

~ *The Return* ~

(On the Circle of Twelve)



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## The Anthropological Truth of the 12

**T**he *Twelve that circumscribe the Center*. This is one of the primary Archetypes of the Sacred, and is found everywhere in the world: Celtic Western Europe, Norse Northern Europe, Homeric Greece and Mithraic Rome, Egypt, Anatolia, the Levant, Arabia, Mesopotamia, Zoroastrian Persia, India, China and Southeast Asia, the tribal plains of North America, and in the pre-Columbian empires of South America. This ancient spiritual motif has endured from remote prehistory, and is still an integral component of modern faiths: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism.

And this archetype is always seen in similar forms: 12 labors around the triumph of Gilgamesh (from the oldest document in the world, c. 3000 BC), 12 Vedic nobles around the Aryan King (Raj), 12 Norse counselors around Odin, 12 native American tribes of 12 clans each (and the 12 poled Teepee around the ceremonial fire), 12 Inca Emperors around the lineage of the Sun, 12 Imams (descendants) around the Shiite tradition of Ali, 12 Namshan advisors around the Dalai Lama, 12 Paladin advisors around Charlemagne, 12 knights around King Arthur and the Round Table, 12 Olympian Gods around Zeus, 12 Disciples around Mithras, 12 Retainers around Osiris, 12 ships around the voyage of Odysseus, 12 Generals around George Washington, 12 tribes around the Nation of Israel (and 12 fruits around the Tree of Life), 12 nerve meridians around Ch'i (energizing force), 12 Gates around the Underworld, and 12 gates around the City of God. The list goes on and on...

In all places, in all times, all civilized peoples have experienced a primal apprehension of the divine in the mathematically ideal order of the cosmos, and they sought to emulate that heavenly order in human society. The numerical Truth we have believed for more than 5000 years is *twelve*. And so we have always reckoned space and time accordingly: 12 hours around the clock, 12 months around a year, 12 heavenly houses around the universe. But why not some other number? Where did this fascination with

the number twelve - more ancient than written history - come from? Are there some real truths associated with twelve that are more than merely our *interpretation* of Nature, or might we have revered some *other* number? Does all this fascination with twelve represent more than just random human whim?

## The Natural Truth of the 12

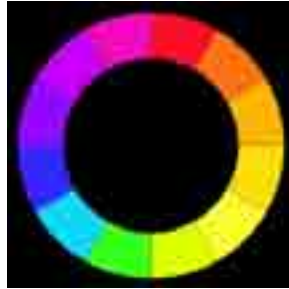
**G**od created, or so it was long said, the universe in six days, and rested upon the seventh. As I mentioned in *Order and Chaos*, this became the model for the western week of seven days. Such human-made reckonings are a reflection of an absolute truth: six perfect circles arranged side by side in a larger perfect circle, exactly circumscribes a seventh circle of equal size. This might be described as the Master Template implicit in The Center. There is a three-dimensional corollary to this geometric truth: *twelve perfect spheres of equal size exactly circumscribes and encloses at twelve points of contact a equal central sphere*. The Twelve surround The One.



The ancients also saw a natural "twelveness" in the heavens above. The full moon is a luminous disk shining out into the dangerous night. Little by little it is consumed by the black sky, until it finally disappears into the death of non-existence. There it remains in some otherworld darkness (so they thought) for three days. And then this guiding beacon overcomes death, and gradually re-emerges into illuminating existence once more. In one solar year, this lunar resurrection will occur twelve times - with twelve days left over.

The mathematics of the electro-magnetic spectrum is made visible in the artist's color-wheel, which has twelve colors (three primary, three secondary, and six tertiary hues). Another art form, music, is mathematics made audible because it consists of pre-

cise numerical relationships of frequency: doubling the frequency of a tone produces the same tone one *octave* higher (a vibrating string divided into 1/3-2/3 parts produces the interval called a perfect fifth, and a 1/4-3/4 division produces a perfect fourth, etc.). One octave consists of twelve notes, the *chromatic* scale, which contains the familiar *diatonic* scale of seven tones: do re me fa sol la ti... Against the fixed stars of the heavens, the ancients saw seven points of light that were not fixed, and appeared to move about the sky in whirling patterns when observed over many successive nights. By the Greeks they were called *planetes* (“wanderers”), but the Romans gave them their familiar names: Mercury, Venus, Luna, Mars, Sol, Jupiter, and Saturn. Seven Celestial Deities representing seven celestial spheres revolving through the twelve constellations around the earth, which corresponds to the seven-tone scale melodically dancing through the octave of twelve notes. The supreme Deity in this pantheon of Gods was Jupiter (Latin form of the Greek Zeus). Its orbital duration is twelve years.



All these factors, in addition to its arithmetical utility (12 is the first and smallest number with 6 divisors - 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 12), conferred upon twelve significance above other numbers; it is the cyclic rhythm of space and time, of heaven and earth, and the living progeny of this heavenly order. It represents a totality: the quest for, and fulfillment of, destiny - the terrestrial human and Celestial Divine.

### The Four Elements

The ancients came to see twelve in the actual material of which all the universe - including Man - is made. They recognized that there are only four kinds of natural phenomena: things

that are hard, things that are vaporous, things that are fluid, and things that possess force or energy. These “categories of phenomena” they called the *Four Elements*: Earth, Wind, Water, and Fire. And each element will exist in one of three qualitative states: Cardinal-Immutable, Fixed-Transitional, and Mutable-Volatile. This produced the *Twelve Forms of the Phenomenal Cosmos*.

The Four Elements were thought to correspond to four of the Platonic perfect solids: tetrahedron, cube, octahedron, and icosahedron. The last of the five perfect polygonal solids is the dodecahedron. It represents Quintessence, the miraculous Fifth Element that was imagined to be the origin and destiny of the Four Elements. The dodecahedron has twelve sides.

In fact, the Four Elements were seen to correspond to many things, like a Divine rhythm pulsing through the universe (which they called the *Music of the Spheres*). The Four Directions: North, South, East, and West. The Times of Day: The Dawn which grows through the gentle innocence of Morning, to maturity in the Afternoon sun, only to decline into evening Twilight and the unknown darkness of night. The Four Seasons: The regenerative Spring which grows to maturity in the efflorescence of Summer, only to descend into Autumn infirmity and Winter death. And ancient peoples recognized that such macrocosmic patterns are a reflection of the human condition: The four Periods of Life (Infancy, Youth, Maturity, Old Age) and The four Aspects of Mind (Sensation, Thinking, Feeling, Intuition).

Once this correlation between the Elements and Man had been established, it was then easy to identify the qualities that meaningfully described both the world within and the world beyond: dry or wet, hot or cold, active or passive, ascending dominant or descending submissive, penetrating outward or receiving inward. Earth (dry-cold) and Water (wet-cold) are the terrestrial Elements. Air (wet-hot) and Fire (dry-hot) are the celestial elements. It was thought that the relative amount of an element present in something determined its nature, all in accord

with its elemental character. And so, just as there are Four Elements of *world* nature, so too are there are four elements of *human* nature, the *Four Humors*: melancholic earth (physicality), sanguine air (intelligence), phlegmatic water (emotions), and choleric fire (intuition). And in the same way that the Four Elements interact to create the twelve Forms of Phenomena, the Four Humors interact to create the *twelve Psychological Types*.

Over time, all this analysis evolved into an extraordinarily complex system of interrelated descriptions, an impenetrable maze of temporal correspondences and spatial associations - both real and imagined. We may now recognize this “reading of the elements” as unscientific, but what is also true is that the most brilliant minds of those past ages were obsessed with the “elemental” composition of the world - and the cosmic Zodiac that contains it. Great scholars, with minds as sharp as any Nobel Laureate, devoted their lives to the study of this religion within religions. And this deeply analytical philosophy of nature has descended to us from remote times, where it continues to inform the fundamental assumptions of the modern mind. Perhaps more than any other human endeavor, these misguided early thinkers established the cognitive foundations for the reductive method and thus the entire enterprise of science.

To ancient reasoning, it was different elements in different quantities that produced all the diversity of nature, and all the variety of human character and behavior. And the relative motions found in the flux and flow of this diversity determines every subsequent event. The Twelve Houses of the Cosmos (4 Directions X 3 levels) correspond with the Twelve Forms of Phenomena (4 Elements X 3 levels), which correspond to Twelve Types of Man (4 Temperaments X 3 levels). The repetition of the twelve-fold pattern found from one level of the cosmos to the next, in the very big *and* in the very small, necessarily means that observations of one stratum tell you something about the other two. Our fates are written in the heavens, in the world around us, and even in ourselves. Or so it was believed.

## Astrology

Such beliefs seem curious to most of us now - deluded medieval superstition. It is difficult for us to understand how a view of reality so obviously erroneous could achieve so much devotion. How can the sky, plus a collection of manufactured correspondences, determine one’s fate? The reductionist science that created and sustains the modern world isn’t very effective at describing holistic relationships, but holistically was precisely how the ancients were obligated to perceive their universe. In a world without conveniently printed calendars, when a particular star rising with the vernal sunrise heralds the planting time of the crops and thus ensures for the community another year of survival, macrocosmic events seem very immediate to the microcosmic concerns of man. When your only clock is the sky, and you live or die by a proper reckoning of the heavens, you feel quite profoundly the penetrating threads that bind you into this vast cosmic tapestry of interdependent energies. When seen in this context, one realizes there is indeed an intimate relation between the order of the universe and the order of Man: as it is above, so too is it below. The order of the Heavens is twelve, the order of Nature is twelve, and the order of Man is twelve. This ancient body of knowledge is a recognition of this divine relationship, and is thus meant to represent a comprehensive description of the cyclical pattern of spatial and temporal laws in all of God’s creations.

This insight into nature, gathered over thousands of years of observation, was eventually codified into an empirical science; in Latin it is known as *Astrology* - “Knowledge of the Heavens.” The study of *The Twelve* has been a source of both scorn and reverence for a long time. By rational objectivists rooted in the material world who can only accept what is concrete, it has been entirely dismissed as preposterous and irrelevant: “How can the position of a star 100 trillion miles away possibly affect events on earth? How can everyone born the same day have the same destiny?” By intuitive subjectivists on a

quest in the ethereal domain who can *never* accept what is concrete, it has been entirely embraced as Divine Word: "All children possess the traits of their lineage, carry the history of their land, and are subject to the same patterns of force that affect all things everywhere. We are the progeny of the heavens, and are bound to them, as all children are, to their parents."

Perhaps there is some truth at each end of this single continuum. No rational argument can be made for the veracity of astrology, and yet as a typology of human behavior and potential, it is surprisingly (and amusingly) informative. Beliefs can persist only so long as they provide something of importance and relevance to the believer. Otherwise old systems of thought are dispensed with as easily as the music of the previous generation. And so the study of The Twelve endures: *a clockwork mural of creation and destiny painted in the sky by the gods* - the image does have some appeal.

### The Zodiac Mandala

The Zodiac is an illustration of this Twelve-fold Principle of Nature, a pictorial representation of the cosmic process - from initiation to resolution, from the beginning of the cycle, to its inevitable end. By ascribing to each step a distinct, defining quality, the ancients revealed a twelve-stage *Process of Transformation* to which everything in Nature is subject: phenomena begin in one form, over time become other forms, and end as yet other forms - which is, in turn, the beginning of new phenomena. Spirit becomes matter. The One becomes many. Idea becomes realization. And Involution, the materialization of things, becomes Evolution, the spiritualization of things.

The Zodiac describes not only the cosmological conditions that together constitute the Wheel of Time, and the natural conditions that together constitute the world, but also the personalities that together constitute a community. And, most relevantly, the zodiac was meant to instruct an individual along the journey of spiritual development, by articulating the

changes in body and spirit that together constitute a life. In this way, the Zodiac is equivalent to a *Mandala* (Sanskrit for magic wheel): a labyrinthine circle that serves as an aid to meditation. And the object of meditation is *The One in The Center*.

If the entire universe is revolving (as it very much appears to do from our small perspective here on the rotating Earth), and everything is perpetually in motion towards what it is becoming, then nothing can be seen for what it actually is. What meditation seeks is contact with that which is not revolving, not moving, not becoming. And if the universe is revolving, then somewhere there must be a stationary point in the center that is eternally motionless. This is the Lotus, the Axis Mundi, the World-Mountain, the World-Tree, the Immovable Spot - the infinitely quiescent, focal nucleus of existence to which is fixed the entire whirling hurricane of the universe. This is where the answer is found: Clarity where all was blurred, Eternity where all was evanescent, The Absolute where all was relative, One where all was many. Stillness and Silence, Immortal Beauty, *Truth*.

### The Great Cycle

There is another important cycle to which the Zodiac refers: the *Great Year* (sometimes called the Platonic Year). For the last two millennia it has been the constellation of Pisces that has witnessed the vernal equinox (the first day of Spring, March 21). Before that, the vernal sun rose in the constellation of Aries. On March 21, 2000, however, it rose in the constellation of Aquarius for the first time in 23,760 years. A slight wobble in the Earth's axis causes a phenomenon known as the *Precession of the Equinoxes*. The apparently fixed heavens in fact slowly move in a great circle, shifting 1 degree of arc every 72 years. And because each House of the Zodiac covers 30 degrees of arc, the vernal sun rises in a new constellation every 2160 years. (This number is, coincidentally, the exact diameter, in miles, of the moon. At the moon's closest approach to the

earth, called the perigee, the distance from the surface of the earth to the surface of the moon is  $2160 \times 100$  (216,000) miles. The sun, in its great orbital journey through the galaxy, travels at  $2160 \times 10$  (21,600) mph. And in silent recognition of these interesting astro-arithmetical truths, our 24 hour day contains  $2160 \times \text{forty}$  (86,400) seconds.)

One degree of arc every 72 years - roughly, one *very* long lifetime by ancient reckoning. It seems impossible that the civilizations of early antiquity could have made observations with sufficient precision to detect this surpassingly small variation in stellar orientation. And yet, we know they did, because the geometry of the Great Pyramid (and other ancient structures) possesses many repetitions of these very precise precessional numbers. It was, for some reason, very important to the first architects that the geometry of their sacred structures reflect the geometry of the Transformation of the Cosmos - a 12-stage journey that occurs one 2,160-year step at a time, in a 360-degree cycle of 25,920 years. (This number corresponds to the ancients' calculation of the diameter of the earth in miles. The mile was said to measure 1000 paces of the Roman Legion; it is, in fact, a far older measurement. It was designed to be of a length such that 25,920 of them would circle the earth. A later readjustment of this unit caused its former accuracy to deviate by 4%: the diameter of the earth is 24,902 modern miles.)

These twelve zodiacal epochs are called *The Ages of Man*, and the character-forms of the Zodiac describe them as well. The most recent Age, Pisces (a water sign) is the last sign of the Zodiac. It symbolizes an ending, a dissolution, a time of sleep before reawakening in a new form. Some believe this must mean the impending end of time, and disastrous geological changes and catastrophes will eradicate the human infestation of the world (or the impenitent sinners of the world, depending upon what you read). Others believe only that our current form of civilization will disappear, as a new one emerges. What kind of world might that be? Two thousand years ago, Someone told us - and we have been waiting for an

Arrival ever since...

### The Return

**V**ery near the beginning of the Age of Pisces, a small Child was born in a manger on December 24, three days after the winter solstice, three days after the solar year had disappeared into winter death. The world of antiquity also died on that winter solstice, and after three days in the underworld, it witnessed the Birth of a Savior - whose emblem was the sign of the Fish: Pisces. The Child grew to be a King of kings, and in His court were twelve Apostles. Through His Supreme Love, a way of liberation was shown from the inertial chains of the physical world, a way to the Domain of Infinite Spirit. And He gave His life that we might know His Truth. He was planted in the ground (like a seed) upon a four-pointed cross - Divine Man nailed there upon the symbol for the union of Heaven and Earth. In that moment of moments, where the destiny of the next 2,000 years was decided, time stood still. The universe stood still. All creation was transfixed on the center of Cosmic Destiny: there, on a shaft impaling the earthy flesh of Golgotha, was a man who became God, bleeding on the Axis of the Universe.

He is said to have died at the vernal equinox, on a Friday. His body was taken from the cross, and hidden reverentially in the dark womb of a cave. There, just as Life sleeps in the winter darkness for three months, just as Moonlight sleeps in the new moon darkness for three days, so too did He remain in the underworld darkness for three days. And when the moon was full, He walked upon the Earth once more, soon ascending upward past the Summit of the Cosmos, through the Gates of Eternity to Paradise beyond. With that Vernal Resurrection, so too, was born the New World - the world of God's Promise of Salvation, of God's promise to the many that they shall touch The One, of God's promise to *return*...

That Seed, planted upon Calvary so long ago, is still waiting to bear fruit... It seems that it was not meant to germinate in Piscean ground, and must sleep

≈ *The Return* ≈

a while longer. But perhaps our Age of History will be the last material epoch in human development. Perhaps our human rapacity will finally sleep, and that Piscean Seed of Idea, will fructify in the *Aquarian Womb of Realization*.

There is a cleansing and purification that must transpire before such an *awakening* can occur; some process by which the avarice and malevolence of humanity is removed. The symbolic mechanism by which this objective is achieved is well known to all the religions of the world; it is another of the Primary Archetypes of the Sacred: *The Flood*. In more than 500 ancient stories from around the world, that which is old and worn out is washed away and destroyed by a global deluge. And yet, when those consuming waters recede, there is new fertility in the soil, a spectacular new potential for Life. Thus the old world is but the seed of a new. The Flood is the Earth itself returning to the waters of the womb for regeneration and rebirth.

And so we see here a cleansing of the Piscean world, with a few artifacts of that Age still visible beneath the Aquarian overgrowth. Swimming in two's are *forty* fish - one for each night and day it rains. New apostles gather in the Sacred Grove wherein they seek communion with the Keeper of Knowledge. The aurora of a transcendent beacon then shines through from the center of existence, and illuminates the pastoral tranquility of their ocean temple. And from that blinding light comes a shimmering Apparition of iridescent perfection. The curving arcs of great sheltering wings form the *Vesica Pisces*: two circles that, like a conjunction of worlds, only intersect around an irresistible spiritual gravity. And thus, with a gesture, Heaven and Earth are united. Where there was only the burning desert of the world, now there is an infinite Oasis of Spirit. Where there was merely nature, now there is Absolute Quintessence. Divine Idea is Realization, and all the labors of the cosmos are done. *The terrestrial and the Celestial become One Garden in Transcendent Paradise*.

But this is *not* the end. As God sustains the Cosmos, the Cosmos, too, sustains God. As one thing

ends, yet another begins. And so, as we are told in the sacred stories, the will of the universe shall be done: even in Paradise, *someone must break the unbroken circle*; someone must *turn away* to embrace a new and unknown future...

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**Personal Notes on *The Return***

I chose my favorite number at young age, long before I knew anything about the spiritual import of such things, for a pretty mundane reason: my favorite hockey player (Ivan Cornoyer of the Montreal Canadiens) wore it on the back of his jersey. The length of time I worked on this painting (from first design-sketches to finished painting): twelve months. In the chronological sequence of Mythic Naturalism paintings, *The Return* is number twelve. The time required to complete the Mythic Naturalism series: twelve years. I know it is an easy matter to find such correspondences, if you really want to find them, but it still *feels* like temporally distinct events are bound by some larger entirely unseen and unknown plan or intention.

I don't remember what I was thinking about when the inspiration for this painting happened, but I remember the inspiration itself quite vividly. My mind was elsewhere and was at first rather reluctant to yield any attention to a curious and amorphous image bubbling up from some unknown depth in my mind. I pushed the image down one or twice, but it was insistent and eventually pushed through whatever had occupied my thoughts previously. And then I saw it: a formless blue universe with a circle of 12 presences illuminated from the center by an otherworldly, iridescent light. I had been contemplating a mermaid painting of some kind, and I knew at once that this blue, Zodiacal circle was the solution I was looking for. It was, however, just a little more complicated than that: I drew well over 100 mermaids before I found astrologically relevant gestures that looked right within the apostolic "broken circle" design...

~ The Lotus Maiden ~





