



The Promise of the Past

by Betty J. Kovács, Ph.D.

Death is the Greatest Mystery of Life because it offers us an initiation into the unknown, the invisible, the source of all being. It is a mystery that can break our hearts, but it can also open us to a vast and loving universe. When we experience the death of someone we love, we are convinced that we are being destroyed, that nothing will ever, can ever, be the same. And this *is* true. Nothing is ever the same again: our focus on the known, visible forms of life is shifted to the invisible essence of the one we love. This shift is the initial stage of the Mystery: the power of the broken heart pulls us to the one we love, to another dimension, another language, and an entirely other way of life.

But it is here that many of us lose our way because we live in a culture that not only has lost the map to this invisible dimension of being but insists that it does not even exist. When we look around the world today at the unbearable sorrow, indifference, depression, addiction, violence, and fanaticism, we are looking at a world that has lost its connection to this invisible source of being. Even the two major religions of the West have forgotten their original knowledge of this Mystery and have fallen into doctrines that limit our own direct inner experience with this source. Yet it is the birthright of every single human being to communicate directly with this invisible source of life. We are all being called to rediscover—and to reclaim—this birthright. Our survival depends on this sacred reclamation.

The Earth herself appears to be playing a role in this healing process by leading us to just the right places to find the buried secrets of our past. It is now known that around 35,000 BCE there occurred a spontaneous evolution of human consciousness that blasted forth around the world in the form of symbols, myths, art, spiritual traditions, and culture. Although this was clearly a worldwide phenomenon, the major areas of evidence are the rock paintings and engravings in more than 300 caves in Europe and the 20,000 painted and engraved rock shelters in Africa. Since this breakthrough did not involve an anatomical change, scholars could not figure out what had caused this evolution. It now appears that this leap of consciousness emerged out of the shamanic experience with invisible worlds. **In other words, we evolved into modern conscious beings through communication with the unknown, invisible dimension of reality.**

It is now known that this consciousness survived in Europe for thousands of years because the same symbols and artistic traditions reemerged around 7,000 BCE in a magnificent artistic flowering in the early farming communities. UCLA archaeologist Marija Gimbutas deserves recognition for her ability to see the continuity of this early symbolic system from 35,000 BCE to and throughout the agricultural period and even into our own time as a powerful symbolic undercurrent.

This symbolic system reflects a deep respect for the laws of Nature; all life was experienced as divine and sacred. The Great Mysteries were celebrated—the Mysteries of birth and death and the renewal of all life: human, animal, the Earth, and the cosmos. The unknown, the invisible, the source of life was as real to them as the visible world, and nothing was more important than living in harmony with this unseen source. **Here again were cultures, an entire way of life, rooted in communication with the unknown, invisible dimension of reality.**

Their artistic images reflect the divinity of the female as well as the male. In fact, there are no images of male domination, warfare, or violence, and it appears that these cultures did indeed enjoy long periods of peace. This way of life was destroyed as waves of invading tribes swept across southeastern Europe between 4,300 and 2,800 BCE, and out of the chaos emerged what we have come to think of as Western culture.

It is strange for the Western mind to come to terms with the idea that the very roots of its own consciousness reach back 35,000 years into the forgotten shamanic cultures of Europe. Many questions arise. How had we lost this profound interrelated worldview? Had the chaos and destruction been so pervasive that we were unable to hold onto this ancient way of life? Or had we not wanted to hold onto a culture that valued what cannot be seen or analyzed by the rational mind? Hadn't we, after all, given the world rationality and science? And didn't these gifts demand a logic that was separated from any other part of the mind that might compromise its integrity?

Well, maybe not. More discoveries emerged and these discoveries turn upside down the very concept of Western culture that we have been taught to believe in. In the 1990's British Classical scholar Peter Kingsley published his research on a powerful shamanic spiritual tradition that existed around 500 BCE and that stretched from southern Spain to Sicily, Italy, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Babylonia, Crete, Turkey, Iran, and all the way to India and Central Asia. According to Kingsley, the Greek Pre-Socratic philosophers, Pythagoras, Empedocles, and Parmenides, were part of this tradition as master shaman healers who used powerful techniques to communicate with the invisible dimension of reality. In fact, it was actually these "modern" shamans who created logic, laws, biology, chemistry, medicine, and physics—the very fields we think of as originating in Western culture. And, says Kingsley, what is most important is that **all of this knowledge came from their communication with the invisible dimension of reality.**

Kingsley also tells us that these master shaman healers were able to bring together the whole mind—the inner and outer worlds, the invisible and visible dimensions of reality. They were practical men who deeply valued both the feminine and masculine dimensions of the divine, created cultures, gave laws, traveled, wrote poetry, and were ambassadors and negotiators of peace. According to Kingsley, Plato really wasn't the father of Western philosophy. The true father was a shaman. It was Plato, he says, who took their knowledge and severed its roots from the shamanic past. And that is why Western philosophy is a “rational” discipline that excludes human experience, especially experience of other dimensions of reality.

One might think that at least we could have counted on the two major religions of the West to hold our birthright in sacred trust. After all, they developed out of the same soil as the master shaman healers. Yet we now know that they too were robbed of their birthright. In the middle of the last century the Earth once again released major secrets of our past in the form of ancient texts, The Qumran texts found near the Dead Sea and *The Nag Hammadi Library* found in Egypt.

These documents reveal that the Judaic First Temple Tradition was indeed a mystical tradition of direct communication with the invisible source of all being. While this tradition was purged by King Josiah around 621 BCE, it was kept alive by Jewish exiles in Egypt and Babylon, and reemerged in the early Jewish movement that was later known as Christianity. For 200 years people wrote about **the hidden secret tradition taught by Jesus—a tradition of direct communication with the invisible source of all life.** Then the Christian Church also purged itself of this tradition.

Our history, philosophy, and religion lost the ancient maps to other dimensions of reality, and we have lost our way. Those of us who have experienced the death of someone we love are in a position to play an important role in reconstructing these maps. Grief has already shifted our focus from the known, visible forms of life to the invisible essence of the one we love. We have already stepped into the process of transformation through the Mystery of Death. With the promise of the past we can summon the courage to reclaim our birthright.

One evening not long before his death, my husband Istvan and I were discussing the incredible experiences we were having with our son Pisti since his death in an automobile accident. Istvan suddenly paused and looked at me. It was one of those moments when individual consciousness pauses and the deep Mind flows through and astonishes both speaker and listener:

“Death is as Divine as Life.
Hold them in both hands.
Play with them.
Balance them.
This is the *Divine Game*.”