

THE MYTHOLOGY OF COSMIC ORIENTATION

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AXIS MUNDI
ASTROLOGY

The Mythology of Cosmic Orientation Axis Mundi Astrology – Lindsay Gladstone DFAstroIS, MA.

The Mythology of Cosmic Orientation

Abstract: Not unlike the great migrations of creatures of the earth and sky the human psyche instinctively demands of itself a sense of direction, specifically a calling home. The Romanian historian of religion Mercia Eliade proposed,

“...that every human is basically religious, whether he or she knows it or not...and therefore every human has a need to find meaning, to discern patterns, though each culture, indeed each individual, may fill in the broad outlines differently.” (Doninger in Eliade, 2004: xiv)

Referring to the works of sacred wisdom written by medieval Middle Eastern philosophers, and by applying the theories of myth to the symbolism of cardinal directions and the Axis Mundi as researched by Western anthropologists, this paper investigates the potency of orientation of the horizon and celestial alignments conferred upon them through spiritual, shamanic and divinatory systems.

Cosmologies

Social epistemology invites comprehension of a truth, and the exploration of universalism, a shared commonality which is found to be upheld within the cosmologies of diverse cultures. Durkheim claims that, ‘The first forces with which the human intellect populated the universe were elaborated through religion’, so in order to comprehend the emergence of life out of chaos the human mind applied the symbolism of complementary human behaviour to these metaphysical constructs.¹ Within mythico-religious contexts a pantheon of creator gods and goddesses reign supreme over primal forces. Omnipotent deities who command worship and from whom salvation is sought. The planets and the stars regarded as being under the governance of these supernatural beings acting as expressions of their beneficent or malevolent natures.

The Axis Mundi

Origins of sky worship and the desire for unification with a deified Supreme Being can be gathered from creation myths of around the world. The Barotse tribe of Zambia relate a story of how God, Nyambi, disillusioned and fearful of the cruelty of the human race, Kamonu, towards its fellow creatures, desires to distance Himself from mankind and so retreats into the sky by way of a thread spun by Anansi the spider, a trickster deity. On the advice of a diviner, Nyambi blinds Anansi and cuts the thread, preventing Kamonu from climbing up and discovering the route to his celestial abode. In an effort to reach Nyambi, Kamonu builds a high tower of wooden masts. Unfortunately, Kamonu’s repeated attempts to reach the heavens end in failure as the constructions inevitably crash to the ground. Resignedly accepting his fate of separation from Nyambi, Kamonu finds solace in the daily worship of the rising sun, reaching out to it as a symbol of God proclaiming, ‘Here is our king. He has come’.²

In this tale of humankind’s disconnection from God, Sproul suggests that the high tower refers to the *Axis Mundi*, a sacred spindle that conjoins heaven, earth and the netherworld, orienting mankind’s place within the cosmic hierarchy. Crowning this north-south axis is the Pole star which, due to the precession of the equinoxes is currently Polaris, located within the circumpolar constellation of Ursa Minor. Acknowledging its eternal centredness the Samoyedic peoples of Siberia refer to the Pole Star as the ‘Sky Nail’, firmly securing the

¹ Emile Durkheim translated by Karen E. Fields, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, Division of Simon & Schuster Inc, 1995), 238

² Barbara C, Sproul, *Primal Myths: Creation Myths around the World* (1979; repr. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 35.

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canopy that is the Milky way, rather like a stake that secures the canvas of a nomad's tent; while the Siberian Buryats view it as a stake to which the circumpolar stars, resembling a herd of horses, are tethered.³

Eliade applied the term 'most high' to a reverential quality of the Divine and in its turn the cosmic north, as a constant point of visible but distant transcendence, became the accepted direction beyond which the Creator and the heavenly host reside.⁴



A diagram of the Tengriist World view on a shaman's drum [2] [3]. The World-tree is growing in the centre and connecting the three Worlds: Underworld, Middleworld and Upperworld.

As Holbraad observes, 'deities can be characterized by their degree of distance from the human world'.⁵ So shamans, in an attempt to reach the Godhead believed to be residing in the furthestmost heaven, by virtue of drumming and the climbing of a sacred tree, perform a frenetic ritualized act of psycho-navigation; ascension via the cosmic ladder that is the *Axis Mundi*. Each tree branch scaled symbolizing the penetration of a planetary sphere, more distant from Earth than the last, until the realm of Fixed stars has been reached and communion with God achieved.⁶

Of such vital importance is this mystical connection with the Divine that religious leaders, such as the Pope, came to represent the *umbilicus mundi*; incumbents in perpetuity upholding a direct link to God.

Medieval Islamic philosophers believed that at the celestial north there exists a concrete spiritual universe, the *mundis imaginalis*, wherein rests the world of the Angel. Corbin describes it as a three-dimensional psycho-spiritual realm beyond the normal two dimensional human perceptions of consciousness and unconsciousness; a world of the 'archetype-Image' where the possibility of everything is a reality, even if it has not yet taken recognizable form.⁷ In an evolutionary process of spiritual comprehension Sufi mystics endeavoured to explore and explain the dominion of the Angel. Avicenna (980-1037CE) applied a soteriological function to angels, who acted as intermediaries between the One and the many.⁸

Suhrawardi (1153-1191CE) combining the ontology of Being with Light developed an angelic order based on Zoroastrian and Platonic philosophy regarding angels as intermediaries

³ Mircea Eliade translated by Willard R. Trask, *Shamanism: Archaic techniques of Ecstasy* (1964; repr. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 260-261.

⁴ Mircea Eliade translated by Willard R. Trask, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1957; repr. San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1987), 118.

⁵ Martin Holbraad, *Truth in Motion: The Recursive Anthropology of Cuban Divination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 170.

⁶ Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic techniques of Ecstasy*, 121-122

⁷ Henry Corbin translated by Nancy Pearson, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism* (1978; repr. New Lebanon, NY: Omega Publications, 1994), 6

⁸ Mehdi Aminrazavi, 'Avicenna', in Ian P. McGreal, ed., *Great Thinkers of the Eastern world: The Major Thinkers and the Philosophical and Religious classics of China, India, Japan, Korea, and the world of Islam* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 449-452.

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between the Light of Lights, God the macrocosm, and His existence within the microcosm, humanity.⁹

Jaffé proposes that man has an innate talent for symbol making and that, 'spatial orientation...may be regarded as symbolic for the human need for psychic orientation'.¹⁰ A theory that can be successfully applied to the sophisticated cosmology of the medieval Andalusian Sufi Ibn 'Arabi (1165–1240CE) who expounded a theosophy of perpetual transformation. He proposed a cycle of return to the Source comprising three principal orientations of experience of the First Intellect and introduces them as angelic beings with designated functions of human existence corresponding to the symbolism of the twelve astrological signs of the zodiac.

Burkhardt, in his translation of the writings of Ibn 'Arabi, précised the astrological meanings; thus, the fixed signs of Taurus, Leo, Scorpio and Aquarius were related to the Descending movement of the cycle. A movement that measured the depth of the possible and related to the present world. The Expansive movement, corresponding to the cardinal signs of Aries, Cancer, Libra and Capricorn measured the breadth of the possible and related to the future world. Finally, the movement of Return towards the Origin, comprising the mutable signs of Gemini, Virgo, Sagittarius, and Pisces, denoted a sense of exaltation or height and referred to the intermediary world of 'al-Barzakh', a place similar to Christianity's purgatory, which acted as a nebulous barrier between the physical and spiritual worlds.¹¹

Are these the angels Ibn 'Arabi saw on his ascension to speak with Abraham? 'Then I saw the "Inhabited House", and suddenly there was my Heart – and there were the angels who "enter It every day"'.¹² This circular fluidity of movement invites a cycle of continuous momentum that offers the initiate a chance to participate in an act of perpetual mutual co-creation with the Divine. For within the polished mirror of the heart the divine attributes could find expression through the human condition.

⁹ Mehdi Aminrazavi, 'Suhrawardi', in Ian P. McGreal, ed., *Great Thinkers of the Eastern world: The Major Thinkers and the Philosophical and Religious classics of China, India, Japan, Korea, and the world of Islam* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 469-474.

¹⁰ Aniela Jaffé, 'Symbolism in the Visual Arts', in Carl Jung, ed., *Man and His Symbols* (1964; repr. London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd, 1978), 256-322.

¹¹ Titus Burkhardt translated by Bulent Rauf, *Mystical Astrology According to Ibn 'Arabi* (1977; repr. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2001), 21-23.

¹² Ibn Al'Arabi translated by William C. Chittick, and James W. Morris, Michel Chodkiewicz (ed.), *The Meccan Revelations Volume 1* (1988; repr. New York: Pir Press, 2005), 228.

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In a Christian context of ascension Sarah Adam's hymn 'Nearer my God to Thee' was inspired by the holy text of the dream of Jacob who saw God's angels descending and ascending upon a ladder stretching from Earth to heaven.¹³

The hackneyed truism of this hymn title becomes a revelatory experience of soulful reunification when one considers Corbin's explanation of the Islamic Sufi's concept of spiritual ascension towards the heavenly pole, the cosmic north, 'This then is the *orientation* that has to be made clear: *where* is it leading and *what* makes it such that the being who takes on the effort of this upward movement, is at the same time, the "being beyond" whose growing manifestation itself guarantees this process'.¹⁴

By delineating the qualitative nature of the horizontal to the vertical the concept of spiritual redemption by unification with God through the upward, skyward movement of transcendence, is extolled. The horizontal is constructed upon the world of the secular, comprising a complex network of relationships within society and a merging with a collective consciousness. Whereas the vertical, released from the constraints of the group, invites evolutionary personal growth, individuation, and sanctification. Holbraad's comparison of the axial movement of Amerindian spirits in particular the Afro-Cuban Ifá divinatory deities, seems to bear out Corbin's reference to an ontological merging and manifestation process when he contends,

the potentiality of virtual spirits in Amazonia is that of transforming themselves horizontally into what they are not ("becoming other"), whereas the vertical axis of transcendence to immanence that is so characteristic of Ifá implies transformations that are also constituted as shifts between *orders* of otherness ("becoming-other-kinds-of-others", if you like).¹⁵

However, Hillman argues against what he calls the 'ascensionist fantasy'; that things down below are worse than things upon high. He reminds the soul of its familial roots and its orientation on earth and considers the possibility of upending the Tree of Life, imagining its roots in heaven and the tree growing down in its extension towards the human condition.¹⁶

Yet such a reversal would put the soul *in extremis* as its natural proclivity is to transcend and is reluctant to descend. Macrobius (390–430CE) in *Saturnalia* recounts that in order to erase the memory of its idyllic life in heaven the descending soul must imbibe from '...that Starry Cup (Krater) of Father Bacchus spaced in the place between Cancer and Leo ... intoxication is there first experienced by souls in their descent by the influx of matter into them. From

¹³ Old Testament. *Genesis*, XXVIII, v10-12.

¹⁴ Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, 11.

¹⁵ Holbraad, *Truth in Motion: The Recursive Anthropology of Cuban Divination*, 171.

¹⁶ James Hillman, *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling* (1996; repr. London: Bantam Books, 1997), 41-43.

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which cause also forgetfulness, the companion of intoxication, then begins secretly to seep into souls'.¹⁷

The orientation of Cardinal Directions

Cardinal points lie upon the horizon line and by applying specific cultural meanings to the directional quaternity of north, south, east and west it orients the individual or group within a space that offers a recognizable construct between themselves and their natural surroundings. A familiarization of space that around the fixed point of a localized *Axis Mundi*, becomes sacred and encompasses the Divine.¹⁸



The creative power of directional symbolism is honoured in the Indian creation myth that relates how the Hindu god Brahma turned his eyes to the four points of the compass as a preliminary orientation before the act of Creation. His four faces controlling the four quarters of the universe.¹⁹

In ancient Christianity reading the gospels from the north end of the altar symbolized the Church's desire to convert the heathen to Christ. South, being the direction of light and warmth is associated with the New Testament. East, relates to sunrise and is symbolic of Christ being the Sun of the Universe and west is associated with darkness, and where, often in church architecture, a rose window is situated making the gospel visible to those in darkness.²⁰

In Islam 'Qiblah' is the direction of the sacred shrine of Ka'aba sited in Mecca towards which Muslims turn five times a day in ritual prayer, 'Turn towards the Holy Mosque; wherever you be turn towards it'.²¹

The necessity for consecrated space as a safeguard against demonic forces is borne out by the ancient Egyptian practice of protecting the viscera of the embalmed. The Four Sons of the Sun god Horus, under the auspices of the four 'protective goddesses', were each allotted a cardinal direction, and acted as spirit guardians and overseers of the ascension of the souls of the dead into the afterlife. They were assigned to safeguard the deceased's internal

¹⁷ Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, Book 1, 12. at http://www.aakkl.helsinki.fi/melammu/database/gen_html/a0000798.php [accessed 31st October 2017]

¹⁸ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 22.

¹⁹ Jaffé, 'Symbolism in the Visual Arts', 266-267.

²⁰ George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (1954: repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 41-46.

²¹ *The Koran*, translated by N.J. Dawood (1956; repr. London: Penguin Books, 1974), 347.

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organs which were placed separately inside four canopic jars, whose stoppers bore characterized heads of the designated deities.

Imsety (man head) – held the liver – south – Isis
Hapi (ape head) – held the lungs – north - Nephthys
Duamutef (jackal head) – held the stomach – east - Neith
Qebsennuef (falcon head) – held the intestines – west – Selket ²²

Geertz posits that in a religious sense sacred and divinatory practices such as these can be seen as, 'symbolic of some transcendent truths'.²³ Sacred invocations and group rituals that draw upon the powers of the cosmos, invoking psychic forces capable of combining the act of Being with a numinous dimension; making manifest, and therefore making real, the miraculous omnipotent influence of the unseen Godhead.

The importance of the Horizon

The first visible appearance of a star on the eastern horizon before sunrise is termed its heliacal rising and it was the ancient Egyptians who, each July, welcomed the New Year with the heliacal rising of Sirius, the brightest star of Canis Major, which coincided with the annual flooding of the Nile.

Circa 3000BCE the Babylonian's observed that their ploughing month of February coincided with the heliacal rising of the Plough asterism of the constellation Ursa Major and the heliacal setting of the constellation Pleiades.²⁴ While the heliacal setting of the constellation Hydra would occur as the Sun arose in the constellation of Aries, heralding the spring equinox and the end of their country's rainy season.²⁵ The incoming seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter were heralded by festivals marking the solstices and equinoxes, and the rising and setting of fixed stars and constellations contributed to the agrarian calendar.

Campbell postulates that mythology is, 'psychology misread as biography, history and cosmology', constructed stories that relate not so much to an external deity but rather to interiorized experiences of the plight of the human condition ranging from its highest aspirations to its worst psychoses.²⁶ In which case when considering the process of individuation of the solar hero the horizon as a periphery can come to symbolize a psychological threshold.

²² Manfred Lurker translated by Barbara Cummings, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt: An illustrated dictionary* (1974; repr. London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 37-38.

²³ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures, Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1973), 25.

²⁴ John H. Rogers, 'Origins of the ancient constellations: 1. The Mesopotamian Traditions', *British Astronomical Journal*, no.108,1 (1998): 16.

²⁵ Francis Huxley, *The Dragon: Nature of Spirit, Spirit of nature* (1979; London: Thames & Hudson, 1992), 21.

²⁶ Joseph Campbell *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949; repr. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2008), 219.

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A myth from Mesopotamian astral religion describes how the Sun god Shamash enters a chamber each night in the interior of heaven, while each morning, using a serrated knife which protects him from the dark powers of the netherworld, he cuts his way out of a gate on the eastern horizon to rise again.²⁷

An act of emergence that is not dissimilar to one that Marie-Louise von Franz classifies as a 'rebirth of

consciousness', which describes the ancient Egyptian concept of Aker, known as the horizon and deity of the north and east direction.²⁸ Portrayed as a pictogram appearing in the tomb of Rameses VI, it shows Rwti, the opposite facing double lion, guarding the horizon's gateways of the east - tomorrow and west - yesterday, with a sun disc seen rising between them symbolizing the moment of resurrection of the sun god from his night journey in the underworld.

In both these myths experiencing the transposition of darkness, as unconsciousness, into light, as consciousness, would seem to imply that to suffer a form of psychological death is as fundamentally important for contact with the numinous and individuation as is the inescapable death of the mortal frame. The mythological hero's journey being a solitary one inevitably involves the sacrifice of the personal *ego*. In some way a psychic threshold has to be crossed, and during submergence below the horizon terror descends as darkness and light battle for the champion's soul and transfiguration has to occur before the solar hero, now conscious of a transcendent truth, emerges triumphant as radiant as the sun as it appears over the horizon.

In no way less profound Tedlock's studies of the priest-shamans of the South American Highland Maya of Guatemala reveals that at the commencement of prayer rituals the Quiché 'daykeepers', who are initiated calendar diviners, position themselves facing towards the eastern horizon presenting themselves to the rising sun as a representation at that moment of a microcosm of the cosmological macrocosm.²⁹ A moment in time when the horizon acts as a sacred threshold uniting Earth and sky, countenancing a sanctified communion between humankind and the Divine.

In an overarching perspective the horizon can be viewed as symbolizing future events, the threshold of what lies beyond, a demarcation of the unseen yet to happen, with the past being firmly put behind, out of sight. A concept borne out by the Quiché's healing practice of the 'speaking of the blood' that interweaves cosmic navigation with spatial divination. Atmospheric lightening in the sky is ascribed to 'blood lightening' whereby muscle spasms or rapid movement of the blood occurring in the diviner's body at the time of a question being posed are interpreted corresponding to the cardinal directions relative to the diviner's physical frame. The front of the diviner's body relates to birth and the future - east; the back

²⁷ Rogers, 'Origins of the ancient constellations: 1. The Mesopotamian Traditions', 11.

²⁸ Marie-Louise Von Franz, *Alchemy: An introduction to the Symbolism and the Psychology* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1980), 70-72.

²⁹ Barbara Tedlock, *Time and the Highland Maya* (1982: repr. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 140.

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with death and the past - west. Maleness is linked to blood movement of the right side of the body - south and to the feminine on the left side of the body - north.³⁰

A code of alignment that sits comfortably within the futuristic, goal orientated western mind. However, anthropological research challenges the western mind to accept the fact that in cosmo-praxis not all cultures adhere to this particular directional orientation. A tradition upheld by the Maori of New Zealand is one that puts their ancestors and the past in front of themselves, and as the future cannot yet be seen it is put behind them.³¹ A turnabout concept that Lévi-Strauss stresses the importance of within the cultures of indigenous peoples, for the purpose of their mythologies is to ensure that 'the future will remain faithful to the present and to the past'.³²

The Luminaries - Sun and Moon

The concept of time is linked to the heavens. Myths and cosmologies morph into historic time and a predictable circle of human existence is charted against the inexorable passage of night and day; the Sun and Moon rising and setting along the plane of the horizon being led or chased by other celestial bodies. When the Sun, relative to the celestial equator reaches its highest northernmost or southernmost point in the celestial sphere it marks the occurrence of the summer and winter solstices. Macrobius describes the solstice points as being the 'Portals of the Sun', gateways that enable the immortal soul to incarnate upon Earth. He relates how the soul descends through the constellation of Cancer and returns after physical death through the constellation of Capricorn 'to be reckoned among the gods'.³³

Plato (circa 428 BCE) wrote of the journey of the soul's return to the heavens from whence it came in *Timaeus*; for after creating the World Soul the Demiurge created mankind from the remnants of the concoction, 'And having made it he divided the whole mixture into souls equal in number to the stars, and assigned each soul to a star...He who lived well during his appointed time was to return and dwell in his native star, and there he would have a blessed and congenial existence'.³⁴

In western astrology the zodiac sign of Cancer is ruled by the Moon and is interpreted as mother; a nurturing, feminine, introverted energy that along with its lunation phases holds symbolic associations of soul, birth, death, ancestors and the past. For Ibn 'Arabi the waxing and waning lunar cycle corresponded to the spiritual heart's pulsating state of revelatory receptivity.³⁵

In many cultures the Moon is regarded as an iconic representation of the Divine Feminine however the Quiché, who normally consider the Moon to be a female deity observe that when it is a full Moon its brightness and swift transit across the sky resembles that of the Sun and on that particular night it takes on the aspect of solar maleness, an extraverted initiatory energy. It is also the night when the Quiché believe that twins or transsexuals are

³⁰ Tedlock, *Time and the Highland Maya*, 138-143.

³¹ Ngapine Allen, 'Maori vision and the imperialist gaze' in Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn, *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum* (Oxford: Routledge, 1998), 144.

³² Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (1978; repr. Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005), 18.

³³ Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 1.12

³⁴ Plato translated by Benjamin Jowett, Jim Manis (ed.), *Timaeus* (Electronic Classics Series: Pennsylvania State University, 2013), 29.

³⁵ Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology According to Ibn 'Arabi*, 34.

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conceived.³⁶ It is proposed that this switch of the symbolic feminine and masculine polarities of the Sun and Moon and the reference to twins and gender orientation is a sacred acknowledgement of the possibilities of boundary transcendence of social patterns.

Balzar reinforces this suggestion of pragmatic duality when writing about Siberian shamans who, when circumstances require, can introduce gender flexibility thereby harnessing both male and female sexual potential.³⁷ An idea borne out by the role of the Quiché priest-shamans of each town, who although being of the male sex only, are by way of the title of 'mother-fathers' incorporating both paternal and maternal qualities. Their role in society being that of maintaining the rituals that affect the prosperity of the entire local community.³⁸

Ibn 'Arabi elevates the mystical symbolism of the full Moon, reflecting as it does the light of the Sun which itself corresponds to the emanation of the Divine Essence, he refers to it as the embodiment of the attainment of a state of spiritual perfection, the complete realization of human potential, the 'Unique Man'.³⁹

The most spectacular conjunction of the Sun and Moon is an eclipse. Twice a month the lunar orbit intersects the ecliptic at the nodal points. Around every six months when the Moon intersects these nodal points at a time when it is either a new Moon or full Moon a solar or lunar eclipse occurs. At this time the celestial triad of Sun, Moon and Earth conspire to enact an awe-inspiring spectacle embodying the cycle of darkness, death and re-birth.



Due to the terrifying nature of the extinguishment of light eclipses were universally held in fearful dread and regarded as portents of the wrath of the gods, acting as heralds of catastrophe and apocalyptic disasters.

Within a Christian reference, in the Book of Revelations John describes such a scene on the Day of Judgement,

And I beheld when he opened the sixth seal; and lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the full moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell to the earth, even as a fig tree casteth its unripe figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind'.⁴⁰

The physiological experience of being in darkness, with no horizon or stellar point of reference is disorienting and disturbing, an unnerving disintegration of the norm.

³⁶ Tedlock *Time and the Highland Maya*, 183-184.

³⁷ Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, 'Sacred Genders in Siberia' in *Shamanism, a reader* in Graham Harvey (ed.) (London: Routledge, 2003), 242-261.

³⁸ Tedlock, *Time and the Highland Maya*, 35.

³⁹ Burckhardt, *Mystical Astrology According to Ibn 'Arabi*, 31-34.

⁴⁰ New Testament. *Revelations* VI, v12-13.

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It is a return to chaos. A time before time. Acting as a reminder of the fragility of earthly life it is a portent of obliteration, for without light humankind cannot exist.

In conclusion

Cosmologies speak of a Divine agency that resides in the firmament. An intelligence that manifested form from chaos and who set the universe in order. By surveying the heavens humanity seeks a reflection of itself. For such is the transient quality of mankind's existence that it requires the reassurance of an organizing principle and through the observation of the cyclical activity of celestial phenomena it comprehends and appreciates a rhythm and a symmetry within the firmament that complements the need for order, permanence and structure within the social group dynamic.

Imaginative ritualized codes of practice by which a community is bound to observe and uphold enables it to comprehend an organic cosmos and maintain an harmonious co-existence with each other. For it is due to the adherence to customs and ceremonies and the acknowledgement of the spatio-temporal function of the localized *Axis Mundi* that stability can be introduced and maintained within the social hierarchy, as these observances affirm the belief that one's group lives at the centre of the world; affording a sacralized psychic means of communing with the Supreme Being.

Within cross-cultural cosmologies horizontal evolution is perceived as that which becomes known and is therefore familiar, whereas the vertical axis is regarded as a superior movement of advancement, containing that which is unknown and deified. I am driven to conclude that in the model of ascension the practical value of cosmic orientation must be acknowledged, for without it there can be no comprehension of the interiorized sacredness of mythico-religious imagery.

Cosmic orientation serves as a sympathetic means by which not only the intellect but also the soul can navigate the maze of human existence, journeying upwards towards reunification with a Godhead believed to be residing beyond the celestial pole. As mankind aspires to unite with a transcendental experience greater than itself, without the theurgical dialectic of the shaman-priests there can be no sanctified upward orientation for the transfiguration of the soul as it strives to experience a multi-dimensional plane of existence.

The horizon serves to draw down the sky towards humanity. Let the final reflection come from a clay tablet of a Mesopotamian diviner's manual of the Ashurbanipal Library circa 668-630BCE, 'Sky and Earth both produce portents. Though appearing separately, they are not separate: Sky and Earth are related'.⁴¹ As long as humankind gazes heavenward the sky will speak and offer the soul a final resting place, a return to its native star.

⁴¹ Clay tablet of Diviners Manual. British Museum Ref. No. ME K.2847. Anon., 'Ashurbanipal Library Project' at http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/research_projects/all_current_projects/ashurbanipal_library_page_1.aspx [accessed 26 October 2017]

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Illustration attributions

Fig.1 – Tengriist World View on a shaman's drum – New World Encyclopedia CC BY-SA 3.0

Fig.2 – Jacob's Dream – (c.1805) Artist: William Blake – Wiki commons – Public Domain

"Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it..." Genesis, xxviii, 12

Fig.3 – Four faces of Brahma - Walters Art Museum. Public domain, CC BY-SA 3.0

Fig.4 – The Greenstone Seal of Adda - The British Museum Collections. Public domain. **English:** Detail of [The Adda Seal](#) from Sippar (2300 BC) depicting Shamash with rays rising from his shoulders and holding a saw-toothed knife with which he cuts his way through the mountains of the east at dawn (British Museum)

Fig.5 - The Opening of the 5th and 6th Seals - Apocalypse – (1498) Artist: Albrecht Dürer. Public Domain.

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