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TRIADS

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David Sparenberg's essays, stories, and poetry have appeared in a variety of periodicals and journals, throughout North America and Europe, including *Telos*, *Parabola*, *The Jewish Exponent*, *Response*, *Aim*, *Festivals*, and *Transnational Perspectives*. He has published *Words on Fire, Not Bodies* (poetry), and *The Name is Shalom* (poetry). Both are available from him at 1717 - 14th Ave, Seattle, Wa. 98122. He is now teaching a writing class at the University of Washington (Seattle) in "Creative Uses of Myth and Tradition."

A higher octave of Earth-love is needed. We have heard it; we can sing it. But humankind will not listen.

Dov Shimshen, Founder of the Foreknower Ways

After the firewar, the long night, the ultimate dispersal, the contagion, the famine, the uncontrollable diseases, small bands of survivors began to form and wander, searching for the foreknowers, insiders who inhabited legendary hideaways green with natural flora. How they were to be found, nobody had a clue. It was not even certain at the onset, if they were anything other than saving dreams from before time. Notwithstanding, now and again, although ever so rarely, a small party of men and women would find themselves at the entrance to an unscathed valley or on the beach of some food producing island. These places were the homes of foreknowers, those from prewar who had renounced the ways of the use-it world and had been guided to refuge in the closing months before the millenarian kindling.

Within their natural sanctuaries, the foreknowers lived simple, primitive lives. But they lived, men, women, children, still fertile, still sane, cultivating the earth under the shielding presence of a spirit mentor and community guardian. Also, like many antecedent generations, in the long off time before the madness conditioning ate the world, the foreknowers attained wisdom and practiced rituals of healing far in excess of the post-technological circumstances of their lives.

To those who came to them, fragmented, ashamed to be alive, they taught planting and prayers. They told stories of the saving, the terror, and the processes of renewal. There, in their circles of awakening, a seed had the stature of a mountain, a blade of grass promised the vastness of a savannah, a new child peaked emotions into intensities of ineffable wonder. Every elemental act and entity contributing to survival and increase was experienced as the miracle that indeed it was.

Throughout the pre-holocaust decade, foreknowers had frequently spoken of "the convoluted denials of humanity," "the reality avoidance syndrome," and

how "the wrath of God" was but a shadow over "the sadness of love." Yet when questioned by desolate-outsiders, had the Earth roasting been necessary? Was the devouring decreed? They did not attempt to furnish answers. They were foreknowers because their hearts had constantly been heavy with pleading. They suffered for the indifference of others, and the agony of Earth's wasting weighed on them.

After the firewar, the counterpart of negative silence became embedded in their lives as a potent virtue, the very core of foreknower thanksgiving and compassion. There remained among them then no hierarchical ambitions, no will to power, no arcane platforms upon which to elevate themselves above the raw and wasted remnants of traumatized humanity. But foreknowers would say, "That we are not blind today means we must use our eyes for speaking. That we are not now mute and deaf means we must weight language in the ambience of silence and silence in the ambience of language." And it was thus, with new seeing and new thinking, new intentions and new modes of address, that they experienced themselves and those others who infrequently found a pathway to them.

Even so, following the initial period of reorientation, the foreknowers made no distinctions between themselves and the outside-strangers. For each of the foreknowers had been a stranger in the use-it world. This too set them apart, placing a wedge of freedom between their critical evaluations and their innate piety, and the mass sentence their generation passed on itself and its future.

Of all the lifeways foreknowers practiced, none were more challenging, nor ultimately more rewarding, than the oral recitations of the tripartite mythologies — those dialectical, therapeutic narratives they universally learned from their spirit protectors, as rituals for the restoration of health and reciprocity. Hence, while the structure of the mythologies was planetarily uniform (the reduced conditions of human existence no longer being culturally contingent), each enactment was particularized by the mentality and experience of the individual teller. Within the one-only formulas, the dramatic content, searched out, penetrated, revealed, was, on every new occasion, irreducibly unique.

Here then is the way in which the foreknowers' tripartite mythologies, or triads, as they were commonly called, were ritually enacted.

First, an initiate came before the assembled community with his or her appointed guide, always a member of the identical sex. The initiate thereupon announced his intention to enter the triads and formally asked the cardinal questions to be answered during the initiation. These questions were: Who am I? What is my world? Who is my God?

Once the questions were publically spoken, the guide turned to the initiate and explained in clear, but emotional-philosophical terms, the wisdom way of the foreknower people. This way was based on the three natural processes of

memory, seeing and hearing.

Of the first factor, memory, foreknowers have said, "We are a people who remember being touched by otherness. We remain faithful to this experience of not living only in our finitude. We remember the preternatural, the numinous, the beckoning. The sacred touch opened us radically, and our memories keep ablaze the experiences. We remember entering the cavern of the still small voice, and we remember climbing the slope of the mountain of thunder and lightning."

This special mode of memory was called crystalline memory, touchstone and mirror of hushed waters. It was vital to the foreknower sense of identity.

Coupled with memory was the seeing of those who were disciplined to see genuine otherness, who looked from horizon to horizon, taking in every detail and entity within the full field of vision; who looked also from dimension to dimension, acknowledging the forms of life inhabiting the spheres of creation. Such seeing was called relational seeing, touchstone and gazing into circles, spirals, undulations, patterns and interpenetrating gyres.

United with foreknower memory and visual perception, the wisdom trinity was completed with the addition of listening. Regarding this sacral process, Elder Jude Languagesaver, one of the founders of the Northern Sequoia People, gave an inspiring definition. The Elder said, "A foreknower hears, listening hard and soft, listening with subtlety, listening attentive. A foreknower hears the whispering invitation of the light and the broken, choking cry of the shadow. A foreknower listens also to the seed popping in the dark soil and to the wind, hungry for seed's descendants, that wind will carry to new lands and new life. This is what a foreknower's hearing is about. We listen to voices of hunger. We are ears to the encompassing address that calls us out and challenges us with becoming, with being here in this significant present we are given, shielded from the ruins of the world that ignored its past and despoiled its future. Our hearing, on the other hand, is pulsating gratitude, and the needfulness of need is at the center of our intentional receptivity."

This mode of listening was called deep listening, also touchstone and music of sound and silence, form and content. As with memory, so too visual and audio identifications were extraordinarily important, and this knowledge was imparted to the neophyte as he stood on the verge of undertaking the ordeal of the tripartite mythologies.

Then, to conclude the wisdom lesson, the guide would repeat to his companion the formula of foreknower reverence and mutuality. Once more, this formula was most wisely expressed by Elder Jude Languagesaver, of the Northern Sequoia People — a mightily endowed and lucid articulator. The Elder's prescription solidified in the following words: "Wherever you are, you are at the center of the circle that begins with your person. Even when you are on the periphery of another, or even several other intersecting circles, you are always at the

center of that circle which is being formed around you — forming through your senses, your intelligence, your receptivity, your emotions, your intuition. What is personally true here is true of every entity in the interlacement of creation.”

Added to this pronouncement, the Elder also offered the so-called Wisdom Sealing Prayer. “Let us remember,” Jude Languagesaver advised. “Let us see, let us listen. Let us discover new aliveness with space, new living in time, a consciousness grounded through memory, seeing, hearing. These, and the gift of breath, the gift of childbearing, and the gift of being able to feel, are what distinguish our being human and make us worthy of a hallowed life.”

Following the recitation of this recollective prayer, the initiate and his guide withdrew to the site of meditative seclusion. There the wrestling for renewal took place: an inward struggle of powerful clearing, creativity and attempts at tri-dimensional, essential placements.

The sites of meditative withdrawal adhered to the same physical pattern in every community founded by these unique and pivotal people at the threshold of second history. First, there was a rise of Earth, never measuring more than three meters above the level of the common ground. There three chiselled stones, serving as stairs, were set into the earth, on the Eastern slope of the mound. Atop the rise were delineated three concentric circles. The radius of the first, or outermost circle, was always ten meters. The radius of the second, middle circle, was always seven meters. The radius of the third, the innermost circle, was always three meters. The circles were laid out with natural materials, varying according to locale, the most widely used substances being either woodchips, stones, shells, or various low growing, aromatic plants and herbs. Whenever the sites were occupied for initiatory seclusion, a dome or round tent was erected over the mound, concealing in its interior the pattern of concentric rings.

As an initiate approached this site, and before his feet touched the huge ascending stones, his guide would admonish him to become aware of the symbolism of the stairs. Thus, the neophyte was to experience from his physical contact with the stone insets an active sense of the three processes of foreknower wisdom, bearing them as tools within himself, as if they were directives engraved on the stone tablets of highest consciousness. This was expected according to the renowned foreknower aphorism: What goes inward (turn around), then goes outward. What goes outward (turn around), then goes inward. Truth is in the meeting place between dynamic poles .

Once inside the dome or tent of concealment, the initiate and his guide embarked on a fast of three days and three nights. Much of this interval was also passed in meditative silence.

During the first twenty-four hour period, the two companions sat across from one another at the center of the smaller, innermost circle. They sat in what has always been referred to as Lotus or Indian position. Once this posture

was assumed, the initiate entered the ordeal of the first triad, that of self, or more completely, the three chief facets of self identity: ideal self, anti-self and authentic self. The intention of this triad was that through reckoning with the truth and falsity of the ideal aspect, and by either integrating or overcoming the anti-self, the neophyte could, as foreknowers put it, "sweat his way toward" a valid, dynamic image of self identity. Considering the epidemic deceits of the use-it world, and the unprecedented psychic trauma of the firewar, the difficulties and potential benefits of this rigorous psychic exercise can only be guessed at by the most creative anthropological imaginations.

Notwithstanding this lacuna, we return to the historical source itself.

When the initiate had worked through the dialectic of self, he communicated his discoveries to his guide. The guide, in turn, challenged the neophyte to envision his findings as a powerful symbol or symbol scheme. Such symbolization made up the second phase of the first, as well as subsequent triadic quests.

Next, when a satisfactory symbolization had been achieved, the initiate was encouraged to, as foreknowers put it, "unfold the concentrated form" into a verbal drama or mythical narration. This very narrative would, then, become the cornerstone of the initiate's new identity as a member of his foreknower community.

When the first triad was thus completed, the following day was dedicated to the second triad, itself based on an identical developmental pattern. Here, however, the neophyte and guide occupied the middle circle, kneeling across from one another and rotating, at set periods, to different positions signifying the cardinal directions, as well as the directions above and below, behind and before.

Triad number two was that of the world. Its identifications dealt with "the world of wishful dreams," "the world of unassimilable nightmare" and "the world of present address." As before, again the initiate had to confront each essential aspect, symbolize the outcome, and translate the symbols into a narrative assisting timespace identification, orientation and placement. As well, it is important to note that certain motifs consistently revealed themselves in this triad on the primary level. For example, the world of wishful dreams regularly reflected a condition devoid of darkness, hunger, atrocity and war. Conversely, the world of nightmare always evoked recollections of the holocaust, with its surreal flashes of death and mutilation. Only on the secondary level, and with uttermost hardship, did personal identifications assert themselves, and then only fragmentarily.

Again, here it is important to understand that although the threat of figurative death was as present throughout these rituals as was the promise of spiritual renewal, literal deaths were extremely rare. When they did occur, however, it was mostly during the second triad, where time-space displacements and scenes

of omniscient consumption were being grappled with.

Such unfortunate losses, it was concluded, were the result of one of two causes. Either the initiate was too weak to overcome the negative confrontations necessary to survive the tripartite mythologies, or else the spiritual presence invisible presiding over the rites had withheld the heroic superflux needed for a successful passage. Of this particular sadness, Esther Thoughtshaper, first child born in a post-kindling sanctuary, left the following testimony. "Whoever undertakes the triads," she said, "is prepared to the best of her or his ability. The mythologies, on the other hand, are a soul-deep wrestling between each individual and truth. Not all women and men who come to us are constituted to take up the yoke or renewal. By entering into our communities, they are at least permitted repentance and the cleanliness of seeking interhuman forgiveness before departing. As well, they are buried. None of this could they have in the contaminated zones. The foreknower blessings are clean air, fresh water, and soil that absorbs natural death and returns life."

On the final day, initiate and guide moved to the outer, largest circle. This ring they continuously traversed together, often meditating, sometimes praying silently or in unison. During this ultimate triad, the initiate confronted three basic attitudes toward God. These were "the God of unconditional love," "the God of unreconcilable anger" and "the God of sustaining covenant." As with both previous involvements, the initiate would "sweat through" the failed, the unapproachable, the forbidding, on route toward a life directing identification. Discoveries, or meetings as they were called here, were, normatively, symbolized; the symbolizations, as before, unfolded into story.

Upon the conclusion of these three struggles, the exhausted neophyte and his companion emerged from seclusion. Once more, the community was assembled and this time the initiate, after swallowing water and tasting fresh food, presented the cycle of his three symbolic findings and their explanatory narrations. The symbols, we note, became personal totems, emblems of dialogical structure, significance and meaning. When the narrative, on the other hand, were finished, the initiated was awarded a new name, chosen by the elders of his community. Then, according to fixed formulas, the ceremony of the triads was concluded with a series of end-form-articulations.

First, the initiated named the dead he had known, but who had been victimized by the horrific kindling. Through this litany, he acknowledge the dead mythologies that had permitted false systems to gain control of first history, and so bring it to its catastrophic end.

Next, the renewed person, recited or sang a prayer or psalm of gratitude for the genuine threefold reality he had awakened to, owned as participant in, and was now beginning to live.

Finally, the just initiated, joining hands with his new human family, chanted in

unison this formula, extant from the traditions of the Northern Sequoia People: "If in prewar the many had done the work we have now done, our reality would be different. Their failures, which cost them everything, are our burdens. But we are inspired to do what always has waited to be done. Now ever and forever, humankind is driven off the battlefields of conquest and onto the narrow ridge of contending and trust.

"We who have been foreknowers are also today ridge-walkers. We welcome each one who walks with us. In spirit and in flesh, we chart a new direction."

Upon these words, then, the triads were concluded.

Today we may regret, even as we reflect on these profound, if primitive practices, that no accounts of symbolization and narration have come down to us. No doubt the extensive oral tradition is largely responsible for this absence. Yet it is equally important to understand here the uniquely personalized character and value of every tripling dramatization. On the essential levels of existence, the triads presented dead (or blind) mythologies, false (or demonic) mythologies, and tenable mythologies (or dynamic images), and always of such intimacy as to be truly a part of each teller's identity and extra- personal identifications. Such intimacy, in turn, analogous to a soul- name or individual face, lived with the teller and passed into nature with the teller's passing.

Consequently, it rests with our current schools of anthropological writers to compose for us a series of restorational fictions approximating the psychic expressions of our ancestral roots, so as to better appreciate their victories and our rewards. For even now, nearly two thousand years after the original foreknowers passed through the winnowing threshold and into second history, their wisdom way, and the ritual of the triads, remains prototypical, while regressively inclined, touchstones of continuing human reality. In light of such a major acknowledgement, we remain grateful for this evocative heritage from the past.

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