Sacred metaphor

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SACRED METAPHOR

by

Keith A. Blanding

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
a Master's Degree in Interdisciplinary Studies
under the direction of
Dr. Ray L. Hart, Religious Studies
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of the
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1984

Approved by:

Chairman, Board of Examiners

Dean, Graduate School

Date

June 6, 1984
Sacred metaphor is a semantic concept for teaching sacred literature from a secular point of view so that religious experience can be studied in public high school English classes without violating the First Amendment.

Sacred metaphors combine concrete, abstract and metaphoric reference in such concentrated harmony that they appear to be a fourth element of language symbolism. But closer analysis reveals them to be the origin of the other three -- a kind of mother word. Their three-fold structure is characterized by concrete flame or light, an abstract name and a metaphoric voice. But this analytical separation is possible only on the printed page; in the conceptual experience it is one "organic" reality.

The integrity of the sacred metaphor can not be interpreted by the pre-existing language-tradition and so a new tradition is begun in a sacred text such as the Bhagavad-Gita, the Torah, the Tipitaka, the Gospels and the Quran, selected for study here because of their availability and obvious historical significance rather than any claim to uniqueness. Indeed, all sacred metaphors share the same semantic structure notwithstanding the diversity of their respective cultural and linguistic contexts.

Sacred metaphors are an originating force for a linguistic worldview that sets limits on consciousness at the same time that they impell consciousness to explore those limits. They are metaphors because they are points of departure, and they are sacred because once they are recognized, the departure has already begun and there is no return to the former state of consciousness. Sacred metaphor calls forth consciousness, and then consciousness re-structures its language-elements in an attempt to stabilize its new understanding. However, sacred metaphor is a destabilizing force for consciousness even though its linguistic structure permits the illusion of stability for generations. It is no small irony that through the influence of sacred metaphor both transcendence and superstition are made possible. As each person constructs his or her own language-environment generation after generation in response to the sacred metaphor, the originating sacred metaphor loses its force and is buried under the accumulating layers of the language-tradition, and only a new sacred metaphor can restore the dynamic tension between language and consciousness. The confusing diversity of historical and cultural traditions are thereby unified into expressions of a single process -- the evolution of consciousness.
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ONE: POLITICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Metaphoric language that addresses the sacred is religious language and requires reading sacred texts. Studying such material in high school English classes is likely to raise more than a few eyebrows and perhaps even some ire. But students need professional assistance at a systematic and preventative level if they are to overcome the problems of living in a diverse community of belief and action. Modern communication and transportation, not to mention wars and economic upheavals, have shaken humanity from its complacency. Scientific description has replaced religious identification for many people, and the language-bridge to the past has lost its pre-Twentieth Century simplicity and left many adrift in a sea of meaningless words. Some have retreated to the graves of traditional interpretation in religious and secular communities of interest, while others have rejected all traditions to pursue the self-indulgent intensity of the moment regardless of consequences. High school students perceive this confusion at various levels of consciousness and need help in finding some pattern that is stable without being suffocating. High school English classes can help students discover the deep structure of meaning in language by exposing them to the sacred metaphors that lie hidden in the sacred scriptures of the world.
These sacred metaphors are models of the necessary tension between words, experience and meaning, and the scriptures are significant historical records of mankind's universal struggle with memory, sacrifice and individual dignity. A study of them would be most productive in the senior year following work in mythical and poetic language. Learning how to read these kinds of materials would introduce students to real literacy and help them to understand and respect others. Six weeks would be adequate although a longer time would be more desirable. Such a study would be entirely consistent with the U.S. Supreme Court's 1963 Schempp decision that

...one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion...and its relationship to the advancement of civilization...Nothing we have said here indicates that such a study of the Bible or religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistent with the First Amendment.

Moreover, such a study would be a substantial step forward in the educational expression of our Constitutional support of religious faith as Phillip H. Phenix argues is necessary in "Religion in Public Education":

The American tradition is one that in its political structure sets a high value on worship. The problem is how to reflect this political principle in public school practice. Clearly, it cannot be done by denying the principle of the separation of civic and religious covenants, for that would be to limit the freedom of worship and to destroy the very
pluralism on which the society is based. Certainly, it cannot be done by being indifferent to religion as if it were non-existent. The American aim is fulfilled by emphasizing the preciousness of worshipful attitudes in our tradition and by opening up the religious domain of human experience to deliberate consideration.

The secular approach to the sacred through a study of sacred metaphor would open up the religious domain of human experience to deliberate consideration and at the same time emphasize the preciousness of worshipful attitudes in our tradition to a degree heretofore unknown.

Previous attempts to respond to the Court's encouragement of religious studies, although worthy in their own right, have failed to focus convincingly on the "religious experience". Pennsylvania's elective university-produced religious studies curriculum was apparently too ambitious as critics judged it to be "considerably over-written and somewhat above the average twelfth-grade level of reading comprehension." Nebraska's program of studying religious themes in classic literature such as "Sin and Loneliness" in high school English made for a good secular literature course but did not present the sacred as a separate "covenant" as Phenix advised. Florida pursued a successful social studies approach to religious studies that was forced to ignore the whole issue of sacred "transcendence" because of methodological limitations. Michigan certified teachers "to insure that the teacher who
undertakes the academic study of religion is competent in the subject matter and professionally trained for his responsibilities" but did not in the process show teachers how to approach the sacred at the level of personal
language. Indiana's university-produced textbook *Teaching the Bible as Literature* is an excellent teaching tool, but it is confined to the Old Testament, and it skirts the issue of sacredness by focusing on the narrative and cultural circumstances. Montana, on the other hand, completely side-stepped the issue by permitting "religious instruction released time programs" for as much as two hours per week away from the public curriculum in a complete abandonment of the legitimate goals of secular religious studies. Apparently no one has yet seen fit to approach a secular study of the sacred as a logical outcome of language study in high school English leading to the very root of language meaning -- sacred metaphors.

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PART TWO: CONSCIOUSNESS AS DEPARTURE FROM LANGUAGE

Language restructures consciousness from perceptual patterns of thought, based on sensation, to conceptual patterns of thought, based on a language-code. Ordinarily, this re-structuring occurs gently and at the edge of consciousness as aural and visual references in language subtly blind our ears and eyes to sensory signals. Language can usurp perception in this way because consciousness prefers the stability of words to the fluidity of sensation. Language stability permits the emergence of individuality that is resistant to genetic and environmental changes. In this way the language-tradition acts as a womb for the development of psychological identity just as the biological womb once acted as the developer of physical identity; and just as the physical person is born by leaving the biological womb so the psychological person (remember that psyche is Greek for soul) is born by leaving the womb of the language-tradition. The chief difference between the two is that while the former occurs naturally, the latter requires an act of will. And yet there is an impulse behind both of them. For the will that impulse is the sacred metaphor -- the "mother word". As the language-tradition once resisted the tyranny of sensory perception to nourish personal identity, the sacred metaphor resists the tyranny of the language-tradition to nourish transcendent
Although the language-tradition incorporates a wealth of relationships to sustain consciousness, it requires considerable effort to discover what we want when we want. Our needs for meaning are so complex and fickle that we cannot afford to postpone our education until the moment we need it. Nor can we allow ourselves to read only the familiar and pleasant, or listen only to close friends and loved ones. We must search for new language experiences in preparation for the full range of possibilities that mature contemplation guarantees will eventually confront us. Such an approach to language will acquaint us with the three major elements of meaning -- concrete references, abstract references, and metaphoric references. This three-fold language reality constitutes the structure of consciousness. Concrete words testify to the tangible realities that can be sensed and identified without disagreement. Abstract words testify to the conceptual relationships between tangible realities and tell us how to relate to them. Metaphoric words testify to the unknown or potential realities of things and relationships that are not yet realized so that we will always remember to keep an open mind. Conventional rules and usage help this airy substance of language to appear more firm and stable than it really is so that we can use it confidently to wrestle our wild
thoughts into shape and share the results with each other. These shared results permit communication which establishes a firm ground of understanding to assist our living together, but this language act separates us as well.

Although language connects us with each other, it also separates us and gives us individual consciousness. Without language the self merges inseparably with its environment. No identity is possible because no separation is possible. But with language the self can gain or lose and in the process strengthen consciousness. Our desire to establish our independence makes language appear as something to be escaped at one moment and something to be embraced at another moment. Our experience with the gain and loss of identity introduces us to the chasm of potential meaning that only conscious choice can cross. This chasm is frightening because, to cross it, the individual consciousness must change its sense of self. If we do not choose to cross it, we are dragged into it by time and language again and again. If we choose to cross it, it seems that the first requirement is to reject language, for language is what defines the self that must be changed. As Georges Gusdorf observes in Speaking,

...the life of the mind ordinarily begins not with the acquisition of language, but with the revolt against language once it is acquired.
But we soon find that only language can reject language. Some uses of language can reject other uses of language so that in time we learn that

Every affirmation of value implies a personal initiative, and a kind of recovery of the elements of language by an awareness which redisCOVERS them and which alone is able to attest to their authenticity.

For conscious identity to continue it must gain the courage to leave the limitations of the language past and enter the chasm of potential meaning, but it can only do so with language.

The language departure that consciousness demands is not simply a departure from language conventions although sometimes a degree of that too is needed; successful departure lies in the ability to depart from conventional meaning. Conventional meaning is after all only a kind of bland summation of every other person's meaning or identity so that everyone can identify with it and live together with a minimum of conflict. Excessive concern with conventional usage and meaning is likely to divert our attention from becoming our true selves. Conventional forms of language-use are important for commerce, but the creative spirit of language is important for consciousness. Individual consciousness is the process of continually re-weaving the "text"-ure of language with the threads of concrete, abstract and metaphoric reference. The
development of individual consciousness must invite the student to find meaning in a word which takes its meaning from a text which takes its meaning from a context which takes its meaning from the language tradition which takes its meaning from a sacred metaphor or "mother word". This process or search is basically religious in its requirements for consciousness. Its sacrament is language, and its priest is the self. In this search that which is not evident is as important as that which is evident, and language is definitive only to provide a firm point of departure.

The language tradition functions as a womb from which individual consciousness emerges, and it is not possible for individual consciousness to exist without emerging to some degree from the language tradition. The symbolic nature of language as a reference system makes it incapable of sustaining an alternative reality by itself. As the self forms within the language tradition nurtured by the fabric of human society, it must inevitably "fall through" the airy substance of language and experience separation, loss and the horror of the non-language present to some degree again and again. If that self rejects its separation from language by grasping even more firmly the fixed and abstract forms of its linguistic substance, the individual consciousness will shrink instead of expand. In order that
individual consciousness might actually begin in its own right, the self must willingly choose to accept its inevitable departure from language into the chasm of potential meaning that is the non-language present. Hannah Arendt acknowledges the inevitability of this departure in Between Past and Future:

It is in the nature of every new beginning that it breaks into the world as an 'infinite impossibility' and yet it is precisely this infinitely improbable which actually constitutes the very texture of everything we call real...It is because of this element of the 'miraculous' present in all reality that events, no matter how well anticipated in fear or hope, strike us with the shock of surprise once they have come to pass. The very impact of an event is never wholly explicable; its factuality transcends in principle all anticipation.

If, in response, the self simply reaches back into the language tradition for the most readily available dogma or lulls itself into forgetfulness, the potential for beginning will be lost. The transcendence of the tyranny of moments made possible by language in the first place cannot become an alternate reality. Language itself must be transcended, and its structure facilitates transcendence if the self is willing.

Language is structured like a ladder. Although it is based in the concrete reality of sensory perception, it immediately rises into the atmosphere of abstract relationships between those concrete sensations and between
more abstract relationships until it gives the impression of having the whole of reality under its organization and control. But the top rung of the language ladder leans against nothing at all but eternity. Nothing holds it there but metaphoric reference. Its word-forms do not refer to themselves or to anything perceivable at all. As Robert Funk observes in *Language, Hermeneutic and Word of God*, Metaphor...raises the potential for new meaning...(but)...does not illustrate this or that idea; it abuses ideas with their propensity for censoring sight...(and establishes)...a cognitive threshold of poetic intuition.

These uppermost rungs of the language-ladder allow individual consciousness to depart its language past and venture forth into the mystery of the non-language present without falling from the protection of the ladder. Metaphoric reference

...gives presence to the referent in such a way that the listener is confronted by it; the auditor does not make a distinction between the vocables and the reality to which the vocables give presence. Word and reality are encountered in their inner unity. Language becomes event.

In *Language of the Gospel* Wilder refers to this highest kind of metaphor as

...a true metaphor (whose reality) is more than a sign; it is the bearer of the reality to which it refers.

The reality to which consciousness is thus introduced has
nothing to do with the concrete reality of sensory perception. It goes beyond traditional language meaning, calls into question every previous conception of reality and leaves the self trembling on the brink of something either horrible or sacred.

It is bad enough when the non-language present makes us fall from the security of our language-based reality, but when language itself becomes the active agent for expelling us from our language security, we have good reason for our terror for we are confronted with the necessity of becoming something new. In The Imagination and Unfinished Man Ray Hart refers to this condition as

...the birthplace of meaning, the meaning of what is at stake in the question.

Previously the language tradition seemed to provide all the answers sufficient for keeping the terror of the moment at bay. At this level of metaphor language seems to be denying the validity of those answers and pointing somewhere else entirely. Edwin A. Abbott illustrates this problem of "somewhere else" in his 1884 fantasy Flatland wherein a square (the main character) experiences a visitation from a sphere perceived as a series of infinitely changing circles until the sphere's superior power permits the square to transcend his two-dimensional reality and see from a three-dimensional point of view where he was seized by "an
unspeakable horror." Mircea Eliade posits this kind of experience as the origin of sacred space in the lives of ancient man in *The Sacred and the Profane*:

> Every sacred space implies a hierophany, an inruption of the sacred, that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different.

Such moments are often recorded in the language record as new names, such as when Jacob's dream of a heavenly ladder (Gen. 28:12-19) caused him to re-name Haran as Beth-el. When such new names come into being, they carry the testimony of their own reality with them as metaphor. And when their newness calls the whole language tradition into question, that is, when a whole culture is called into question, the departure from the language tradition carries its members to the very root of meaning. Such radical departures from the language tradition can be related to metaphors that are sacred as opposed to metaphors about the sacred.

By studying the sacred metaphors of the past, individual consciousness can be aided in the present. Sacred metaphors dramatize the transcendent nature of language and consciousness and their intimate relationship to each other. Sacred metaphors reveal the critical paradoxical tension between language-acquisition and language-departure. The future is open to individual consciousness only to the degree that the present is an
introduction to a reality that has not already been defined. Full immersion into the possibilities of the present must be done outside of the language tradition. It is a total risk of identity -- a spiritual risk. Studying the language record for the sacred metaphors that identify that risk can balance the pressure that is exerted by language conventions and disclose the transcendent character of language structure. Only language can balance the tension between the known and the possible, and sacred metaphors incorporate the balancing mechanism. With that knowledge the birthplace of meaning can be approached with confidence.
PART THREE: SACRED METAPHOR AS THE BIRTHPLACE OF MEANING

Sacred metaphor gives birth to meaning by taking consciousness beyond the limitations of the language-tradition on the wings of its own integral structure of concrete authority, abstract identity and metaphoric transcendence. Its independence allows it to become the archetype of new meaning in language. Its ability to re-establish the balance between concrete, abstract and metaphoric reference reinvigorates language-meaning and allows consciousness to transcend its former bounds and create new realities. Like a seed in the forests of knowledge, the sacred metaphor generates a new language tree that overshadows and replaces the old and dying structure of meaning in the previous language-tradition. Its concrete specificity attracts even the simplest minds while its abstract identity re-organizes the cosmos of understanding, and its metaphoric voice introduces human consciousness to the eternal now. Although every language-tradition rests upon its own sacred metaphor, historically unique and fitted to the needs of each culture, each sacred metaphor is the entrance to the same eternal reality of transcendent consciousness which admits of no distinctions. The poets of every tradition sing the praises of its unifying theme to remind the forgetful of its beauty, but only sacred metaphor can successfully give birth to transcendent consciousness.
A sacred metaphor is a place where consciousness has burst forth so dramatically that previous consciousness is made to seem like somnambulism. It is, of course, a time as well as a place, and the language record of it is more or less sensitive to that time and place. Indeed, such historical moments are seen as turning points in the development of civilization as the beginning of each religious period testifies. But these primal points of reckoning are a turning-away as well as a turning-toward. Their transcendent power throws the whole language-tradition into question. Through their influence the human community of shared consciousness is disrupted as some people reject the sacred metaphor and others accept it. It is as though a single atom had generated a whole new world while the old world trembled at its own insignificance. The sacred metaphor's concrete simplicity explodes into mystery. Its abstract identity becomes the "archetype" of all identity or meaning. Its metaphoric voice opens a "bright and shining portal" into the eternal now. Its concentrated power

...can generate, through successive ages, all the manifold arts which the hands of man can produce...No sooner is this resplendent word uttered, than its animating energies, stirring within all things, give birth to the means and instruments whereby...arts can be produced and perfected.
Contrasting with the sacred metaphor, the mature language-tradition to which it comes is diffuse and diffusing, deprived of the potential for new meaning and absorbed in the busy-ness of its myriad relationships.

Meaning tends to be lost in the mature language-tradition because it resides in the relationships between things that have grown so complex as to be inconceivable; whereas, sacred metaphor carries its own meaning intact. In the mature language-tradition individual consciousness can not balance the disparate elements of concrete, abstract and metaphoric reference within a single focal point. Concrete references are not inexorably tied to abstract references of freedom, courage, justice or obedience, and abstract references seem quite content to ignore the everyday realities of concrete necessity. Metaphoric references are primarily devoted to simple-minded emotions and entertainment or similar distractions from the business of living well. The personal identities comprising various points of view within this tradition are only tentatively tied together by the texture of the language; indeed, people often select certain threads of the text to unravel the text of their opponents and thereby gain some momentary advantage. Altogether, the three-fold elements of language-meaning are so loosely woven together that they frequently fail to support meaningful consciousness and are
in constant danger of unraveling unless various authorities are set up to guard against that eventuality -- authorities such as church, school, legislature and court. On the other hand, the three-fold elements of meaning in the sacred metaphor each bear witness to the other in such perfectly balanced tension that its apparent simplicity and stability is like a rock of certainty in comparison, making departure easy for some and impossible for others.

The departure from the language-tradition made possible by the sacred metaphor gives birth to new potential that the language-tradition cannot define. Of course, as a new language-tradition emerges around the sacred metaphor, mere association and familiarity will create the illusion of definition, but the required departure is beyond the reach of language as Franz Kafka characterizes in Parables and Paradoxes as "My Destination":

I gave order for my horse to be brought round from the stable. The servant did not understand me. I myself went to the stable, saddled my horse and mounted. In the distance I heard a bugle call. I asked him what this meant. He knew nothing and had heard nothing.

At the gate he stopped me, asking: "Where are you riding to, master?"
"I don't know," I said, "only away from here, away from here. Always away from here. Only by doing so can I reach my destination."
"And so you know your destination?" he asked.
"Yes," I answered, "didn't I say so? Away-From-Here, that is my destination."
"You have no provisions with you," he said.
"I need none," I said, "the journey is so
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long that I must die of hunger if I don't get anything on the way. No provisions can save me. For it is, fortunately, a truly immense journey."

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The journey is immense because the departure is eternal. At least it cannot end in language, notwithstanding the fact that it began there. Only by transcending the limits of language can the potential for personal meaning or conscious identity continue, and only by limiting that transcendence with new language can that potential be realized. Each conscious identity must continue to transcend its identity by reconstituting language for its own purposes and then departing again and again, using the sacred metaphor as a model, as Gusdorf argues:

The initial transcendence of the Logos or the divine Word as it is manifested from the mythical point of view in all eschatologies is only the archetype of the effective operation imposed on every living man to constitute his vital space by the recovery of the linguistic elements immanent in the environment.

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Attempts to make further departure unnecessary by turning the language of departure into the language of arrival, otherwise known as dogma, brings to an end the necessity of transcendence and with it the end of conscious identity, for it will have been caught in the snare of language.

The effort to capture or record the birthplace of meaning cannot be satisfied with mere concrete references to things as they normally appear, nor can they be satisfied
with lofty abstractions which attempt to explain consciousness. Even metaphor is severely limited as a means of capturing the transcendent entrance to the eternal and can only point the way, as Robert Graves poeticizes in *The White Goddess*:

> Conquering gods their titles take  
> From the foes they captive make.

The radical departure from the language-tradition precipitated by the sacred metaphor produces a metamorphosis in the landscape of reality that only metaphor can render, however poorly. Water gushes from dry rock. Bushes burn without being consumed. The earth swallows up the unrighteous. Nightingales sing in the rose-gardens of immortality. Lions roar in the forests of knowledge. Whales swim in the oceans of life. Men wrestle with angels. Paradise is brought near, and Hell is made to blaze. The dead rise out of their graves. The voice of God is heard in the whirlwind. And the living fall down on their faces for fear of the Lord. This radical metamorphosis constitutes the theme of true poetry — the Theme of Life and Death — pursued, as Graves observes, as a "religious invocation of the Muse" to recreate the elements of transcendent departure produced by the sacred metaphor:

> The elements of the single infinitely variable Theme are to be found in certain ancient poetic myths which though manipulated to conform with each epoch of religious
change...remain constant in general outline. Perfect faithfulness to the Theme affects the reader of a poem with a strange feeling, between delight and horror, of which the purely physical effect is that the hair literally stands on end.

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The non-interpretability of transcendence is characterized again and again through metaphors controlled by the poetic voice as instanced by the following verses of Baha'u'llah, Founder of the Baha'i Faith, translated from Arabic:

Ten thousand Prophets, each a Moses, are thunderstruck upon the Sinai of their search at His forbidding voice, 'Thou shalt never behold Me!'; whilst a myriad Messengers, each as great as Jesus, stand dismayed upon their heavenly thrones by the interdiction, 'Mine Essence thou shalt never apprehend!'

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The mystery of the sacred metaphor unfolds only to those in whose consciousness it has taken root. Like a seed, a sacred metaphor cannot be explained or unfolded for examination. Only by entering into the sacred metaphor can consciousness depart the language-tradition and experience transcendence. But it is always away from "here," never away from somewhere else.

Because sacred metaphors point to nowhere but themselves, they usurp the authority of the language-tradition and locate the question of meaning in the present moment rather than the distant past. History can never establish authority; it is only a language-record of the circumstances surrounding authority -- the authority to
depart from the language-tradition. In retrospect the departure looks as though it was away-from-there and not away-from-here because the point of departure is a sacred metaphor -- a language artifact preserved at the root of the language-tradition to which it gave rise. But with proper respect for the metaphoric testimony that surrounds the sacred metaphor, a careful reader can detect a magic atmosphere that is quite foreign to the familiar cosmos of the language-tradition. Consciousness begins to swirl or perhaps even reel as it approaches the entrance to the eternal now even though that particular portal may be thousands of years old and nearly smothered in the accumulated layers of language-traditions of hundreds of generations of travelers. Indeed, all the metaphoric footsteps of conscious language-use may give the appearance of a campsite or even a metropolis instead of a point of departure. That is why a new portal emerges periodically to re-establish the transcendent foundation of consciousness and rescue it from the meshes of mere language.

Although there have been many sacred metaphors and presumably will be many more so long as consciousness and language are closely allied, the transcedence experienced by the departure is always the same, always "away-from-here". Because language and consciousness are products of each other, they must be continually separated
and continually reunited. Each radical departure from the language-tradition is uniquely adapted or designed for a specific time and place in the development of human consciousness, but the transcendent entrance into the eternal now is always functionally and structurally the same sacred metaphor although it appears as a different name, identity and voice. In this way each language-tradition and more importantly each conscious identity supported by that language-tradition is challenged by a new understanding of a reality which is always transcendent. However, it is important to remember that in its own time-frame each sacred metaphor is the only entrance into the real. Past sacred metaphors have been incorporated into the tradition and tamed into mere language, and future sacred metaphors can not be imagined. Sacred metaphor is plural only in the sense that a single journey is indicated by many footprints, but there is only one true departure that must be dealt with at every footstep put down.

The footsteps of ordinary language are lifted up through the power of sacred metaphor which contains the basic structure of all language -- concrete authority, abstract identity and metaphoric voice. The journey that is consciousness is freed from the tangle of past thought and transported to an open plain as it were. Like a seed the sacred metaphor founds a new language-tree to nourish human
consciousness. It re-organizes the relatively inert language-materials surrounding it in the language-tradition as a sapling nourishes itself from the decaying products of the forest. So attractively balanced is this sacred sapling that the birds of human consciousness are attracted to its branches even if its apparent size relative to the mature forest of the language-tradition is as insignificant as the famous mustard of the Gospels, alluded to as

...the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. (Matt. 13:32)

Its concrete authority establishes a new firmament. Its abstract identity translates the harsh light of eternity into the pleasant shade of understanding, and its metaphoric voice inspires the birds of the spirit to sing a new song upon the twigs of the tree of eternity. As seeds of pure consciousness, sacred metaphors translate the earth of human perception into heavenly understanding. Its three-fold structure re-organizes consciousness from the inside out. Its sacred name becomes the first name. Its sacred identity becomes the first identity. Its sacred voice becomes the first voice. And thus consciousness itself is given a new name, a new city, and a new song.

Transcendent consciousness, although produced by sacred metaphor, cannot simply rest or nest within the
sacred metaphor. Its departure is forever away from itself as language; for consciousness is not language in spite of its intimate relationship with language. If the new consciousness accepts the responsibilities of its release from the bondage of the language-tradition, it cannot simply replace old language with new language. It must learn to continue to escape its own interpretation of things and still build a reality for itself. After all, the journey away from here is truly immense and must supply its own provisions or the traveler must die of hunger. One important way to continually escape from one's own interpretation of things is in a community of fellow-travelers. By accepting the diverse interpretations of others, one's own interpretations are continually escaped. And yet the interpretations of others cannot satisfy one's own needs for interpretation. In this way transcendent consciousness can continue living without becoming ensnared in itself. But all interpretations must be inspired by the sacred metaphor which has the power to escape final interpretation and to found a new reality at the same time. A community of transcendent consciousness must be established, as Berger and Luckmann argue in The Social Construction of Reality:

To have a conversion experience is nothing much. The real thing is to be able to keep on taking it seriously...Saul may have become Paul in the aloneness of religious esctasy, but he
could remain Paul only in the context of the 
Christian community that recognized him as such 
and confirmed the new being in which he now 
located this identity.

Within this community departure must become ever more 
difficult and ever more necessary if transcendent 
consciousness is to continue, requiring a discrimination of 
thought that can hardly be imagined much less explained. If 
transcendent consciousness is to continue, the three-fold 
language-structure re-established by the sacred metaphor 
must be maintained. Departure must be absolute and the 
language-dust shaken from one's conceptions. The Journey 
must continue departure after departure -- not just once -- 
with single-minded devotion. And each new thought must be 
well-planted in the soil of human experience without 
becoming stuck. Returning to the sacred name, identity and 
voice of the sacred metaphor encourages continuing 
departures.

The scriptures of the world's religions contain the 
record of the development of transcendent consciousness as 
it responds to the sacred metaphor that founds each 
tradition. Five of these scriptures are particularly useful 
for studying sacred metaphor because they are readily 
available in translation and because they represent 
different cultures over a long period of time. There is no 
reason to believe, however, that the sacred metaphors 
enshrined in each are the only ones to have influenced the
development of human consciousness. They are merely the most convenient and least debatable. But whether the scripture is the Bhagavad-Gita, the Torah, the Ti-Pitaka, the Gospels or the Quran, the sacred metaphor contained therein will express the same unvarying language-structure. Its name, identity and voice will establish its transcendent authority. Its transcendent authority will be stabilized in a teaching of transcendent departure, and the transcendent departure will be limited by the need for discriminating thought, responsible for the development of self-control and ethics. In all this the sacred metaphor will take an invisible shape between the words of the text, notwithstanding the single word that names it Krishna, Jehovah, Buddah, Christ or Allah. It is never a mere word or phrase.
PART FOUR: THE TRANSCENDENT AUTHORITY OF SACRED-METAPHOR

Because consciousness is so dependent on language, it is apt to become no more than the language-tradition will allow and often no more than the language-tradition demands unless the authority of a sacred metaphor assists consciousness to transcend its language-limitations. The authority of a sacred metaphor rests upon the integration of the three basic elements of language-meaning that comprise its language-reality. Its concrete image, abstract name and metaphoric voice bear witness to each other independently of the concrete, abstract and metaphoric references of the language-tradition. Its image establishes a new firmament for consciousness that none can refute although they may ignore it just as any other image. Its name identifies and establishes the order of the cosmos and therefore becomes the new organizing principle for consciousness. Its voice establishes the living presence of the eternal in the present moment as a model for all consciousness to transcend the limitations of temporal reality and become the discoverer of its own reality. Its inherent unity contrasts with the disparate nature of the language-tradition, notwithstanding its familiarity, and attracts consciousness to its simplicity, stability and vitality. Thus constituted, the sacred metaphor satisfies the language-need
of consciousness while transcending the limitations of the
language-tradition, thereby freeing consciousness to
investigate each new moment of existence without having its
reality previously defined.

In the Bhagavad-Gita the transcendent authority of the
sacred metaphor is established through the sacred name of
Krishna, identified as God in His universal Form with the
voice of Time itself. Arjuna, Prince of the Pandus,
personifies consciousness limited and suffering as the
result of the language-tradition that keeps him attached to
the forms of consciousness. The image of the sacred
metaphor is fire as it usually is in some form or another in
every tradition. Its concrete form is referred to by the
name of Krishna, but its identity is beyond name and form as
Arjuna learns in his Vision:

This is my Form of fire, world-wide, supreme, primeval,
Manifest by yoga power, alone of all men,
Arjuna, I showed to you because I love you.
Neither through sacrifice, nor study of the Vedas,
Nor strict austerities, nor alms, nor rituals,
Shall this my Shape be viewed by any mortal,
Other than you, O hero of the Pandus.

Consciousness is thus attracted to the image of the sacred
metaphor and thereby empowered to transcend its dependence
on the language-tradition. The supreme identity of the
sacred metaphor then sets the world in order for the
transcendent consciousness:
I am the birthless, the deathless,
Lord of all that breathes.
I seem to be born:
It is only seeming...
When goodness grows weak,
When evil increases,
I make my self a body.
In every age I come back
To deliver the holy,
To destroy the sin of the sinner,
To establish righteousness...
Whatever path men travel
Is my path:
No matter where they walk
It leads to me.

The voice of the eternal expressed in a moment detaches
consciousness from its identity with horror and re-creates
it in a new light with joy, thereby introducing it to a
transcendent reality as solid as before, but refreshed with
its new understanding:

...(Arjuna) folded his palms and bowed
down, trembling. Prostrating himself, with
great fear, he addressed Krishna once more, in a
choking voice:...Forgive me, Lord Eternal...I
have seen what no man ever saw before me: Deep
is my delight, but still my dread is greater...
Now you need fear no more, nor be
bewildered, seeing me so terrible. Be glad,
take courage. Look, here am I, transformed, as
first you knew me...That Shape of mine which you
have seen is very difficult to behold...But by
single-minded and intense devotion, that Form of
mine may be completely known, and seen, and
entered into, O consumer of the foe. Whosoever
works for me alone, makes me his only goal and
is devoted to me, free from attachment, and
without hatred toward any creature -- that man,
O Prince, shall enter into me.

This three-fold testimony of sacred image, name-identity and
voice is the language-expression of the unified reality of
the sacred metaphor that frees consciousness to become its own author independently of the language-tradition.

In the Torah the transcendent authority of the sacred metaphor is established through the sacred name of JHWH, commonly rendered as Jehovah, and identified as "the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Ex. 3:6), speaking from out of the burning bush. Moses, exiled Prince of Egypt and orphan son of Hebrew slaves, personifies an enslaved consciousness trying to be free and suffering because of the two-fold slavery of his people -- a slavery both of mind and body. Again, the image of the sacred metaphor is fire. No concrete form is given the sacred metaphor other than the fire. Its reality cannot be directly perceived because of its transcendent nature, communicated through the burning bush that is not consumed.

And the angel of the Lord appeared unto (Moses) in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. (Ex. 3:2-5)

The concrete authority of the sacred metaphor is established in a place and time remote as it is transcendent yet
specific enough for anyone to perceive. The transcendent voice moves Moses to fear if not to ecstasy as he hides his face, "for he was afraid to look upon God" (Ex. 3:6), and then transcends that fear with a promise to deliver the Israelites:

up out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey (Ex. 3:8)

This new reality is identified with a new name as well as the old reality identified with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob:

but by my name Jehovah was I not known to them (Ex. 6:3)

The sacred metaphor, empowered by its threefold language-reality, transcends both the consciousness and the circumstances of Moses' and his people's past reality, lifting them "up" and "out" and into a "good" and "large" reality that is "flowing" rather than fixed. The fact that this transformation takes forty years instead of forty minutes as in a vision does not lessen its transcendent authority.

In the Ti-Pitaka the transcendent authority of the sacred metaphor is expressed through the name of Buddha, The Illumined One, identified negatively as "not-Anyone-Or-Anything-Which-Presently-Binds-You-To-Appearances-Or-Invisible-Realities" with a voice that detached men from
the wheel of suffering and continual re-birth. Such a voice makes reference to no previously important spiritual ancestor, claiming such a unique station that it is revealed to man only about once in two-hundred and fifty million years — a length of time that clearly transcends history and assumes metaphysical significance. Other than this his only identity was The Buddha, The Dhamma (Teaching) and The Sangha (the Order of Monks). The metaphoric expression of the power of his transcendent voice to produce both fear and ecstasy is recorded in the scripture as follows:

...Thus spoke the Lord, and the five monks expressed delight and approval at the Lord's utterance. And while this exposition was being uttered there arose in the elder Kondanna the pure and spotless eye of the doctrine that whatever was liable to origination was all liable to cessation.

Thus when the Wheel of Dhamma was set turning by the Lord, the earth-dwelling gods raised a shout: "This supreme Wheel of Dhamma has been set going by the Lord Buddha at Benares at Isipatana in the Deer Park, a Wheel which has not been set going by any ascetic, brahmin, god Mara, Brahma, or by anyone in the world. "The gods of the heaven of the four Great Kings, hearing the shout of the earth-dwelling gods, raised a shout...The gods of the heaven of the Thirty-Three, hearing the shout of the gods of the four Great Kings...the Yama gods...the Tusita gods...the Nummaniarati gods...the Paranimmitavasavattin gods...the gods of the Brahma-world raised a shout: "This supreme Wheel of the Dhamma...has not been set going by...anyone in the world."

Thus at that very time, at that moment, at that second, a shout went up as far as the Brahma-world (the highest of these regions), and this ten thousandfold world system shook, shuddered, and trembled, and a boundless great light appeared in the world surpassing the
The new light was manifested in this case not from a mere flame, but from something more like a sun that completely outshone the pre-existing stars of the heaven of human understanding. Indeed, of all the religious traditions this one comes the closest to addressing point-blank the language-trap of consciousness and the need to transcend language. Perhaps the sophisticated nature of Sanskrit with its rich use of metaphor required this focus on language itself in order to escape its snares.

In the Gospels the transcendent authority of the sacred metaphor is established through the name of Christ, a Greek adaptation of the Hebrew Messiah, identified as the Logos or Word by which the cosmos was organized even before creation with such words as

Before Abraham was, I am. (John 8:58)

and

For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me: for he wrote of me. But is ye believe not his writings, how shall he believe my words? (John 5:46-47)

speaking

...as one having authority, and not as the scribes. (Matt. 7:28-9)

His most intense voice is heard at his transfiguration when the voice of the eternal charges the moment with
transcendent power:

...Jesus...was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light...behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. (Matt. 17:1-6)

His light is likened to the sun rather than a flame, but the transcendent quality of the vision and the voice again provokes the typical mixture of fear and ecstasy. In spite of the physical expression of the power of transcendence in various miracles, the emphasis on the importance of transcending language and achieving understanding was made clear in such sayings as the following:

...For by words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words shalt thou be condemned. (Matt. 12:37)

The transcendent authority for detaching men from their false understanding was manifested in the sacred metaphor, not withstanding the additional necessity of acting out the lesson in blood in order to save a blood-thirsty people.

Blood flows in a slightly different way in response to the Quran where the transcendent authority of the sacred metaphor is established through the name of Allah:

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Say: He is Allah, the One!
Allah, the eternally besought of all!
He begetteth not nor was begotten.
And there is none comparable unto Him. (CXII)

As before, the voice of the transcendent identifies itself as the Creator of everything, focused in but a few minutes in the consciousness of one man, saying:

Read!
Muhammad responded to the voice saying, "I cannot read."
The voice again said, "Read!"
And he said, "I cannot read."
A third time the voice, more terrible, commanded: "Read!"
He said: "What can I read?"
The voice said: "Read: In the name of thy Lord who createth. Createth man from a clot. Read: And it is the Lord the Most Bountiful Who teacheth by the pen, Teacheth man that which he knew not.

The image of fire or light is there also in the vision that confronted Muhammad when he went out of the cave to escape the voice only to hear the same awe-inspiring voice say:

O Muhammad! Thou art Allah's messenger, and I am Gabriel. Then he raised his eyes and saw the angel, in the likeness of a man, standing the sky above the horizon. And again the dreadful voice said: O Muhammad! Thou art Allah's messenger, and I am Gabriel. Muhammad stood quite still, turning away his face from the brightness of the vision, but whithersoever he might turn his face, there always stood the angel confronting him. He remained thus a long while till at length the angel vanished, when he returned in great distress of mind to his wife Khadijah.

The three-fold structure of the sacred metaphor established
a transcendent authority over the ancient tradition of idol-worship, tribal identity, and the voice of self. Based on the transcendent authority of the sacred metaphor as manifested in the Quran, warring tribes were united in a spiritual brotherhood that was to become the nation of Islam.

All these sacred metaphors share similar structures and functions even though their specific characteristics are unique to each. The different names are departures from their respective language-traditions, but they still use the same letter and sound forms of the tradition from which they depart. Their different identifies also are contingent on their respective language-traditions, but are stated in a way that ties them to some ancient or eternal origin. Their different voices, some intimate, some dramatic, some militant, all move human consciousness to the edge of normal perception and into the sea of transcendence, carried on the raft of the sacred metaphor. The foundation of consciousness is thereby moved beyond the limits of both biological perceptions and linguistic conceptions of reality without destroying either. Both perception and conception are outshown by the transcendent authority of the sacred light of the sacred metaphor. Its light does not consume its object physically as one would expect of mere fire but transcends its object without denying the value of its
form. Whether it is Krishna's "Form of Fire", or Jehovah's "flame of fire out of the midst of a bush", or Buddha's "boundless great light", or Christ's transfigured radiance wherein "his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light", or the "brightness of the vision" of Allah, they all participate in one common image of a transcendent reality that at best can only be suggested by the poetic voice of metaphor, even when that voice extols the paradox of the plurality and singleness of these sacred metaphors as does Baha'u'llah:

He hath manifested unto men the Day Stars of His divine guidance, the Symbols of His divine unity, and hath ordained the knowledge of these sanctified Beings to be identical with the knowledge of His own Self...Every one of them is the Way of God that connecteth this world with the realms above, and the Standard of His Truth unto everyone in the kingdom of earth and heaven. They are the Manifestations of God amidst men, the evidences of His Truth, and the signs of His glory.
Sacred metaphors might appear to be simply another kind of fiction or fantasy so common in literature if it weren't for the stabilizing influence of their three-fold structure which guarantees the maintenance of harmonic semantic tension for generations. Because of this stability the archetype of transcendence remains available for each point of individual consciousness as it becomes ready for transcendence. Transcendence itself is not guaranteed, of course, merely because the means of transcendence is stabilized. In fact, as a new language-tradition develops around the sacred metaphor, discrimination between it and the language-tradition becomes increasingly difficult until after many centuries the sacred metaphor will have become accepted as mere language-truth imprisoning consciousness instead of releasing it. But in its vital stage the sacred metaphor stabilizes the need for departure from language-forms of consciousness to transcendent consciousness. Its concrete references to battlefields, mountains, trees, blood, and cities tie the transcendent reality to a world that requires no special kind of consciousness beyond sensory perception and memory. Its abstract references to behavioral codes make explicit the implicit importance of self-control and discriminating thought. And its metaphoric references to various forms of
sacrifice illumined by the flame and voice of the eternal urge each point of consciousness to depart "away from here".

In the Bhagavad-Gita the departure is stabilized as a departure from appearances, even those appearances prescribed by religious tradition and noble reasoning. Arjuna would reject his duty as prince and warrior to fight against his evil cousins in a civil war because

...the killing of kinsmen...(is a)...sin...(that results in)...families broken,...rites...forgotten, vice,...corruption,...ancestors...dishonored..., the ancient, the sacred...broken, forgotten.

Arjuna's sorrow is genuine and his frustration complete because he appears to be damned if he kills his kinsmen and damned if he rejects his duty to kill or oppose evil in defense of the good. But through the transcendent influence of the sacred metaphor, Arjuna departs the crushing jaws of appearances. The concrete reference to the saving name of Krishna rivets Arjuna's attention. The abstract command to

...overcome the three gunas...[and] be established in the consciousness of the Atman...[explaining that]...When the whole country is flooded, the reservoir becomes superfluous. So, to the illumined seer, the Vedas are all superfluous...At present, your intellect is bewildered by conflicting interpretation of the scriptures. When it can rest, steady and undistracted, in contemplation of the Atman, then you will reach union with the Atman.
overcomes Arjuna's habitual thought-patterns and confused passions. The three gunas are levels of consciousness corresponding to the three elements of language-meaning — tamas with belief in concrete reference, rajas with belief in abstract reference, and sattwa with belief in metaphoric reference. The Atman is the center of consciousness as opposed to the forms which surround consciousness and give it identity. Krishna's transcendent "Form of Fire" infuses reality with a new light that makes departure from appearances past tense and yet stabilizes that departure for all eyes to see in such words as follow:

This true wisdom I have taught will lead you to immortality. The faithful practise it with devotion, taking me for their highest aim. To me they surrender heart and mind. They are exceedingly dear to me.

Such words are only reflections of the rays shed from the transcendent light of the sacred metaphor, stabilized in language as a photograph fixes physical light in a picture, and yet the picture is not the light.

In the Torah the departure is stabilized in the story of the movement of the Children of Israel from the slavery in Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land. Although originally theirs was a nomadic tradition in which departure to new pasture was constantly re-occurring, forgetfulness of the sacred metaphors of their ancestors had led them into forgetfulness of the needs of their own consciousness.
Because of their abysmal ignorance, only concrete reference was able to move them. All the elements were forced to cry out in order to move such ignorance. Bushes burned, water turned to blood, sticks became serpents, dust became lice and all sorts of natural phenomena assumed metaphoric proportions in an effort to move the Israelites away from their bondage. Even so, they moved reluctantly,

...saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness. (Ex. 14:12)

Even Moses was reluctant so that

the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses (Ex. 4:14)

He was first made to depart his mother as an orphan babe, then he was made to depart Egypt into exile as a rebellious prince, and finally he was made to depart his own identity in deference to Jehovah. Upon the strength of his departure, Moses became the means of the departure of the Children of Israel through the power of the sacred metaphor. The sacred name, fire and voice combined to establish a new consciousness --

...out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice. And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform... (Deu. 4:12-13)

-- directed toward the importance of transcendence:
O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them and their children forever! (Deu. 5:29)

But the three-fold stability of the sacred metaphor is seen most clearly in the following testimony:

Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. (Ex. 19:4-6)

Although an explicit covenant encourages stability, such explicitness compromises the transcendence of the sacred metaphor and makes continuous departure seem unnecessary.

In the Ti-Pitaka the danger of compromise is dealt with directly at the same time the sacred metaphor is stabilized by institutionalizing the metaphoric departure. Siddartha Gotama's departure from the life of princely satisfaction and power to become a Tathagata (one who goes forth to find that which neither comes nor goes) and a Buddha (Fully Illumined One) is stabilized in the abstract name (Buddha) and teaching (Dhamma), and a disciplined community of monks (Sangha). The drama of ignorant renunciation is minimized. No adventures are there to tempt the feeble-minded with illusion. The explicit expression of the sacred metaphor is stabilized in direct teachings addressing the quality of consciousness itself, as an
assistance to the departure of others who wished to follow. This was understood to be attractive to only a few whose quality of life would gradually attract the less able. Together the "Three Jewels" -- the name of Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha -- would stabilize the sacred metaphor for others to follow. The Dhammapada chrystalizes this three-fold structure as the Wheel of Dhamma, delivering consciousness on the wheel of language:

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the cart. (1:1)

One is the road that leads to wealth, another the road that leads to Nirvana: if the monk, the disciple of the Buddha, has learnt this he will not delight in the praise of men; he will strive after separation from the world. (V:75)

There is no suffering for him who has finished his journey, and abandoned grief, who has freed himself on all sides, and thrown off all fetters. They depart with their thoughts well-collected, they do not delight in an abode: like swans who have left their lake, they leave their house and home. (VII:90-91)

Let a man blow away his own impurities as a smith blows away the impurities of silver, one by one, little by little, and from instant to instant. (XVIII:239)

You yourself must make an effort. The Tathagatas are only teachers. The meditative who enter the way are freed from the bondage of Mara (the Tempter). (XX:276)

Apart from consciousness, no diverse truths exist...

Clearly, the sacred metaphor in this tradition is most transparent, refusing any linguistic definition of
transcendence and carefully refuting any attempt to make a personal departure unnecessary.

In the Gospels the stabilized departure is not so subtle. Traditional attachment to blood-lines and bloodletting required a deliberate and dramatic rejection of the value of blood by not protecting it, even while provoking a blood-thirsty people. Jesus' blood-line was questionable, as it supposedly came only through his mother by the Holy Ghost (Matt. 1:20). It was by the authority of the spirit rather than the authority of blood-lines that he taught, saying,

It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. (John 6:63)

He counseled men to "forsake (their) houses,...brethren,...sisters,...father,...mother,...wife,...children, or lands for my name's sake" (Matt. 19:29) and disavowed the importance of the past, saying,

Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. (John 6:49-51)

Powerful metaphoric reference demands that bread cannot sustain life, that flesh is bread, that death sustains
life. This metaphoric mystery is not substantially lessened by the abstract explanation that,

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. for what is a man profiteth if he shall gain the whole world and lose his soul? (Matt. 16:25-26)

Such self-sacrifice obviously could not sustain a community such as the Buddhist Sangha because the rejection of physical life is absolute except for those who already understood the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven". (Matt. 13:11) The tension between life and death was not explained away in a transcendent teaching that the foolish might come to believe that they understood, when in fact they would have merely exchanged one superstition for another. The stability of the sacred metaphor was thereby maintained in the face of a severe superstition, not as a light, but as a cross of crucifixion, not as a community but as resurrected man, not as scripture but as a living sacrifice. In this way the three-fold structure of the sacred metaphor was stabilized in a resurrected man who could be touched, a language (LOGOS) for reorganizing reality, and the metaphoric presence of the Holy Ghost — a triple reality compressed into one transcendent reality.

In the Quran the sacred metaphor is stabilized in quite another way no less transcendent for consciousness but
completely revolutionizing for society. The revolution was first from illiteracy to literacy in the person of Muhammad and second from tribalism to nationalism enabled by that literacy:

He it is Who hath sent among the unlettered ones a messenger of their own, to recite unto them His revelations and to make them grow, and to teach them the Scripture and Wisdom, though heretofore they were indeed in manifest error. (LKII, 2)

Consciousness was to be controlled by Allah's words rather than individual imagination or tradition, making

...no compulsion in religion. The right direction...distinct from error. And...a firm handhold which will never break. (II,256)

The Quran became a concrete reality instead of a name or a person becoming the center of reality, such as the daughters of Allah or the heads of various tribes had been. The second revolution accompanied the first as society was reorganized around the Quran in a mere ten years after the Hijrah due to the harsh cleavage of the sword:

41 Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loveth not aggressors. And slay them wherever ye find them, and drive them out of the places whence they drove you out, for persecution is worse than slaughter...And fight them until persecution is no more, and religion is for Allah. But if they desist, then let there be no hostility except against wrong-doers. (II,190-193)

Departure from evil was not simply preached and then proved
by self-sacrifice as evil attacked the good. The sacred metaphor was stabilized by the sword against those who sought to destroy it, but it was the Quran and not the sword that controlled consciousness behind the sword. As the warring Arab tribes were united in that consciousness under the power of the sword, different levels of consciousness were recognized by the Quran:

The wandering Arabs say: We believe. Say: Ye believe not, but rather say "We submit," for the faith hath not yet entered into your hearts. Yet, if ye obey Allah and His messenger, He will not withhold from you aught of (the reward of) your deeds. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. (XLIX, 14)

In this way the sacred metaphor was established with a power over bodies as well as minds, and society was transformed from one with a thirst for blood to one with a thirst for knowledge. Once liberated from the bounds of ignorance and superstition, the transcendent quality of the sacred metaphor revolutionized consciousness itself with metaphoric clarity, shedding new light on creation itself:

Were We then worn out by the first creation? Yet they are in doubt about a new creation. We verily created man and We know what his soul whispereth to him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein. (L, 15-16)

The identity of the sacred metaphor itself was shown to be transcendent over the temporary manifestation of that identity:
And Muhammad is but a messenger, messengers the like of whom have passed away before him. Will it be that, when he dieth or is slain, ye will turn back on your heels? He who turneth back doth no hurt to Allah, and Allah will reward the thankful. (III, 144)

And the eternal unity of the transcendent reality is shown to eclipse the localized unity of its historical manifestations:

Lo! those who disbelieve in Allah and His messengers, and seek to make distinction between Allah and His messengers and say: We believe in some and disbelieve in others, and seek to choose a way in between; such are disbelievers in truth; and for disbelievers We prepare a shameful doom...Lo! We inspire thee (Muhammad) as We inspired Noah and the prophets after him, as We inspired Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and as We imparted unto David the Psalms; and messengers We have not mentioned unto thee; and Allah spake directly unto Moses; messengers of good cheer and of warning, in order that mankind might have no argument against Allah after the messengers. Allah was ever Mighty, Wise. (IV, 163-5)

Concrete, abstract and metaphoric references to reality again were stabilized in the sacred metaphor with such power that almost "in a twinkling of an eye", relative to history, men's lives were revolutionized by it.

Once stabilized in language the sacred metaphor makes transcendent movement look like stillness although that very stillness is what supplies consciousness with a definitive point from which to depart successfully. Language, once written, is fixed; but transcendence is always departure
from that which is fixed. The paradox of language is that it is presumed to control the invisible at the same time the invisible is controlling consciousness. Sacred metaphors destabilize that language-control over consciousness and move consciousness to higher levels of awareness and wider embraces of reality. Once the flowing ink dries on the paper, the journey away from here can begin again. Each new configuration of linguistic elements moves consciousness away from here to there until there becomes here and we must depart again. Out of stillness motion is engendered -- a transcendence based on sacred metaphor.

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PART SIX: THE DISCIPLINE OF SACRED METAPHOR

Although the transcendent authority of sacred metaphor is stabilized in a scripture, the transcendent departure that it makes possible is not automatic. It requires great discipline -- a discipline that transcends mere behavior and governs consciousness itself. Transcendence is not simply a loss of control as an uneducated mind is apt to believe. Drunkenness or speeding down a highway out of control is not a transcendence of the requirements of form into the freedom of formlessness; it is a departure of consciousness into carelessness and ultimate unconsciousness if it is not corrected. This ancient misconception of transcendence is amply recorded in both sacred and secular literature throughout history. It is the subject of the eternal theme of Life and Death in both poetry and prose. The metaphoric journey from form to formlessness always takes place in terms of form. The form of the metaphor releases consciousness from its attachment to form but does not become careless of form. A rejection of language-form gives consciousness no continuing point of departure from which to take its meaning while slavish obedience to language-form gives consciousness no reason to depart at all. Recognizing various levels of language-meaning and variations in individual points of view helps consciousness to maintain its balance between form and formlessness, but the ecstasy
and fear provoked by the sacred metaphor is the more powerful guide to transcendence. The perfect balance of these two emotions produces reverence which is the balance-wheel of transcendence. Reverence is the discipline of transcendence, and its mother is the sacred metaphor.

The discipline of the sacred metaphor in the Bhagavad-Gita is a thin but indestructible line stretched between fear and hope -- an explicit extension of the implicit horror and ecstasy of transcendence. That line is the scripture:

But he who flouts the commandments of the scriptures, and acts on the impulse of his desires, cannot reach perfection, or happiness, or the highest goal.

42

The scripture, of course, is language; but it is language requiring movement "away from here". It never justifies the existing state of consciousness as "good enough". Required actions, however necessary, are never sufficient. They are always dependent upon the balance between form and formlessness, or the fear of failure and the hope of success. Arjuna, desiring noble action and yet finding evil in both fighting and not-fighting, is released from his dilemma by the discipline of worship.

Acts of sacrifice, almsgiving and austerity should not be given up; their performance is necessary. For sacrifice, almsgiving and austerity are a means of purification to those who rightly understand them. But even these acts must be performed
without attachment or regard for their fruits...Give me your whole heart, love and adore me, worship me always, bow to me only, and you shall find me: This is my promise who love you dearly. Lay down all duties in me, your refuge. Fear no longer, for I will save you from sin and bondage...For I am Brahman within this body, life immortal that shall not perish: I am the Truth and the Joy forever.

Arjuna must continue to live within the requirements of the scripture by focusing his attention on a transcendent reality outside of the scripture. The discipline of worship or reverence maintains a transcendent consciousness through fear of disobedience and the joy of understanding. Krishna's "Form of Fire" releases spirit from form as light is released from heat, producing simultaneously joy and fear.

The discipline exacted by the sacred metaphor in the Torah although considerably less subtle, is no less difficult for the Children of Israel. There is, of course, a difference between the requirements of individual transcendence and the requirements of group or social transcendence. The line between fear and hope again is a scripture and more precisely a "covenant", separating the people from both slavery and idolotry and leading them into independence and transcendence:

And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them. The Lord our God made a covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us alive this day.
Notice the immediacy of this covenant in the living moment of transcendence. It was not a reference to a past truth, requiring mere obedience. It was a reference to an immediate discipline for maintaining their joyful relationship with JHWH in spite of the fear such a relationship also provoked:

The Lord talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire (I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to shew you the word of the Lord: for ye were afraid by reason of the fire, and went not up unto the mount) saying, I am the Lord thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage. (Deu. 5:4-6)

The fear of departure dominated the consciousness of the people more than the joy of deliverance, for they said:

if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die. (Deu. 5:25)

But the discipline of transcendence spoke to them, saying:

Ye shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God hath commanded you, that ye may live...(Deu. 5:33)

But this discipline is not recognized outside of the sacred metaphor which gave it birth, for "false prophets" (Deu. 13) and others who would "serve other gods" are to be stoned to death. This seems to be a very low level of transcendence indeed, but the Children of Israel were recognized as a "stiffnecked people" (Deu. 9:6) and apparently needed such
harsh measures to catch their attention, and in all fairness it must be admitted that they were headed toward a superior culture by human standards of economics and self-control which would have surely absorbed them but for the strict covenant that guaranteed the integrity of their departure.

In the Ti-Pitaka the discipline of transcendence must operate within a mature culture unlike that of the Torah. Mere physical departure from society into the Sangha (religious community of monks) did not suffice although it was necessary, for the Buddha had said:

There is no path through the air: no (true) monk is found outside (the Buddhist Order). (Dhammapadha XVIII, 254)

A transcendent quality of thought and action was required, but it was subtle. The tension between fear and ecstasy was not demonstrated by either stoning or firelight. Suffering itself was fire, and freedom from suffering was light. Discipline required each individual to practice transcendence at all times, not simply by not doing something or by departing from some place or word, but by disciplining his own thought:

The thoughtless man, even if he can recite a large portion of the Dhamma, but is not a doer of it, has no share in the religious life, but is like a cowherd counting the cows of others. The follower of the Dhamma, even if he can recite only a small portion of it but, having forsaken passion and hatred and foolishness, possesses true knowledge and serenity of mind; he, attached to nothing in this world or that to
come, has indeed a share in the religious life.

Such disciplined thought is at once a departure from pain and an entrance into Nirvana for those who can sustain it. Acceptance of the three-fold structure of the sacred metaphor in the concrete reality of the Buddha, the abstract guidance of the Dhamma, and the metaphoric departure of the Sangha was the refuge of transcendent consciousness unmatched by any other refuge:

Men driven by fear go to many a refuge, to mountains and forests, to shrines and graves and sacred trees. But that is not a safe refuge, that is not the best refuge; a man is not delivered from all pains after having gone to that refuge. He who takes refuge with Buddha, the Law and the Order; he who with clear understanding sees the four noble truths: — suffering, the origin of suffering, the destruction of suffering, and the eightfold noble path that leads to the release from suffering — that is the safe refuge, that is the best refuge; having gone to that refuge, a man is delivered from all suffering.

(Dhammapadha XIV, 188-192)

Fear and hope remain, of course, as the basic discipline of transcendence, but they are located within the consciousness of each person rather than in external circumstances or future conditions.

In the Gospels the discipline of transcendence required not only the tension of pure consciousness but the struggle with external circumstances and the promise and threat of future conditions. Although
...true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth...(John 4:23)

separation from external circumstances was not a desired goal:

    I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from evil. (John 17:15)

and future conditions of reward and punishment created a painful tension for consciousness:

    He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. (John 3:36)

The test of devotion was "that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Death was not to be transcended but to be entered into in faith even when that death was the result of attack:

    yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. (John 16:2)

The action required of faith was the test of belief, but words were a purer guarantee of transcendent discipline:

    If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him. (John 14:23)

This tight configuration of word, action and reward or punishment focused in and on the sacred metaphor, exclusive of any other transcendent guidance:
I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

Away-from-here is made present at the same time that the present is transformed into away-from-here, and fear and ecstasy are one disciplined reality, shimmering in the light of transcendent consciousness.

In the Quran Away-From-Here is combined with even greater intensity with the present in verbal symbols that physically re-organize society and promise a painful doom for those who would resist. This is a discipline not left to the imagination nor to a community of devotees. It is as though the swords of the Israelites were turned against themselves instead of the children of Anak (Deu. 9:2). It is reminiscent of Arjuna's civil war as Arab challenged Arab word to word, sword to sword and life to life, until life was transformed in the space of one generation. The transcendent discipline of the sacred metaphor made men transcend tribal loyalties in favor of national loyalties. The discipline is clearly verbal as established by a "Scripture that maketh plain" (XLIV, 2) as opposed to the opinions of men, whether believers or unbelievers. the threat is clear:

Whosoever heareth the revelations of Allah receive unto him, and then continueth in pride as though he heard them not. Give him tidings of a painful doom. (XLV, 8)
The immediate swordpoint of this doom forces everyone to change, to depart the old ways objected to in the Quran, but swords cannot be held forever at one's throat. Indeed, even a few minutes of sword against sword is a long time. But when the discipline of transcendence is couched in sword-like language, that is a discipline that can last centuries. The tension between "damned if you do and damned if you don't" forced continued transcendence or fatigue and rejection. Swords can be lifted by the ignorant, but such powerful metaphors as wielded by the Quran transcended the word-power of even the wisest men, as demonstrated in the following surah:

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.
1. The Calamity!
2. What is the Calamity?
3. Ah, what will convey unto thee what the Calamity is!
4. A day wherein mankind will be as thickly-scattered moths
5. And the mountains will become as carded wool.
6. Then, as for him whose scales are heavy (with good works),
7. He will live a pleasant life.
8. But as for him whose scales are light,
9. The Bereft and Hungry One will be his mother.
10. Ah, what will convey unto thee what she is!
11. Raging fire. (p 1)

The use of metaphor to explain the unexplainable dominates the Quran, requiring a conscious discipline rather than superstitious belief. No opportunity is left for the
foolish to justify not thinking, as the following passage shows:

Verily, We have coined for mankind in the Quran all kinds of similitudes; and indeed, if thou camest unto them with a miracle, those who disbelieve would verily exclaim: Ye are but tricksters! Thus doth Allah seal the hearts of those who know not. So have patience (O Muhammad)! Allah's promise is the very truth, and let not those who have no certainty make thee impatient. (XXX, 58-60)

The promise and the threat are clear as is the need to transcend mere literal understanding or selfish imagination:

And now the guidance from their Lord hath come unto them. Or shall man have what he coveteth? (LIII, 23-24)

The discipline of transcendence is precise without losing its sense of departure away from here:

Lo! We have created every thing by measure. And our commandment is but one (commandment), as the twinkling of an eye. (LIV, 49-50)

In that twinkling is a timeless moment of transcendence, recurring again and again as long as the eye of consciousness is open.

The discipline of sacred metaphors forces consciousness to open and language to close in the twinkling of an eye. Once opened, the eye of consciousness drinks in the light of transcendence, looks at language from the outside, re-arranges its basic elements to conform to a new
understanding, and then blinks. The new language-configuration then closes on the new understanding and stabilizes it. But if the eye of consciousness continues to look upon the sacred metaphor, it will continue to open after every blink and not succumb to the illusion that it has discovered or created a lasting reality. And thus has Rumi said:

"Cleanse thou the rheum from out thine head
And breathe the breath of God instead."

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