**Honora Foah:**

**myth, weaving of the spirit**

Here is one of the reasons contemporary people don’t like to understand myth – myth is about the world, not exclusively humans. As the brilliant Robert Bringhurst, mythographer extraordinaire, says about Native American mythology,

…Native American literature—by which I mean the genuine goods: oral works in Native American languages—is never about a human-centered world. It’s about a larger world, a wild world, where humans are minor players.

Even in mythologies in which humans have pretty big roles, myth is about forces, enormous forces, forces of nature and gods that are not under human control. It is one of the central functions of myth to remind us of just that fact. Even within what we think of as human, the stories say over and over, you have no idea, Mr Man, you have no idea what you are doing. We activate forces with no understanding of what we have invoked, what comes to life, what dies in the multi-dimensional universe of consequences.

The god of war is a god. He has absolutely no interest in persons. Once persons have invoked him, they are his and not their own anymore. Love comes alive in a human heart and there is no question but that one is possessed by a force larger than the individual. Bizarre, often anti-social behavior ensues. This is why monotheism is so keen to keep us from the clutches of the lesser gods. They may be lesser, but they are much bigger than we are and once fully invoked, we have very little chance of contradicting their imperatives. The same is true for ecological, geographical, meteorological forces. What is a shrug for Mother is an earthquake for you buddy.

And all around are these stories, and images that are the nodal points of what Hegel called the silent weaving of the spirit, ‘the underground work of changing the coordinates, mostly invisible to the public eye, which then suddenly explodes, taking everyone by surprise. ‘ as Slavoj Zizek has observed.

What I mean by myth is all of the definitions at once, or sometimes, one at a time all at once.  In the media now, ‘myth’ almost always means ‘falsehood’ and this reduction of the definition makes visible the intense materialism/fundamentalism of global culture at this time. Both groups of literalists storm over us attempting lobotomies of the mind and soul through war, capitalism, balkanized science and technologies as well as religious fundamentalism of all stripes. (Fundamentalist Hinduism has got to be one of the all time great definitions of an oxymoron.)

Bringhurst says that myth is a theorem about the nature of reality. At base, a myth is a description of an ecology or an ecological niche. The social, psychological and spiritual meanings adhere to that because the interconnected weaving of nature is the materialized form of cosmic intention and it is not possible to truly escape from these structures. Everything we invent is a reapplication of an insight into the structures large and small, of nature.

But there is change and evolution. In the human world, the foundational ideas upon which we build a culture are subject to the ceaseless weaving of the spirit. If something is one of those foundational ideas, it IS a myth. The mythic world IS the world of foundational principles, archetypes, images that embody an idea, a being, a foundation stone that is big enough to be a pillar upon which to build a culture, and that bigness involves a quality of multi-valence, multi-facets. That dimensional powerpoint is the hallmark of the mythic world.

The mythic world enters our world through images and stories, through stories made of images. Stories are the human form of this world. Human life exists in time and the form of understanding that best suits being in time, is a story. First this happens and then this and then this and then…. Plot plots out a map that we are able to follow. The events along that horizontal x coordinate can be pictured as images. The images open the dimensional vertical y coordinate that connects all of the layers of reality together. The y coordinate is a fantastic beanstalk that we can climb into other worlds (firmly connected by an ordinary stem to this one) or penetrate below our world into the depths. What keeps us from getting lost and strongly tethered to this world, is the firm insistence of the marching plotline.  To enter the image is dangerous in that it can take you anywhere, but time is on your side and forces you on to the next image, the next event, the next action. We are able to retain little information without an attached narrative. It is why you can remember Red Riding Hood from your kindergarten class but not a string of numbers from this morning. We are homo storicus.

The myth is a story that integrates time and eternity, the x and the y. The eternal world makes itself known in all of those experiences of timelessness, where much happens, but all sense of time is lost. It seems to happen all at once, or in slow motion – it’s not really slow, it’s that everything is given it’s due, everything can be accomplished without the constraint of time, so it seems to go in the blink of an eye, yet everything is in ‘slow motion’.  These kisses from eternity are hard to remember exactly because they occur  it seems, ‘somewhere else’, even when it is a magical basketball shot that clearly did physically happen right on the court. And that is the point of life, is it not, to happen right here on the court while also being alive to eternity? The images encapsulate these moments and form a sequence, a narrative, that allows us to remember, to hold, to learn.