrus's stand-in departed the temple and took his prominently displayed seat on a lavishly opulent cart drawn by a white ox. The procession left the Esagila temple and headed back through the Gate of Ishtar. After this departure, Kambujiya would never again return to the temple.

Soon Cyrus appointed Kambujiya to rule as King of the former Medes Empire, including the Elam-Medes-Parsa territories (today Iran). Eight years later (531 BCE) he also appointed his son the King of Babylon, and in the following year, with the news of his father's death in battle, Kambujiya ascended to the throne of the entire Persian Empire.

At the beginning of his seven-year reign Kambujiya moved the empire's seat from his father's center in Pasargadae to Susa, the former Elam capital, a more convenient location between Babylon and Ecbatana. There his administration operated with a heavier hand levying oppressive taxes across the empire, primarily to finance his growing military ambition. At his court his servants watched as the emperor fed his obsession for becoming the greatest ruler of all time with a growing drinking problem. He would fly into wine-induced rages, whereby he might kill any noble in his line of sight if he suspected disloyalty.

Like his father, Kambujiya coveted the expansion of his borders, but the prize he eyed was Egypt. However, before embarking on a military campaign to Africa, he was concerned that a long absence might jeopardize his throne at home. Kambujiya secretly instructed his most trusted lieutenant, Prexaspes, to assassinate the only possible threat

in his view, his younger brother, Bardiya. As the Emperor marched on to Egypt (525 BCE), Bardiya disappeared.

Kambujiya's invasion of Egypt was ferocious and timely. His military overwhelmed the armies of a new pharaoh only six months on the throne. He captured Pharaoh Psamtik III (526–525 BCE), deported him to Susa, and had him executed there.

Kambujiya clearly saw his victory as proof that Heaven had selected the Persian culture, as embodied by him, to dominate Egypt, thereby relegating its religion to an inferior status. He declared himself Pharaoh Mesuti-Rae (*son of the Sun God Rae*) and demanded that the Egyptians treat him as a living God. He relished the idea of being worshipped. To eliminate any possible resistance among the Egyptian nobles, he ordered the public execution of two thousand leading citizens including the son of the fallen Pharaoh. In addition, several thousand influential Egyptian citizens and scholars were arrested and pressed into service as personal slaves of his military's officers and soldiers.

Declaring himself a liberator, Kambujiya charged that Egyptian temples had been taking advantage of the people. He ordered that religious taxes be cut in half. Most temples relied on revenue paid in cattle and poultry to sustain their clerical and support structure. This edict was a severe blow to the religious enterprise in Egypt, already in decline from its glorious past.

THE COVER-UP

For three years during his occupation of Egypt, Kambujiya

failed to return to Babylon and neither reported to Esagila nor sent a stand-in for his anointment as king. To the Magi Order his absence appeared to cause a crisis. Ignored again by a detached emperor, some among its leadership council called for appropriate action. Because they enjoyed immense popularity and the support of the people, they appeared confident in asserting their divine right to certify mortal sovereignty. The Anointing Ceremony could become inconsequential again, they feared, unless they enforced it. On the other hand, if they vacated the throne, some asked, what would be the emperor's reaction? Could it cause an unintended response?

Senior clerics, those who several years earlier witnessed what they perceived to be a compliant Prince Kambujiya, believed that once he returned to Babylon, he would express his regrets and beg for the throne to be restored. After some debate, during which even the Persian evangelist, Zoroaster, may have agreed to support the Magi's proposed action, the council ruled that for the sake of social stability in the emperor's absence they would evacuate the throne. They chose their Chief Magus, Siddhartha Gautama, to represent the crown temporarily. Expecting that the issue would be resolved when Kambujiya returned and repented, indeed they were heartened to learn that word of their action had reached Kambujiya, and he prepared to return to Babylon.

Behind the scenes a secret Persian conspiracy plotted to take the throne. Darius Achaemenid, Kambujiya's distant cousin and an ambitious military leader, his religious advisor and mentor, Zoroaster, and seven prominent Persian nobles hatched a complicated plot that would change the course of

the world. They planned to take the reigns of the empire, as well as bring down the Magi Order.

His inner circle, a conspiracy of military leaders, landowner aristocrats, and religious leaders, had worried that the reigning Kambujiya was not reliable. They hatched a complex plan to change the leader at the top, but they could not be seen as having a hand in overthrowing a Persian kin.

The first step was to initiate a crisis by influencing the Magi Order to vacate the throne in Babylon. Gautama, the Chief Magus, they hoped, would then assume the mantle of governance. The conspirators would make sure that Kambujiya failed to return by “creating” a fatal accident. Once he was out of the way, the Persian conspirators would spread the story that the Magi had placed Bardiya, Kambujiya’s long lost brother, on the throne.

The Persian conspirators would then charge the Magi Order with perpetrating a fraud on the public. They would spread word that Bardiya was already dead, as Kambujiya had ordered his assassination three years earlier. Then they would accuse the Magi Order of greedily orchestrating a power grab by using a “Bardiya-imposter” as a puppet-figurehead, in order to maintain control of royal power. Exposing this supposed trickery would show that the Magi Order conspired against the Persians. They even charged that the Magi went so far as to threaten to kill any Persian aristocrats who might expose their ruse.

The Persian conspirators accused the Magi of plotting with the Median aristocracy to confiscate rich agricultural lands in Babylonia from Persians nobles and award it to their secret allies. Darius, in full control of the Persian military,

would step in and rescue the throne from the clutches of the “traitorous Magi.” Ironically, to justify their actions, the Persian conspirators invented and decried a Magi Order conspiracy.

Once the Magi in the name of Marduk had placed the throne in Gautama’s hands, the wily plan would go into motion. Their next move was designed to stop Kambujiya from returning to Babylon and reclaim his right to the throne.

Kambujiya, as the son of Cyrus the Great and grandson of Ach-aemenes, the founder of the Persian dynasty, was the rightful emperor in the bloodline, but the Persian nobles had had enough of him. As emperor, pharaoh, and self-proclaimed living god he had unlimited power and a reputation for unstable behavior. His drunken and egomaniacal bouts caused his courtiers to fear his rage. He had on occasion plunged his sword into one of his advisors. The next day he would be sorry, but his erratic pattern of behavior would not change. The Persian conspirators determined that he would have to be assassinated, but needed to do so surreptitiously. To avoid being identified as traitors to their own kind, they would have to make it look like they had nothing to do with his death.

Once Kambujiya learned that the Magi Order had vacated his throne, he quickly departed Egypt for Babylon. On the way back he camped at the head of the Tigris-Euphrates in Syria where he was met by a group of Persian military leaders who came to report to him on the situation ahead. Unbeknownst to Kambujiya, the mission was composed of agents allied with Darius, and possibly included Darius

himself. They rode out to intercept Kambujiya and kill him before he could return to Babylon. They cornered him alone in his royal tent and used his own sword to kill him.

The official story, according to Darius, was that Kambujiya had died of “natural causes” just as he was leaving Egypt or on his way back to Babylon. To explain his sword wounds, another story claimed that he tripped and fell on his own sword. The bleeding could not be stopped. He then died of self-inflicted wounds.

Meanwhile, Babylon under the caretaker government of the Magi saw what it would be like to be ruled by a philosopher-king.⁸³ Siddhartha Gautama had been reluctant to accept the Magi’s request that he take on the responsibility of king, unless he could use the post to bring some relief to the population. As Chief Magus he had been in charge of the distribution of basic goods to the needy of Babylon. In the role of king, he could do more for the people who had suffered for so long under repressive regimes. He quickly issued edicts lowering taxes, freeing slaves, opening up farmlands, and allowing citizens to have more rights and opportunities.

But Gautama refused to physically sit on the throne in the emperor’s palace, or to announce that he was king. He remained in Esagila. But word spread in Babylon that Gautama and the Magi were behind the changes being made to benefit the populace at large.

That’s when the Persian conspirators began to spread rumors that the Magi Order had illegally usurped the throne. Although they only intended for their chief to hold the position during the absence of the emperor, now with the

death of Kambujiya, the Magi had a dilemma. According to the Persian nobles, the Magi pretended that Kambujiya's brother, Bardiya, was brought to the royal palace in Babylon to assume power. But, as he was already dead, they said, the so-called Bardiya on the throne must be an imposter posing as a figurehead while the Chief Magus continued to issue new policies and edicts that favored the Order's compatriots.

Darius had been plotting behind the scenes. He was a shrewd student of the political methods of Cyrus. He learned how to cultivate powerful social, religious and military connections. He worked his way up through military ranks, just as Cyrus had done, putting himself in position to take control of the Persian Empire.

Under Kambujiya the empire's hold on its vassal kingdoms had weakened. The Persian nobles foresaw that rebellions were brewing and feared that the empire might not hold. But they could not have expected that once under Gautama's leadership those seeking more autonomy would find support at the top. The transitional period, they hoped, would be uneventful before they would take back the throne. But now it appeared that the change created an immanent threat to the empire's future.

As Darius and his cohorts moved to execute their plan, they were already well aware of the resistance they would expect from a host of kingdoms. Taking back the throne would not be without incident, but they had planned on a bit more time to build up the size of the Persian armies. Seeing Gautama taking an active leadership role contrary to their interests, they resolved to move faster.

Under pressure they launched their campaign to shape

the news reaching the public. Darius and his supporters accused the Magi of placing an imposter on the throne in a grab for power. The imposter, they called “Gaumâta,” supposedly pretended to be Kambujiya’s brother Bardiya. But this was a lie, they cried out. The Magi they charged probably killed the real Bardiya.

To give credence to their accusation, the Persians brought out a witness. Prexaspes, Kambujiya trusted aide, would reveal what really happened to Bardiya.

Apparently, Prexaspes said, Kambujiya had heard that the Magi Order were planning to bring back his brother Bardiya to take his throne. Refusing to believe that Bardiya was still alive, he ordered Prexaspes, the aide whom he had instructed to assassinate Bardiya, to be brought before him. Prexaspes confessed to Kambujiya that indeed he had not killed Bardiya as Kambujiya had ordered years earlier.⁸⁴ Instead, he admitted, he had turned over Bardiya to the Magi Order in Medes. They had apparently learned of Kambujiya’s plot to kill Bardiya, he said, and persuaded him that it was wiser to let them hide the young prince in Medes. They assured Prexaspes that Kambujiya would never find out. But once the decision was made to vacate the throne in Babylon, Prexaspes told Kambujiya, they brought Bardiya out of hiding to use him to control the throne on their behalf. Hearing of this conspiracy Kambujiya flew into an uncontrollable rage, and, accidentally “fell on his sword,” Prexaspes testified.

But, according to the Persian conspirators, once the Magi Order learned that Kambujiya had died, rather than returning Bardiya to the throne as Prexaspes expected they would, the Magi Order substituted an imposter for him. As Bardiya was a

stranger to Babylon, his face would be unfamiliar to the royal court in that city. By hiding an imposter in the emperor's palace in Babylon, the Persian nobles contended, the Magi believed they could get away with claiming he was back without anyone being the wiser to the notion that the Chief Magus Gautama was in charge.

Otanes, one of the Persian conspirators had a daughter, Pahidime, one of Kambujiya's wives, who lived in the royal palace. She related that she had spotted a strange man in the emperor's throne room. She told, he said, that this man pretended to be Bardiya. She described him as a short man, an imp, with both of his ears cut off, the mark of a man who had been punished for some past criminal enterprise, and certainly not the expected appearance of a royal.⁸⁵ Otanes said that his daughter was frightened by threats that she might be killed for exposing the truth about the imposter pretending to be Bardiya.

Traditionally, Mesopotamian seer-advisors protected their kings by sending a surrogate whenever they encountered detrimental astrological information. For example, if they suspected the possibility of assassination or some other danger they would place an "imposter" on the throne. If their suspicions proved correct, the imposter would bear the consequences, and the monarch would live. It may have been that the Magi deposited an imposter in the palace when the omens of danger to Gautama had surfaced.

A CONVENIENT SUICIDE

The inscriptions Darius had left for posterity named the

imposter-king “Gaumâta“ in an effort to mock the good name of the Chief Magus. But he also described him as a Magi and a stargazer. Notwithstanding such disparaging stories about an earless, occultist imposter at the helm of the empire, the real Siddhartha Gautama was tall and known for his long ears.

The Persians claimed that the Magi Order tried to gain legitimacy by pretending that an Achaemenid king still sat on the throne, while in actuality their governance undermined the Persian Empire. In actuality, they charged, the Magi hid behind Bardiya’s name in order to confiscate Persian landholdings and grant them to the ruling class allied with the Magi Order based in Ecbatana in Medes.

And to make it appear that the Persians were enemies of the people, Darius contended, the Magi ordered the burning down of certain temples and then accused the Persians of these atrocities. Such actions were wicked attempts to weaken the Persian Empire, he charged, part of a cynical conspiracy to enrich and return sovereign power to the former Median Empire whose aristocracy had held power prior to the rise of Cyrus.

To avert this shameful pretense, Darius and his noble friends declared that they must right this wrong. One fateful evening, they made their move. Darius claimed that they entered the palace in Babylon to discover that the imposter emperor had escaped, but after a long chase they caught up with him. Darius I, now the self-proclaimed new Persian Emperor (522–486 BCE), had “confessed”⁸⁶ to the public that he and his noble allies personally tracked down the imposter “Gaumâta” to a castle in Medes where they stabbed him to death.

Whom did they kill? Was it the imposter-imp they named “Gaumâta?” Or could it have been Bardiya himself, whom the Magi supposedly had placed on the throne or perhaps kept him there in hiding? Or, could it be that the whole story of the chase to kill the imposter was a complete fabrication?

To suppose that they chased the imposter from Babylon to Medes in a single night lacks credibility since the distance they would have had to travel to the castle in Medes was much too far to travel in such a short time. In addition, the witnesses whom Darius cited to corroborate his story of the stabbing were all his own noble conspirators.

Based on this elaborate misdirection, Darius justified his taking of the throne as a rescue of the Persian Empire from a conspiracy hatched by the Magi Order in league with Medes nobles. He accused the Magi Order of vacating Kambujiya’s throne in the first place as part of a diabolical plan to instigate popular rebellions against Persian rule, land ownership, and administration.

An addendum to the cover stories justifying the Persian “reclamation” of the Achaemenid throne included the convenient suicide of Prexaspes, upon whose word the veracity of the entire episode rested. The Persian nobles reported that he had climbed atop a rooftop in the Persian capital of Susa to address a crowd that he expected to be largely sympathetic with the Persian version. He shouted his story from the rooftop, recounting that Kambujiya had ordered him to kill Bardiya. He revealed how the Magi had convinced him to let them hide the prince. But recently, he declared, he had learned from Persian nobles in the know

that the Magi had fooled him. Rather than bringing back Bardiya, who became the rightful Persian heir to the throne upon the death of Kambujiya, the Magi had instead placed an imposter on the throne. Prexaspes cried out in disillusionment and despair that the Magi had deceived him into believing that they had protected Bardiya and offered him safe harbor.

“What did they do with Bardiya?” he shouted down.

From his rooftop platform Prexaspes saw that those gathered below waived their clenched fists in the air and called for revenge. Prexaspes mistakenly thought that they did not believe his story and were calling for him to be arrested for Bardiya’s murder.

According to the Persian nobles who told this story the crowd was actually incensed with the Magi Order. But Prexaspes misunderstood their reaction. Scared and despondent, he jumped to his death.

Was this story true? Did he commit suicide, or was Prexaspes eliminated to silence him after he served his purpose?

Indeed, if Prexaspes admitted to murdering Bardiya years earlier as ordered by Kambujiya, the charges against the Magi would not be credible. The entire basis for the coup would come apart. His denial of the murder as told to Kambujiya and then his tale of disappointment at being fooled by the Magi appeared to be a convenient story that would benefit the Persian conspirators. Moreover, if the missing Bardiya did survive, certainly Darius and his conspirators would have needed to eliminate him as well. In any case, as the veracity of the entire episode hung on the

word of Prexaspes, his “leap” from a rooftop would assure the conspirators that he could no longer speak of Bardiya’s fate.

As winners usually write history in their best interest, the only information available about this episode comes from Darius, his Persian collaborators, and from hearsay that spread from Persia to other kingdoms long after the reign of Darius. What was missing from their version of history was the real story.

They had concocted and successfully executed an elaborate plot that included a dethroning, assassination, military coup, execution, and fake suicide. They facilitated the removal of Kambujiya from the throne in Babylon, murdered him, accused the Magi of usurping the throne, seized the throne for Darius, killed the imposter, and eliminated the one person who might expose them, and yet, there was more to it.

While they covered their tracks, the story contained a number of inconsistencies. Darius and his cohorts made several preposterous assertions: (1) the Magi Order hid Bardiya, thus taking sides against the Emperor Kambujiya in favor of his Achaemenid brother; (2) the Magi Order connived to put a criminal imp on the throne by pretending he was Bardiya while their Chief Magus ruled; (3) the Magi Order threatened Persian nobles living in the palace with death if they told the truth; (4) the Magi Order burned down temples and framed the Persians for it; and (5) Siddhartha Gautama, the Chief Magus, orchestrated this power grab to make the nobles in Medes richer.

Earlier on the evening of the coup Siddhartha Gautama had departed Esagila for parts unknown. He had slipped away

into the dead of night. Within days of his disappearance, as word circulated about the coup that placed Darius at the helm, several kingdoms mounted insurgencies against the Persians. The new emperor immediately marshaled his military to suppress the resistance.

Darius said he was forced to crush nineteen rebellions in the wake of his ascendancy to the throne. He destroyed rebel communities, mutilated their captured leaders, and burned down temples. Most likely, Darius's forces fostered and directed enraged Persian mobs seeking vengeance on the demonized Magi to destroy the Vedic temples. And yet his pronouncements presented him as a benevolent ruler who rescued the temples. Just as Cyrus shrewdly blamed Nabonidus for defiling sacred idols, Darius had used a similar tactic to accuse "Gaumâta" and the Magi Order of destroying temples, which he quickly rushed to rebuild by using government funds and rations to help victims.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Emperor Darius thanked the Persian deity, the Supreme God Assura Mazda, for choosing him as the rightful heir to the throne of the King of Kings. His declaration that Assura Mazda (alt spelling Ahura Mazda) was his Lord God confirmed his undeniable alliance with god's messenger, Zoroaster.

Darius endorsed the Zoroastrian faith as his state religion, just as his mentor initiated a purge of the interfaith Magi. With the departure of Gautama, Zoroaster would remake the order into a Zoroastrian-only organization. For generations to come, the Persian Empire and the Zoroastrian

faith would be partners.

Zarathustra Spitamas, the Zoroaster of Achaemenid Persia, may have been the son of a wealthy Persian noble, and brother-in-law to both Kambujiya and Darius. His half-sister, a widow of Kambujiya, remarried Darius shortly after he came to power.

Zarathustra had been a teacher and advisor to Darius from his youth. He was also a benefactor of Prexaspes who certainly would have confessed to him when Kambujiya ordered him to murder Bardiya. A brilliant tactician, and a member of the interfaith Magi community under Gautama, Spitamas surely had to be the mastermind behind the multifaceted plan to replace Kambujiya with Darius, gain control of the Magi Order, and strengthen Persian military control of the empire.

Darius and Zoroaster had to have met many times as the plot hatched.⁸⁷

Zoroaster appealed to Mazda for the power to vanquish his foes. The influence of his “Religion of the Future” spread when a wealthy patron, Vishtaspa, who may or may not have been the father of Darius, helped him establish the first “Zoroastrian community”⁸⁸ in Persia. He opposed the overthrow of Gautama, but may have been assuaged when Zoroaster predicted that Darius would become emperor of the world.

Zoroaster was most keen on replacing what he regarded as the “evil” Magi Order with a community of his own. In particular, he may have feared that the philosopher-seer Gautama was planning to create what he regarded as a “blasphemous new religion.”

He wrote a hymn calling for Assura Mazda to bring death and bloody punishment to his opponents. Within these lines (names in parenthesis are added), Gautama and the Magi appear to be advocates of evil who deserve to be killed:

So they whose deeds are evil (Gautama/Magi), let them be deceived, and let them all howl, and be abandoned to ruin. Through good rulers (Darius) let Him (Ahuramazda) bring death and bloodshed upon them (Gautama/Magi), and [restore] unto happy villagers peace from them (Gautama/Magi). [May] He (Ahuramazda) who is greatest with the lord of death, bring grief onto them [i.e., kill them] and let it be soon.⁸⁹

Although the emperor repeatedly lauded Assura Mazda without mentioning his messenger Zoroaster, it is unlikely that the popular Persian deity⁹⁰ could be viewed as independent of Zoroastrianism. Darius' worship of this god serves as clear proof of the important role Zoroaster held within the Achaemenid power elite.

But Zoroaster's name was conspicuously missing from Darius' Bisu-tun Inscriptions at Persepolis.⁹¹ Was a substitute name used, did Zoroaster stay out of governmental affairs and records, or did a low profile serve his purpose to remain behind the scenes? For political purposes, Darius needed deniability regarding any involvement in the death of Kambujiya. Similarly, it was politically expedient for Zoroaster to keep his true role hidden in regards to the conspiracy and the purge of the Magi Order.

However, the two men shared a dream to restore the Kingdom of God on Earth.⁹² The Prophet Zoroaster foresaw a future when Persian forces, the “Immortal Companions,” would conquer the world. At that time the dark lord, he predicted, the Devil God Angra Manyu, would be no more, and Assura Mazda would purify the ground so that all his good believers waiting in Heaven will be able to return and live on Earth for an eternity.

In Zoroaster’s view the destination of the soul in the afterlife depended on which god the believer worshipped. In opposition to the traditional Arya view of repeated births, Zoroaster suggested that people lived only once. He declared that only those choosing to purify their soul by embracing moral allegiance to the true god would go to Heaven. But if people believed in following other paths their soul would be annihilated in death.

Under the leadership of Siddhartha Gautama during the Magi Order’s interfaith era, Magi scholars and stargazers explored a variety of ideas aimed at liberation from suffering and the pain of death. From the Watchtower observatory in Esagila, the stargazer Siddhartha Gautama had observed the cyclical motions of the celestial bodies. The cosmos, as he saw it, turned like a wheel that facilitated the continuity of time. Influenced in part by Vedic cosmology he sought to decipher the Universal Laws to explain the scope, nature, and essence of existence and its relationship to the human experience.

Gautama was a seer. Several years earlier he had studied in the Indus forests with Arya ascetics pursuing the “liberation of the soul” from the cycle of rebirth. There he developed divination skills for determining potential

destinies and outcomes. In due course he had surpassed his foremost teachers.

In Babylon Chief Magus Gautama was one of the founders of Philosophical Naturalism whose controversial views drew a growing interest. He was honored, even in far away lands, for his Middle Path Doctrine that called for a balanced approach in dealing with life's permutations.

Zoroaster stood in sharp opposition to Vedic, ascetic and philosophical teachings. As a prophet he spoke directly with God—the invisible, immortal, divine ruler of humanity—whom he identified as the God of Good. His Universal Truth (*Per. Asha*) called for a return to moral purity in order to reestablish God's Divine Paradise on Earth. As a member of the Magi Order, Zoroaster became concerned about the organization's direction under Gautama's leadership. He may have felt an urgent need to prevent Gautama from introducing "dangerous ideas" that might lead to a new religion.

Once he purged the Magi Order of all but his Zoroastrian clerics they took charge of ritual duties in the Persian Empire. Through Zoroaster's guidance the Persian ruler would act as the spearhead on behalf of the Supreme God, Assura Mazda. The victories Darius and Zoroaster achieved over the enemies of the Persian state inspired a missionary fervor among its military, aristocracy, and clergy. Convinced that their actions were all on behalf of Divine Good, believers viewed their successes as victories over the Devil God. The Persian nobles received lands and gold, and divine rewards were promised to people who converted to the faith.

Zoroaster's religious view was simple to understand:

ordinary human beings were caught up in a cosmic battle between Good and Evil, and they had to choose sides. They could either live a blessed life in alignment with good moral behavior, or, if they chose to follow only their instincts, they would suffer damnation. Those people who were enemies of the harmonious Asha, Universal Truth, would become possessed by demons without their knowledge of it. Zoroaster decreed that a Devil God, Angra Manyu,⁹³ worked through other faiths to seduce people into sin, and thus doom them to fall into ultimate darkness.

As entry into a pure life could only be acquired through free will, adherents would need to choose to have faith in Assura Mazda, follow his righteous moral code, and live in purity as the religion required. The good would be rewarded in this life and in the afterlife. The sinful would be punished in this life and upon their death would fall into the pit of hell.

Mazda-worship started hundreds of years before Zoroaster. Initially the god was one among many Assyrian-Hittite deities in the Black Sea region. When the deity reached Assyrian-occupied Elam he held a relatively minor role in the Elamite pantheon of gods. He was named Mazdakku by the Assyrians, Mazdak by the Elamites, and was also known as the Assyro-Elamite deity, Assara Mazas.⁹⁴ Pronounced *Ahuramazda* by his Persian proponents, Assura Mazda's name came to prominence only once he chose Zoroaster to be his messenger.

Zoroaster saw his religion as superior to all Vedic-based religions. He derided the gods of the Rig Veda as wild and immoral and of lesser divinity. Contesting the supremacy of Brahmanism's Creator God, Brahma, Zoroaster said this god

was merely a pupil of Assura Mazda, whom he called the Creator of all the Creators. He also derided the ascetic beliefs (Jaina, Orphics, Buddhism) that focused on sages attaining divinity.

Popular in Medes, Elam, the Indus lands, and other Arya cultures, the Vedic hymns featured thirty-three divine beings of light (*Devas* and *Devis*). Zoroaster redefined them as evil deities (*Daeva*), whom he accused of infecting the world with idolatry, intoxication, corruption, disease, and seducing people to engage in immoral and hedonistic activities.

The Assyrian word *Assura* referred to all gods tasked with upholding Universal Order. Persian culture recognized a number of them, but Zoroaster said three Assuras were the greatest: Mitra (the Sun), Varuna (the Moon), and Mazda (the Creator), with the latter by far the greatest Assura of all. However, in the Rig Veda, the term *Assura* was reversed to refer to demons.

In the Vedic conception the luminous *Devas* reflected the ancient view of celestial bodies as gods. The angry *Assura* were associated with the fallen deities of Akkad, which the Arya had associated with the hated Assyrian pantheon.

Echoing the older Akkadian mythology, the Assuras in Arya mythology were derived from the fallen Titans that were thrown out of Heaven and banished to the depths of the ocean. Symbolically, the Arya-Assura would take the form of giant whales or great storms that wreck havoc on humans who are the seafarers of life.

With Zoroaster's anti-Vedic views, in the pantheon of Assura Mazda these roles were reversed. The Assura were the divine guardians of moral good, and the *Devas* were recast as

Daevas, evil-minded demonic spirits bent on seducing people into immoral activities. Herein Vedism and Zoroastrianism defined competing divine cosmologies that degenerated into a religious conflict.

ZOROASTER SPEAKS

Politically Zarathustra Spitamas preferred to remain in the background, preaching that the focus needed to be on God, not his messenger. But behind the scenes Zoroaster the Prophet lamented to Assura Mazda about the elitist religious leaders in his home area of Kamboja, seat of a warrior clan on the eastern front of Medes and Elam (today these are parts of Iran, Azerbaijan, or Afghanistan).

In that region the notion of Light and Darkness had come to be interpreted as Beauty and Ugliness. It was a religious duty to kill ugly animals like snakes, worms, frogs, and insects⁹⁵ and to revere the “pretty“ animals like cows and horses. Zoroaster had exhorted people in the area to reject both the mistreatment of cattle by farmers and the ritual sacrifices of animals. He saw depravity everywhere and decried the near absence of moral behavior, the ease with which people lied, and the worship of false gods. He placed blame for this state of affairs on the local Rishi who were the Vedic shamans. He accused them of the blasphemous attempt to achieve divine immortality by drinking the trance-inducing, hallucinatory elixir Soma,⁹⁶ believed to be the Elixir of Eternal Life consumed by the Arya gods. However, if one drank it (Per. *Haoma*) to honor Assura Mazda, it would be for the sake of extending the length of his or her life in order to

do more good on behalf of God.

In their youth Zarathustra Spitamas and Siddhartha Gautama may have known one another. They may have shared memories of each other as young pupils in a Magi school. At that time, Siddhartha, the Saka prodigy and prince, must have received a great deal of praise for his mastery of the Vedic scripture. Zarathustra, brilliant as he was, might have felt ignored, fueling his competitive fervor. In his adult years, perhaps he carried within him a sense of being rejected by the traditional religious leaders of the Aryans.

In his conversations with Assura Mazda, Zoroaster implored his God to guide him toward his goal to convert a sinful world to embrace Goodness. He composed the “Sacred Songs” (Gathas), emulating the poetic style and hymnal form of the Rig Veda, but because of his indifference to the Vedic views of the divine, the content of his songs rejoiced in the moral themes of Assura Mazda. In its initial oral edition, Zoroaster, as the chosen messenger of Assura Mazda, heeded the call of the Supreme Being entrusting him with the mission to convert others to all that was good and pure.

Assura Mazda was the “Uncreated” Creator—the immortal God who always was and always will be. He was the protector of the *Asha* and creator of the Laws of Universal Truth and Order. His faithful were blessed with free will in order to live life in harmony with the *Asha* and through it embrace the practices of good deeds and cooperative behavior. Zoroaster warned that Angra Manyu, the Devil God, seduced people into chaos, selfishness, depravity, and lies (*Per. druj*). Working through evil-minded shamans, the personifications of *Daevas*, the Devil God sent his legions to

fool people with fake magic, calling upon them to make sacrifices that had no real power, and deluding them by promoting ascetic practices.

Zoroaster emulated the role of Abraham, the Hebrew Bible's personal messenger of God, and his transcendent Almighty God. In addition, following the example of the biblical Moses, Zoroaster also embodied the Law Receiver who would lead the faithful into God's holy paradise on Earth.

Zoroaster used his considerable skills as a mythic writer to continuously update the Zoroastrian scripture, cleverly collecting, co-opting, modifying, recycling, deriding, or commenting on his extensive religious knowledge of other faiths. In opposition to the Magi Order's exploration of an overarching Universal Truth that would encompass all religions, he advanced the Zoroastrian teachings by using his mastery of mythic language to compete with other religions and to declare the superiority of his Good God over all others.

Zoroaster may have initiated an oral record of the Word of God received in a vision, the "Guide to Exorcising Demons," Vi-Daeva-datta (aka Vendidad). This major work contained an articulation of a Zoroastrian genesis story and cosmic mythology. It also featured prayers and rituals designed to instruct followers on how to defend against disease and evil spirits. In conversation with Zoroaster, Assura Mazda began by telling him the story of human creation:

In the beginning, there were twin gods, one good and one evil. The good god, Assura Mazda, and the evil god, Angra Manyu, each had their respective followers, the Assuras and Daevas. Assura Mazda then created the first man, Yima, and charged him

to become the king of all righteous people and to promote the prosperity of those free of evil, which he did successfully. At that time good men and their families prospered, were bestowed with perpetual youth, and never fell sick. At the same time evil men in service of the Devil God, Angra Manyu, cultivated bad reputations and were deprived of wealth and growing herds.

Assura Mazda gave Yima supernatural powers and magical tools, including *the Jam-e-Jam*, a cup filled with “Haoma“ a pure version of the “elixir of immortality”⁹⁷ so he may live long and do God’s bidding. Yima used his God-given powers to grow the human population for hundreds and thousands of years until Assura Mazda appeared to him with a warning of an impending catastrophe. Soon the Devil God intended to unleash a Great Freeze that would devastate the land. Assura Mazda called upon the Sage-King to save the Aryan people in his care. He instructed him to dig and build a Vara,⁹⁸ a three-level underground city where Yima would assemble a society free of any evil and disease.

Assura Mazda told Yima to select the fittest of men and women, and gather two of every kind of animal, bird and plant seeds, and an ample supply of water and food.⁹⁹ Yima then used his mystical powers to knead the earth as if forming clay to shape it into a Vara underworld with buildings and streets inside it. Then by powering this world

below with light and air, more than two thousand people and their catde—a "pure Aryan race" free of quarrels, slanders, and impurities—entered die city from surface portals. They lived below ground to ride out the catastrophe above.

Zoroaster's mythic subterranean habitat was based on a real account of ancient history. Although wrapped in the aura of a mythic story, it harkened back to the inception of Aryan shamanism at its roots in the area of the Black Sea and the Steppes. Underground structures in ancient Anatolia (Turkey) dating back to pre-historic millennia from 10000-6000 BCE were a well-known legacy of shamanic Spiritualism.

The Hittites, Assyrians, Medians, Lydians, Greeks, and Persians had all visited this land named Cappadocia,¹⁰⁰ and were well aware of its secret subterranean cities and tunnels. These man-made cave-cities could have been the inspiration for Sumerian and Egyptian myths of an afterlife entombment where lost souls lived in subterranean communities.

Zoroaster claimed this ancient property for his God by linking Assura Mazda to the origins of the Arya culture in this area, which he described as the original divine paradise of Aryanem Vaejah. Earlier, in the Rig Veda, it had been designated as the Arya Varta, the original Arya homeland.

Zoroaster described this landscape by co-opting mythic Arya locations:

The Cosmic Mountain, herein named Hara Berezaiti (i.e., Watchtower), the heavenly home of the chariot-riding gods supporting Assura Mazda