

SOUL PRINTS

Live Your Story

Mordechai Gafni

Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show ...

—Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*

I. The Wave of Your Story

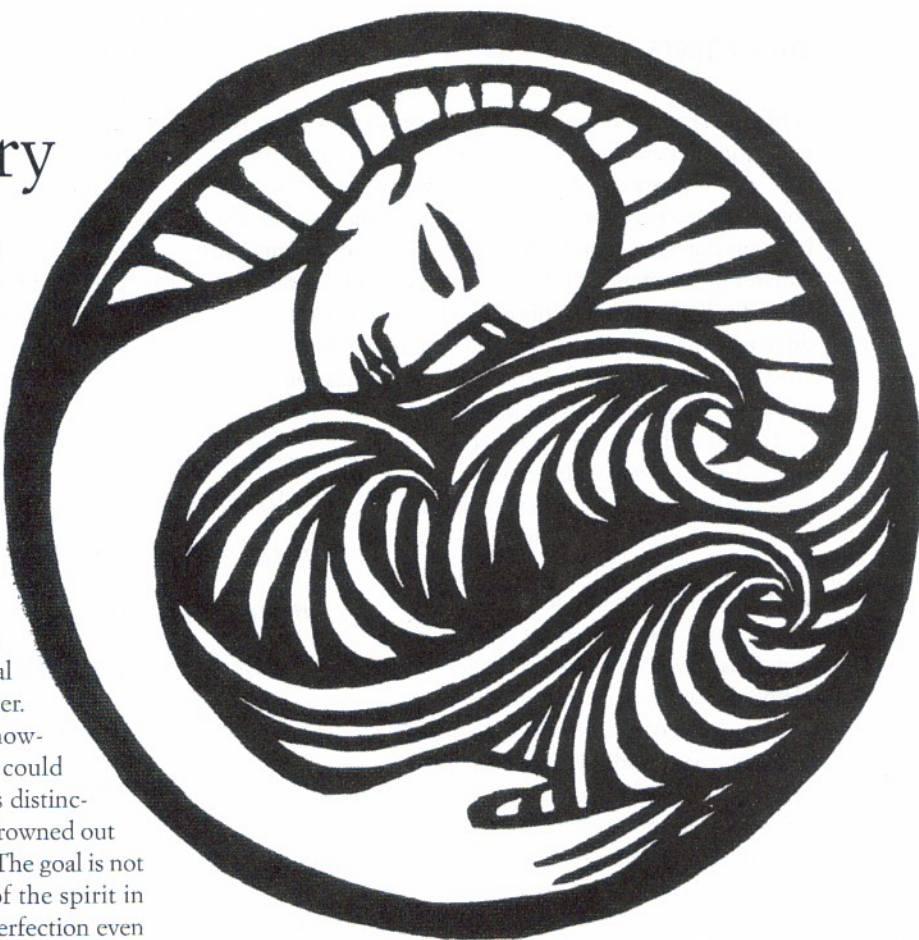
One of the great blessings of our time is the symphony of spiritual possibilities available to the seeker. The shadow of this blessing, however, is that the gorgeous harmony which could emerge from each spiritual system playing its distinctive song is becoming rapidly indiscernible, drowned out as it is by the cacophonies of spiritual cliché. The goal is not religious sameness but a grand symphony of the spirit in which each religion plays its instrument to perfection even while listening deeply and respectfully to the music of the others. To achieve this sublime sound we need to distinguish the particular tones which each particular instrument is called to play.

In recent years the biblical instrument has become duller and duller, gradually losing the pristine clarity of its melody. Many of those who in earlier generations were seduced by her charms have abandoned her, leaving for what they feel to be the more subtle and sophisticated tones of the instruments from the East.

As a lover of both instruments but one whose primary commitment and love is to biblical music, I will try to set down in this short essay something of the essential movement in the biblical score. Occasionally explicitly, but mostly by implication, I will compare the biblical and Buddhist instrument. My goal is not triumphalist—it is rather to pick out the unique biblical notes, with the hope that their melody will be discernable once again.

In lieu of an overture, let me state at the outset what I hold to be the essence of the biblical myth position.

The mantra of biblical myth is “Live Your Story.” Your story is part of what I term your soul print. A soul print is made up of your dreams and your destiny both lived and



The essential question of living is whether you will be the hero of your story—or, tragically, a minor character in your own drama.

unlived, conscious and not yet conscious. It is made up of your past and all of your yesterdays. It is your successes and especially your failures. It is the partner you married and the partner you didn't. It is your fear, fragility, and vulnerability, as well as your grandiosity and larger than life yearnings. Your soul print is the song only you can sing, the poem only you can write, the way of being in the world which is you and you alone. To impress your soul print on the lips of reality is the highest goal of spiritual living.

To realize the meaning of this idea, allow me to begin with the technique best used with the biblical instrument—establishing an essential ontology of words, which will then serve as the backdrop for our major movement.

The Physics of the Soul

This little light of mine...

I love sappy love songs. In great poetry, classical literature, mysticism, and sappy love songs, the most often used metaphor for soul is light. The image used most often

Rebbe Mordechai (Mark) Gafni is Dean of the Melitz Beit Midrash for Public Culture and has published two Hebrew volumes. His first English book, Soul Prints, is a main selection of the Book of the Month Club and the subject of a PBS National Special.

SOUL PRINTS

in biblical myth to describe the soul print is also light. Your soul print is your light. When we sing, "You light up my life," or "You are my sunshine," we don't mean "you support me financially" or "you help me to advance politically." It means that your infinite specialness—your soul print—illuminates my existence. In the language of biblical myth, the image for light is The Candle of God. And the myth masters drive our analogy home when they call out "The Candle of God is the soul of man." Apparently the association of light and spirit is burned into the fiber of our souls.

To decipher this connection—beyond the obvious observation that light is bright and we can see by it—we need to introduce a kabbalistic core principle: the physical and spiritual worlds are mirrors of each other. This idea—found throughout the Kabbalah as well as comprising a basic element of Plato's thought—suggests that models in the physical world are reflected images of the spiritual and therefore often the best way to understand the spiritual world. Given that understanding, let's explore how the nature of physical light "illuminates" the nature of the soul.

Light, modern science teaches us, has two distinct properties: particle and wave. Understood as a particle, light exists as one particular point. Understood as a wave, light possesses a flowing and more amorphous quality.

In ancient biblical myth, light is also understood as a two-fold phenomenon. The word for "light" in Hebrew is *sapir*, (the root for the English "sapphire"). In Hebrew, *sapir* is the root for the words *mispar*, "number," and *sippur*, "story." Like a particle, *mispar* expresses the point-like quality of light; like a wave, *sippur* captures light's fluid nature. "Number" and "story" express the two-fold physics of our soul-light. The physics of the soul reflects the physics of light.

Let's study these qualities further.

Sippur, story, corresponds to the wave quality of light, flowing and streaming, just like the tales of our lives. The wave function of our soul is thus our story, the wave-like rush of events and emotions we experience in a lifetime. The *sippur*, or story quality, of your soul print refers to the flow of events, the unique patterns of your story line, the whorls of your soul print lines. The incidents, details, images, and apparent coincidences of your life all weave a story unlike that of any other human being on the face of the planet.

Mispar, number, corresponds to the particle nature of light, implying a discrete unit, a uniqueness, just as each of us is unique. Numbering something is a way of identifying a specific moment, place, thing, or person in the sea of infinity. A number is the call of the infinite through a finite point;

number is infinity limiting itself in order to be heard and seen. The person called is summoned as a One, a singular being with a discrete, defined destiny to fulfill. The soul's numbering says that you are singled out, unique, one and only, and that therefore you are called to a mission, a "point" of meaning, that you alone are charged to fulfill.

Does the prospect of being singled out sound daunting, even lonely? It is, but only at first glance. Superficially, your uniquely numbered soul does isolate you as being one and only one, alone, as opposed to being part of the All-One-

Ness. However, on a deeper level, only by responding to your unique call do you open up the channels in your soul print which create connection, loving, and community. Alone-ness is the path to all-one-ness. Your singularity is actually the most powerful access point to the greater One. Number is the call of the One through the one.

Yet as *Sippur/Mispar* etymologically reveals, your soul print is much more than a number or even a specific mission. It is also your story, a wave of emo-

tions, actions, and interactions. There exists a *sippur* for each of our souls, the story of our light. Realizing your soul print comes from your ability to follow the outline of your own story. For it is your own story, your unique story, that calls you. *Mispar* and *sippur*, the wave and the particle, merge into one.

Soul-Story

Let's turn our attention to story, the wave function of light, the soul's story. This story is made up of the common moments that we all share—eating, sleeping, loving, arguing, studying, taking care of the details, and all the rest. The wonderful poet Charles Reznikoff writes:

Not for victory
But for the day's work done
As well as I was able;
Not for a seat upon the dais
But at the common table.

Reznikoff's "common table" speaks of that which is normal, routine, unextraordinary—life's daily fare of food. But "common" also means "communal," that which we all share, there where we all sit. Your story is in large part how you live uniquely at the common table. Each of us sleeps, eats, loves, rages, works, and speaks. Not one of us, however, does those things in quite the same way. Living your story is about expressing the originality of your commonness. It is about making the ordinary extra-ordinary. You can make your common, true-life story into something novel. Of course, that is not all. Your story is also the revealer of your unique destiny. Unlike a call, which is focused and specific, your story is the unique weave, the

*Living your story is
about expressing the
originality of your
commonness. It is about
making the ordinary
extra-ordinary.*

SOUL PRINTS

blending and the melding of all the moments and encounters of a lifetime. All of these are bound together into the book of your life.

Signing the Book of Life

In biblical myth ritual, there is a special prayer in which we ask to be written into the book of life. Really though, explains the kabbalistic master of Slonim, it is not we who are asking God to inscribe us, but God asking us. "Please, this year, write yourself in the book of life!" God entreats us. Now, what could God possibly mean by such a plea? A beautiful explanation is hidden in the mysteries of ancient Hebrew. Remember that our core soul print word is *sappir*, light. The word for book, as in the book of life, is *sefer*—deriving from the identical three-letter root (samech, peh, reysh) as *Sapir* and its derivatives *mispar*, and *sippur*. *Sefer*, your book of life, is made up of the chapters of your *sippur*, your story. "Write yourself in the book of life," God says, as he turns to every human being, "Live Your Story."

God has placed a pen in our hands, inviting—some would even say commanding—us to become both the authors and the heroes of our own tale. Every incident, relationship, residence, and experience is part of the plot. The essential question of living is whether you will be the hero of your story—or, tragically, a minor character in your own drama.

It is the expression of our unique and personal passion play that signs us in the book of life. Remember the powerful teaching of Chaim Vital—that each of us has our own letter in the Bible. Only through our unique story do we realize our biblical letter and become part of the cosmic scroll.

Biblical myth's radical affirmation of the value of one's distinct and singular life-story is fundamentally different in outlook than that of many popular spiritual understandings. To cite but one persuasive counterexample, Don Juan in *Journey to Ixtalan* tells us, "I had a terribly strong attachment to my personal history....I honestly felt that without [my personal history] my life had not continuity or purpose.... I don't have personal history anymore....I dropped it one day when I felt it was no longer necessary."

This notion of moving beyond personal history is particularly important in Buddhism. Buddhism is one of the most powerful systems of consciousness ever known; one of my most exciting writing projects has been an analysis of the meeting points between biblical myth/Kabbalah and the Buddhist Sutras. The Zen master is my model no less than the biblical myth master is. Yet, my respect and love for a sister system in no way implies agreement with it. Quite the opposite. One of the reasons that I am a biblical myth mystic and not a Buddhist is because my whole being rejects the

Buddhist idea of moving beyond our personal story as the path to Nirvana.

Let me try to state this moment in Buddhist consciousness clearly. For those readers more familiar with Eastern spiritual systems, what I am about to say accurately reflects both early Buddhism (Theravada, the small vehicle) and later Buddhism (Mahayana, the great vehicle). For Buddhists, the goal is to move beyond *Samsara*, "the vicious circle of the world of existences," which is fueled by ignorance. This world is a realm of suffering and confusion. The

major source of suffering is ignorance and the major expression of ignorance is the belief in a Self. French Scholar Alfred Foucher was not all wrong when he suggested that for biblical myth the goal is immortality while for Buddhism the goal is to disappear. Now I understand that at least one school of Buddhists (the Middle School) would explain that to disappear means to merge with the infinite goodness and wisdom

that is the force of the universe. Yet, even given this moderate formulation of the idea of disappearance, we biblical myth mystics take strong issue with our Buddhist brothers and sisters. For the underlying goal even in this moderate Buddhist system is to become conscious of the fundamental discontinuity and therefore illusion of self. Yes, the goal is to be one with goodness and wisdom, say the biblical myth masters. However, in biblical consciousness, such awareness must be accomplished without losing your unique place in the universe, your sense of self within the One.

For me, the cycle of my life, or the cycle of my successive lives—in Buddhist terms, my karma—is something I want to fix, but not escape. There is a *tikkun*—a fixing, in kabbalistic language—that I believe is the plot line of my story, and of every story.

Our goal is never to escape our stories but to make our stories sacred. That is why the core book of biblical myth, the Torah, is written neither as a series of Zen koans nor as a Sutra, nor even as a Western philosophical essay. The Torah is, pure and simple, a story. Because, as the masters said, "God loves stories."

Our story is our essence. To move beyond it would be to lose ourselves. That may be success for the Buddhist, but it is failure for the biblical mystic.

Don Juan meets Dovid of Lilov

Don Juan and the Sutras can be most starkly contrasted with the biblical myth mystic Dovid of Lilov.

Dovid of Lilov was asked by his students, "What section of the Talmud will you study in heaven?" The Talmud is divided into twenty volumes, each with its own subdivisions; each section, or "tractate," deals with a particular section of law and philosophy.

*Our goal is never
to escape our
stories but to make
our stories sacred.*

Much to the surprise of the students, Dovid of Lilov did not respond with any of the known tractates. Rather, he said, "In heaven, I will spend all my time studying Tractate Dovid Lilov."

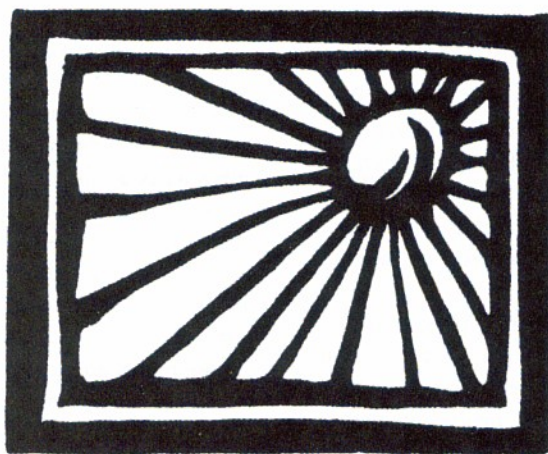
Dovid of Lilov did not fall into obsessive narcissism late in his life. Instead, he realized that his life was sacred ground. Laura Riding, one of the most exciting yet unsung American poets of the twentieth century, captured Dovid of Lilov's idea in one elegant sentence: "Until the story of ourselves is told, nothing besides told can suffice us: we shall go on quietly craving it."

The Lost Thread

What if we can't remember the stories of our past or make sense of the stories of our present?

Remember the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur? Our hero Theseus travels through the underground labyrinth to slay the Minotaur. His challenge, however, is more than to slay the beast; he must also find his way back out of the maze after his success. Often we get lost in our own accomplishments. We slay the beast, but stay stuck in the maze. Ariadne, the King's daughter, symbol of the feminine energy, has given Theseus a length of thread to help him retrace his steps. The thread in our personal myth is what keeps us connected to the light as we wander in the labyrinths of darkness. The thread is the thread of the story. When we lose that thread (no matter how many beasts we slay), we are lost.

This is precisely what Franz Kafka had in mind in his masterpiece, *The Trial*. The plot of the novel is intentionally an impossible path. The thread of meaning frays, and at points when the story line seems in reach, it slips out of grasp again, like a lure drawing the reader along. Frustration, anger, and a radical hopelessness gradually build in the reader as Kafka subjects us to the very feelings that his protagonist K. undergoes as he is arrested, for what and by whom he doesn't know. Every time he detects a glimmer of sense in the proceedings, it vanishes into nonsense. K. is overwhelmed, incapable of making sense of or telling his story, tortured by a nonsensical system of bureaucracy and human inanity. In an all too apt passage, Kafka captures how we all feel on occasion about our lives: "He was too tired to survey all the conclusions arising from the story.... The simple story had lost its clear outline, he wanted to put it out of his mind."



To lose hope in life is to lose the thread of your story. To recover hope is to reweave the fabric of your story.

What Kafka is describing is the unique torture of modernity, the sense of being disassociated, de-storied, displaced. K. is just an initial; he is essentially nameless, devoid of context, history, or soul print. Through pain, the torturer aims to force the victim to betray and abandon his story.

There is a straight line from *The Trial* to George Orwell's 1984, the quintessential modern torture novel. A diabolical anti-self social system featuring the omnipresent Big Brother turns individuals into veritable slaves of the system. Winston Smith, the protagonist, attempts to rebel against Big Brother's ever-watchful eye. His growing rebelliousness culminates in an epic love affair. When the lovers are inevitably caught and tortured, they betray each other, their self-

hood crushed. In literature, movies—and sometimes, tragically, in life—we have seen how torture can push people beyond the bounds of their story.

To lose hope in life is to lose the thread of your story. To recover hope is to reweave the fabric of your story. A single thread can be enough to lead us back to re-ravel the full tapestry of our tale.

A story can have the strength of a thousand incantations, the incense of the most sacred of spaces, the heat and light of the most brilliant of flames. The lines of your soul print are the lines of your story.

II. Tell Your Story

To be free often has little in common with political revolutions. Emancipation is not a political goal to be realized in the distant future; it is an accessible psycho-spiritual reality that comes when you live your authentic Soul Print Story. "I call out from the narrow places—answer me please with the expanses," said King David. The Hebrew word for Egypt is *Mitzrayim*, which, the kabbalists note, literally translated means "the Narrow Places." The philosopher and early psychologist William James—speaking soul print language without using the term—told us we need to expand into our "wider selves." For us today, the Exodus is an intimate spiritual journey in which we depart from the narrow, constricted straits in our lives and seek wider vistas.

In the kabbalistic version of the Exodus from Egypt that we have explored, Moses is not only a revolutionary but also a spiritual master. His journey from Egypt to the

SOUL PRINTS

Promised Land is also a spiritual journey home to an expanded self. Every human being is invited to embark.

It is the second century BCE, in Israel. The disciples approach their master and say, "There is a man blowing the Ram's horn in Galilee, claiming to be Messiah. Master, is it true?"

The teacher opens the window and reaches out his hand to feel the wind. After a moment's concentration, he says, "No, it is not true."

Most of the students are appropriately impressed at their master's ability to sense the spiritual reality by the wind. However, one novice, a slightly impudent disciple, is troubled. "If you are so spiritually intuitive," he asks the master, "then why did you need to put your hand out the window? Why couldn't you sense the air in the room to see if Redemption had arrived?"

The master responds ever so softly, "Because in my room, the Messiah has already come."

The master in the story was a mystic, one of the precursors of the kabbalists who would later manifest themselves in thirteenth-century Spain. Starting with this ancient Israeli master, the essence of kabbalistic teaching has been the possibility of immediate redemption by moving from constricted to expanded consciousness, by claiming your room, a room of your own as it were—the great dimensions of your story.

Re-collected Pieces: The Storytelling Ritual

How do we do it? How do we pass over from the narrow to the wide? The answer comes through drama. Biblical myth lays out a specific plan, a psycho-spiritual process, a ritual under the full moon of early spring. It takes place as part of the biblical myth freedom holiday that occurs at the spring seed-planting time. It is no coincidence that this is the dramatic ritual that Jesus and the disciples were enacting at the Last Supper. Each year the process invites us to act out and actualize our exodus. In Hebrew the ritual is called "Pe-Sach" which the kabbalists interpret to mean "The Mouth That Speaks," a profoundly appropriate name. The formal name of the dramatic ritual—quite a mouthful in every way—is, "Telling the Story of the Exodus from Egypt." The key word here is *sippur*—story. The *sippur*—"telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt"—is the path to *sapir*, our soul-print light.

Henceforth we will refer to this drama as the Storytelling Ritual, the tale of the exodus from slavery into freedom. It is a ritual that all human beings can make part of their lives. Retelling the myth of emancipation from slavery impels you to reclaim the story of your wider self.

"In every generation there is a new understanding of leaving Egypt," said Master Isaac of Gur. "Egypt is inside us. We all have our own Pharaohs. Indeed, not only in every generation, but also in every person there is a point of freedom—to touch that point is to take leave of an inner Egypt.

That point is known only by the person himself."

The Exodus myth enjoins us once a year to re-narrate our personal tale. In the graphic imagery of one mystic, "All year God walks behind us and collects the pieces of our lives that we have left behind." For example, we might relinquish the memory of a relationship that hurt us deeply. We forget all about that job that didn't pan out. Conversely, we repress moments of success and achievement either because they're too good to be believed or give us vertigo, inviting us to heights that frighten us. Once a year God gives us back the lost pieces of our lives by charging us to tell our stories. Those pieces are rewoven into the tapestry of our tale.

"Won't you help me sing these songs of Freedom, they're all I've ever had," asks Bob Marley on behalf of all of us. The Divine answers, "Yes, I will help you sing your song of freedom. Here are the pieces of your story—re-sing it and be Redeemed!" For to re-deem is to deem again, and to deem is to reckon to be worthy of attention. Redemption itself is therefore inherent in re-collection; the attention we pay to old details that we reclaim with renewed appreciation.

The Talking Cure

The night of the Storytelling Ritual is called *Leil Shimurim*, "A Night of Guarding/Watching." Instead of being the audience of the spectacle of history and humanity, we turn into the actors of the drama; it is God who turns into the watcher, the wide-eyed, hand-clapping audience to our recollections. The divine promise is to remain silent but present during the drama.

One of the inheritors of biblical myth consciousness was Josef Bruer in Vienna, who collaborated with a man named Sigmund Freud in developing what they called the talking cure. Or, as their contemporary, the writer Eric Hodgins wrote, "Talk: The four-letter word for psychotherapy." At the core of the process sits the client, who re-tells her story to the silent listener. In the telling, the forgotten or repressed tatters of the story are reclaimed and integrated into the whole self. At the time of *Leil Shimurim*, it is as if God sits in the therapist's chair, silent but listening, healing us with a cosmic hearing.

In the Storytelling Ritual, we reclaim both our greatness, which frightens us, and our failures, which embarrass us. Only when our story is complete do we have the inner equilibrium and integrity necessary for healing and growth. When we leave behind sections of our story, we can never realize our soul print.

Sublime Stories

Every age contributes a more advanced chapter to the spirit's quest for freedom. Only recently has our consciousness evolved to a place where we grasp that the greatest story in the universe is our own. Yet when we leave an earlier epoch behind, we don't forget its truths—rather, we refract their light through the prism of our more evolved

understandings. To understand where we are in the evolutionary scale of the spirit, we need to trace the history of the spirit's stories. We can follow the spirit's evolution from the telling of Sublime Stories to Saint Stories to Soul Print Stories.

Early biblical mysticism centered on what I call sublime story-telling—elaborate recountings of the divine realm. The central text of this lofty tradition is called *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, the "story of the Chariot," and emerges from Ezekiel's ecstatic vision.

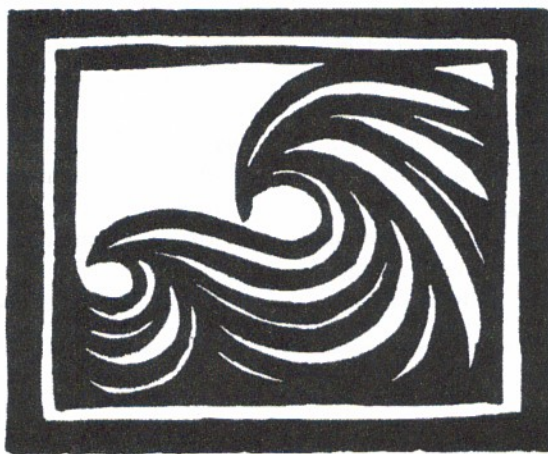
The entire first chapter of Ezekiel is a soul-stunning recording of the prophet's vision of the divine chariot, replete with emerald wheels, four-faced angels, a throne of sapphire, and radiating rainbows. Each elaborate detail was taken by the mystics to symbolize a different dimension of higher spiritual reality. The vision was a blueprint of the divine, as the soul in its yearning for meaning reached for the heights and told stories of the divine realm.

Saint Stories

Later mysticism shifted the locus of significance from heaven to earth, grounding and transforming the sublime story into what I call the saint story. Isaac "The Lion" Luria and his students in the Renaissance years, as well as succeeding generations, taught that the chariot is actually incarnate in the great masters. "The Masters are the Chariot!" cry out the mystics. The search for meaning has shifted. The Chariot has landed in the souls of the saints.

In this understanding, Ezekiel's chariot represents an intricate depth-psychology chart of the souls of the spiritually developed. In the souls of these spiritually masterful teachers, we find the divine vehicle as well as the divine road. God's presence is experienced in the world in the person of the spiritually evolved, the yogis, masters, *bohdisatvas*, and saints. This is the mystery of incarnation—that infinite beauty and spirit resides in finite, imperfect, and frail human beings. The *Ma'aseh Merkavah* is translated into the story of the Masters. This idea is actually the spiritual antecedent of our modern idea of biography. From uniquely lived lives, we can derive important information and insight.

Thus, there developed a new mystical genre, *sippuri tzadikim*, in English called Saint Stories, the stories of the mystical masters of the ages. Every detail of a master's life dripped divine import; each event was a new chapter of spiritual significance. The master's childhood adventures, his first teaching jobs, friendships, and failures—all these



We all have sacred stories, with great mysteries within us.

were the design and detail of Ezekiel's chariot. Each detail of dress and behavior was a beacon of illumination. Even the unique pathology of a saint became a lesson, with stories ranging from manic depressive bouts or cutting humor to irrepressible sexuality and conflicts with other masters. These were people parables. While this stage of evolution offered important stories to further the path of the spirit, the saints transcended our reality. We might be awed and occasionally even inspired by them, but we viewed their behavior as totally beyond our grasp and therefore not worth the reach. These were not *our* stories. Yet, is it not won-

derful to allow ourselves to be awed?

Sacred Autobiography

The next critical stage in the spirit's evolution is occurring here and now, as we tell our own stories, our Soul Print Stories.

We all have sacred stories, with great mysteries within us. We are the masters; we are Moses, we are Buddha. You are the Chariot. The saint story you must tell is the story of yourself, your Sacred Autobiography.

Creating Sacred Autobiography is the spiritual imperative of our generation. We need to know that in the details of our lives dangle the keys to heaven. No corner of our story is created in vain; we have never been down any dead-end street, never met an unnecessary face, never heard a senseless song. Every nuance, event, image, and incident of our lives is a source of vital psychological and spiritual information. Telling our autobiographies, we forge a coherent narrative out of our life stories, shedding light on the meaning of our lives.

One of the saddest sentences I have read in psychological literature appears in an otherwise learned work by British psychoanalyst Anthony Storr, *Solitude*. Storr develops his arguments using anecdotes about various famous people. In a chapter paradoxically titled "The Significance of the Individual," he makes the following observation: "The literary genre of autobiography is now so popular that men and women of little interest and no distinction feel impelled to record their life stories." What a tragic and misguided thought! There are simply no men and women of little interest and no distinction existing in the world. Indeed, it is far from certain that the anecdotes of the famous on which Storr builds his work have the most to teach us. In fact, it is certain that they do not.

SOUL PRINTS

Forgers and Editors

When we sanitize our life stories, telling only the tale of our triumph as judged by the external standards of success and failure, we risk turning our beautiful lives into failures. Since no one wants to be a failure, we begin to edit, forget, plagiarize, or just excise out whole sections of our story. We become forgers of our own signature.

I recently encountered a high school friend who became very involved in spiritual practice about five years ago. I offhandedly asked him how old he was. Without a moment of hesitation, he responded, "I just had my fifth birthday." It took me a second to realize that he meant that it had been five years since his "enlightenment." He was implicitly declaring that his life before enlightenment was valueless. He had ripped out those pages from his book of life. I told him sadly that I did not believe he was five; we cannot tear out pages from our book of life without paying a very heavy price.

Masters of Return

One of the paths of inner work in biblical myth is called *teshuvah*. A hard word to translate, its closest equivalent might be "return."

To return is one of the prime goals in biblical myth. The most profound return is the return from the exile of the self. *Teshuvah* is an act of spiritual excavation, digging beyond the build-up of dust to the authenticity that has always rested deep within. To return sends you back to the place and time where you went into hiding, so you can tell yourself that it is okay to come out now. My own attempt to return led me to a game of hide and seek I played around age six. I was hiding in a closet under a huge pile of winter clothes. Everyone had gotten back to base and was called free. I didn't want to come out. The world I'd experienced outside seemed an arbitrary and dangerous place and the winter clothes were warm and protective. I must have stayed in there for over an hour, wishing I could stay forever. In the end, I came out for dinner. I didn't really come out until twenty-five years later, after a painful divorce. Only then did I return to reclaim my story. Only then did I paste back in all the pages that I had ripped out of my book of life to make it prettier and less painful.

Telling our stories means coming out of hiding and returning to our sources. That is the only way we can really find freedom.

To Search Out the Broken

As we seek to return, reclaim, recollect, and retell our stories, we return to the Storytelling Ritual on the biblical myth-freedom day. That is, the feast of Pe-Sach, or Passover, the ritual of "Telling the Story of the Exodus from

Egypt." For all of us, no matter our faith, this Storytelling Ritual simulates and celebrates our movement from exile to redemption, from slavery to freedom. It is a time when we free ourselves from the internal editors who, though wanting to help us, have falsified the stories of our lives.

At the opening of the Storytelling Ritual, a round matzah cracker (the source of the wafer used during the Christian communion service) is broken in half. As if the breaking of this cracker were a starting gun, the evening takes off along the track from slavery to freedom. Each

person relives leaving Egypt. Each one invites, invents, and enacts his or her personal return from the dark and narrow to the wide and bright. The storytelling builds until the journey culminates with the famed *afikoman* hunt. What is an *afikoman*? Remember that matzah cracker broken at the beginning of the meal?

Well, somewhere along the way to freedom someone has very surreptitiously hidden half of that broken cracker—the *afikoman*.

Late in the night, after we have each told and been told, given and received the stories of emancipation, we send the children to find the hidden *afikoman*. In a symbolic sense, the children we send are none other than ourselves, returning to that moment when the world seemed so broken that we began to hide.

The children go searching throughout the house, and having exultantly found the flat broken bread of slavery, they come running to return it to the adult. This is the child in us bringing our broken piece back to the adult in us. The process of healing has begun. The Storytelling Ritual is complete. Perhaps most important, the child who finds the broken treasure gets a prize.

The goal of the biblical myth storytelling ritual is no less than know thyself. However, in the mystical consciousness of biblical myth there is no difference between the individualism of know thyself and the spiritual imperative to know God.

Indeed they are virtually identical. "In all your ways Know God," writes King Solomon in Proverbs. For the kabbalists this means in "all the ways" and byways of your story—in all the forgotten nooks and crannies of your experience—know the God that is with you. To "know" in biblical myth is to know intimately. Carnal knowledge. We are invited to intimacy with the textured surfaces and complex patterns of our story. So often our lives appear as a series of disconnected and disjointed dots and lines. Rupture and dislocation mark the spirit-scapes of our lives. In retelling my story I connect the dots of my life. In connecting the dots, patterns begin to emerge, images begin to crystallize and some of the haze of unconscious living is dispelled. I begin to know myself—and so begin to know God. □