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THE METAPHYSICAL WIZARD OF OZ

Steven G. Herbert

Drawing on Indian, Jungian and other symbols the author provides an analysis and interpretation of the spiritual significance of the Wizard of Oz.

In all the world's literature, the most successful and enduring stories tend to be those which express archetypal truths. One of the most prominent of these is "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz", a uniquely American myth. The original book by L. Frank Baum first appeared in 1900 and was further popularized by the 1939 MGM movie starring Judy Garland. Its author was a Theosophist, which is certainly reflected in the profound esotericism underlying this classic tale. Yet Baum himself insisted that the story was purely inspirational, coming out of the blue, from the Great Author himself.

The story begins in Kansas on a dry, flat, and featureless prairie. Aridity and formlessness of the landscape is further augmented by a lack of color. There is no distinction even of black and white, only a uniform gray. Though Baum has written a thoroughly Occidental fairy tale, there is much that parallels Oriental symbolism here and throughout. The homogeneity of the environment suggests Oneness as does the One-room farmhouse in which Dorothy lived. It is the realm beyond all polarities and differentiations. It is the Void, or what the Buddhists refer to as Nirvana, beyond all concept and form.

By contrast, the land of Oz is the colorful and magical world of maya and illusion. It is the realm of sangsaric experience. In Tibetan, the word for maya (sGyuma) literally means "magical show". Oz is an uncivilized land, as the Good Witch of the North admits in the beginning of the story, being "cut off from the rest of the world". Only uncivilized countries still have witches and wizards. Kansas has neither and is therefore civilized, for in Nirvana there is no distinction between the mundane and the magical.

Uncle Henry and Aunt Em represent the archetypal masculine and feminine aspects of the androgynous Spirit. The name 'Dorothy', is the feminine variant of 'Theodora' meaning "gift of God", and symbolizes the soul about to enter into its last incarnation. Collectively they exemplify the multiplicity of aspects inherent in Being.

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On the prairie, the winds rise from the north and the south (the directions associated with the good witches of Oz) and where they meet becomes the center of the cyclone, directly over the house. 'Cyclone' derives from a Greek word meaning "circle or the coil of a serpent". The serpent, or kundalini, represents the descent of the spirit as well as the ascent, and the round of birth and death. As the winds rise, Uncle Henry and Aunt Em take cover in the cyclone cellar just as the Spirit, or Knower, witnesses, but does not actually incarnate with, the soul.

Toto was the only thing in Kansas which was not gray, indicating that he is of the sangsaric realm, the karma the soul carries back with it and which necessitates rebirth. But Baum's story is more than a simple theosophical allegory and has multi-level symbolism. Even though Toto is not a fundamental aspect of Nirvana, neither is he a fundamental aspect of sangsara, for the people of Oz "had never seen a dog before".

The name Toto suggests Total, and as such the little dog represents the totality of the archetypes of the collective unconscious. Toto symbolizes for us the Guide that leads us to Wholeness at the same time that he functions as the "Trickster". When Dorothy tries to follow her uncle and aunt into the cyclone cellar, Toto hides under the bed and tricks Dorothy into being caught up in "the fierce wind of karma", which is necessary for her to achieve Whole-ness.

But despite the magical and "wonder-full" nature of the land of Oz, Dorothy still yearns to return Home to the monotonous Kansas from the moment she arrives. The map of Oz, however, reveals that it is rectangular shaped, exactly like the state of Kansas. Their corresponding shapes hint that the two realms, Nirvana and sangsara, are actually one and the same. It is for Dorothy to discover that she is already Home if she would but realize it.

The land of Oz itself is divided into four countries, each associated with a direction and a color (and either a good witch or a bad witch), surrounding a central city. The obvious mandala composition also presents a striking resemblance to the symbolisms contained in the Tibetan Book of the Dead, or Bardo Thodol. In his psychological commentary contained in the Evans-Wentz edition, C.G. Jung describes how the gods and goddesses encountered in the Bardo state (between death and rebirth)... "are arranged according to the four directions and are distinguished by typical mystic colors. It gradually becomes

clearer that all these deities are organized into mandalas, or circles, containing a cross of the four colors. The colors are co-ordinated with the four aspects of Wisdom..."

There are five colors associated with the land of Oz and all are rainbow colors. The order in which Dorothy encounters them is important, too. She meets first the good Witch of the North, ruler of the purple Gillikin country, wearing white, showing that all the colors of the rainbow are integrated within her in a state of spiritual purity or Clarity. With a magical kiss of protection upon the forehead ("third eye" or sixth chakra), Dorothy begins her journey within the blue Munckin country, traveling towards the green City of Emeralds. From the Wizard's palace she proceeds through the yellow Winkie country and eventually ends in the red Quadling country. These colors are associated with the 7th (spiritual), 5th (throat), 4th (Heart), 3rd (solar plexis), and 1st (basal) chakras, respectively, in descending order.

Emerald City, representing the central Heart chakra, lies in the "heart" of Oz, just as Kansas is America's "heart"-land. The correspondence between Aunt Em and the Emerald City has a further significance. Spirit communicates its Wisdom to soul by the central psychic organ of the Heart, through the feminine function of Intuition.

Baum's story is also replete with alchemical symbolism as Dorothy travels down the road of gold wearing her silver shoes in search of the Emerald (philosopher's stone) City. On the way, Dorothy is joined, one by one, by the three companions, who exemplify the elements. First she finds Scarecrow up in the Air on a pole. The Tin Woodman was found rusted by Water during a rainstorm. And finally, the Cowardly Lion bounds out of the forest with a roar and lands upon the Earth in front of them.

Each of the elemental companions also have a one-to-one correspondence with C.G. Jung's Four Functions of Consciousness. Scarecrow, who is looking for a brain, represents Thinking. Tin Woodman, who is looking for a heart, implies Feeling. Cowardly Lion, who is looking for courage, denotes Sensation, or the Will to Act. Dorothy herself signifies Intuition, which corresponds to the alchemical Fire.

Jung represents the Four Functions of Consciousness as placed at the four directional points of the compass with a Transcendent Function at the Center. The Four Functions always take the same positions on the circle with respect to each

other. And so is the order in which Dorothy meets each of her associates also significant. The foursome symbolize in progression the transformation of spirit into matter: etheric, gaseous, liquid, and solid. This four-fold symmetry superimposed upon the circle is the classic form of the mandala, which itself is a symbol of Wholeness. The word 'mandala' in Sanskrit means "circle and center" with the center implying a passageway between dimensions. Among the travelers, Toto represents that Center, the Transcendent Function, or the oft included fifth element of ether.

The cyclical and directional nature of the Functions is again affirmed when the four companions, one by one, enter the Throne room of the Wizard. Dorothy (Intuition) sees him as a giant head (Intellect). Scarecrow (Intellect) perceives him as a lovely and sweet-voiced lady with green hair and wings, dressed in green gauze (Feeling). Tin Woodman (Feeling) views him as a Terrible Beast (Sensation). Finally, the Cowardly Lion (Sensation/Action/Will) sees him as a large and hot ball of Fire (Intuition). The latter illustrates that in the end matter returns to Spirit, completing the cycle, as when our Service is offered back to Spirit as a gift.

The same cyclicity of the elements, in the reverse order, is found in the Bardo Thodol's reference to the three chief symptoms of death. Evans-Wentz's footnote describes them as "...1) a bodily sensation of pressure, 'earth sinking into water'; 2) a bodily sensation of clammy coldness as though the body were immersed in water, which gradually merges into that of a feverish heat, 'water sinking into fire'; 3) a feeling as though the body were being blown to atoms, 'fire sinking into air'..."¹ (p. 93). Elsewhere, the Bardo Thodol alludes to the sounds of the elements heard at death. Again Evans-Wentz footnotes an explanation: "In the Six Doctrines, a treatise on the practical application of various yogas...'If one findeth not the Path during the Second Bardo (i.e. during the Chonyid Bardo) then four sounds called "awe-inspiring sounds" (are heard): from the vital force of the earth-element, a sound like the crumbling down of a mountain; from the vital-force of the water element, a sound like the breaking of (storm-tossed) ocean-waves: from the vital force of the fire element, a sound as of a jungle afire; from the vital-force the air element, a sound like a thousand thunders reverberating simultaneously.' Herein are described the psychic resultants of the disintegrating process called death as affecting the four grosser elements composing the human body

aggregate; the ether element is not named, because in that element alone - i.e. in the ethereal, or Bardo-body - the consciousness-principle continues to exist"2 (p. 162). Since Dorothy and her companions represent the reincarnation of the soul, their order of appearance is reversed.

Through the story it is quite obvious that each already contains within himself the quality which he seeks. Dorothy killed the Wicked Witch of the East by virtue of her own power and greatness. Scarecrow seems to have all the ideas. Tin Woodman is so sentimental that he fears stepping on the tiniest bug, and is constantly in danger of rusting himself with his own tears. Cowardly Lion scares away the other beasts with his roar and is quite capable of brave action. The process of the journey itself helps the entire party to discover those qualities within themselves and develop them.

That development illustrates the alchemical transmutation of base substances into "noble" ones. Just as the alchemist's real goal was the transmutation of the elements within himself into their nobler forms, so do each of the travelers unconsciously attempt to enoble the quality which he represents. Dorothy will transmute mere biological and cultural instinct into the highest Intuition. Scarecrow will transmute intelligence of the brain into Wisdom. Tin Woodsman will transmute mere sentimentality into Compassion. Cowardly Lion will transmute manipulating the reactions of others into his own Will to Act.

Each of Dorothy's comrades debates about which quality (brains, heart, or courage) is most or least desirable. They don't yet realize that any one quality alone has both virtues and liabilities. Everyone is born at a different point on the Medicine Wheel, but for all the goal is the same. The meritoriousness of each quality can only be fully manifest when in healthy balance with the others. And this is the second unconscious objective of the journey: INTEGRATION.

The transmutative and integrative process begins when Dorothy is dropped by the cyclone near the White Mountains (white, again, is the color of spiritual Purity, Clarity, and Unity, the color of the integration of all the rainbow colors) and begins her journey towards the central Emerald City. In landing, the house kills the Wicked Witch of the East. Similarly, the soul, in its last incarnation, finally crushes the desire for rebirth. Just as for Dorothy it was an unconscious act, so it is for the soul, for at this point it has

already been earned by previous karma. The means of return to Spirit is also a gift, and as with the power of the silver shoes, it only remains to be remembered by the bearer. One other task must be completed first, however. As Dorothy must kill the Wicked Witch of the West, so must the soul consciously defeat the fear of death and of ego dissolution.

The Yellow Brick Road represents the spiritual, yet perilous path. "You must walk," says the good Witch of the North. "It is a long journey, through a country that is sometimes pleasant and sometimes dark and terrible." Once Dorothy has been joined by her companions, they proceed towards the Center (and integration), but must face and overcome many obstacles along the way. Though the land seems quite friendly in the beginning, "the farther they went the more dismal and lonesome the country became". The Scarecrow, although he claims to be unable to think, makes a profound observation at this point. He reflects that if everyone had heads stuffed with straw, they would all live in Oz (the sangsaric world) and no one (like Dorothy who had "brains") would want to live in Kansas (Nirvana).

Here again, there is much symbolism that parallels that of the Tibetan Book of the Dead. In the Sidpa, or third Bardo, which immediately proceeds rebirth, one is whirled along by "the fierce wind of karma". The newly "deceased" may obtain liberation in the first (Chikhai) Bardo, if one recognizes the primary Clear Light, which is the first to appear. In the first days of the Chonyid (second) Bardo, the peaceful deities appear (with associations of color, direction, and element) shining amidst a halo of rainbow light. If one is not afraid and recognizes these as emanating from one's self, then one may merge with that light.

Like Uncle Henry and Aunt Em, these deities always appear in male and female pairs. According to the Tantric School, every deity, even the Supreme, has its shakti. Though ultimately, monism is recognized to be the reality, and the dualism to be merely apparent. All pairs of opposites are viewed as originating in a Single Source - in the Voidness of the Dharma-Kaya.

The Bardo state as a whole is a process, initiatory in nature, where the visions become more and more terrifying as time goes on. Here one is incarnate in the thought body of propensities, facing the illusory thought forms which are born of mental

content. The word 'Bardo' literally means "between (Bar) two (do)" states, referring to either states of being or states of consciousness. It is the Buddhist philosophy, in fact, that birth and death occur not just once in a lifetime, but continuously. Therefore, there are Bardo states on both sides of death and on either side their purpose is to restore the soul to Divinity.

As each elemental companion tells the story of his life prior to joining the party, it reveals something about the nature of the respective unintegrated aspect. Scarecrow confesses that his problems are partly due to his lack of experience, having "only been made day before yesterday". Compared to the eternal Spirit, the ego or intellect is very young indeed, being born anew with each incarnation. He also admits that he thought himself quite important scaring crows away until even the crows were able to see through him. Thereafter he was simply ignored. Such is the intellect's exaggerated sense of self-importance always a very insecure foundation.

Tin Woodman's story began as a man of flesh in love with a beautiful Munckin maiden. But a spell cast by the Wicked Witch of the East caused his axe to chop off one part of his body after another. Gradually each portion was replaced with a tin version until he was completely tin, and thus without a heart fell out of love with the Munckin girl. And in the same way, the self-destructive compulsive "spells" we are sometimes programmed with lead us into one painful experience after another. With each successive hurt, another piece of our heart becomes hardened until it is completely walled in, and loses the capacity to love altogether.

The Cowardly Lion had been able to scare the other beasts all these years with his roar. None ever suspected his inner cowardice until a little girl slapped him on the nose. Thus, like the Scarecrow, his quality was mainly a front staged by the ego, and to make it genuine, each needed to make the heart connection.

As they approached nearer to the Heart-Center (Emerald City) the country again became more beautiful. But this did not mean the dangers were over. This "lovely, sunny country" was filled with fields of poppies with a deadly aroma, which could cause one to slip into eternal sleep. Truly, as one first becomes attuned to the Heart one can become transfixed by its beauty, and be tempted to rest there without following through to service. Thus

all further spiritual progress is halted. The Scarecrow and Tin Woodman (who were not affected) carry out Dorothy and Toto, but the Cowardly Lion is too big to move. In the same way, Intellect and Feeling may save the aspects as a whole by carrying Intuition and the Transcendent Function to safety, then calling upon our sense of compassion for our fellowmen to save the Active Function.

Cowardly Lion's demise and deliverance has another moral, that things are not always what they seem. This is a recurrent theme throughout, emphasizing that Oz is indeed "the world of illusion". The huge Lion succumbed to beautiful flowers and was rescued by field mice. Furthermore, his plight exemplifies the lesson in humility that is required of all of us before entering the realm of the Heart.

At the gate to the city the partners were each fitted with green glasses which were securely locked on. The people of Oz were perfectly capable of seeing the green of emeralds for themselves, but were made to believe they needed to be protected from "the brightness and glory of the Emerald City". Thus authority, and especially religious authority, sets itself up as mediator between its constituency and the Truth, and encourages a state of dependency rather than liberation. Furthermore, the glasses represent dogma, and a lack of faith on the part of authority in the ability of Truth to present itself. But that it will do, and directly, if one but "knocks at the door".

Once they finally gain audience with the multiformal Wizard, they are told they must first kill the Wicked Witch of the West before they may be granted their requests. On leaving the city, Dorothy finds the color of her dress and Toto's ribbon turned from green to white. Once making the Heart connection, she (as Intuition) has become officially a white sorceress, and Toto has turned from Trickster to Guide. The party set off with no idea how they will accomplish their task, but they do now have the faith gained from the Heart.

Unlike their travels through Munckin land, there is no defined path in the Winkie country, and again the country becomes inhospitable. The Wicked Witch spots them immediately with her "one eye... (that) could see everywhere" (the third eye of psychic sense), and sends several adversaries against the party. Each of these attacks is thwarted until finally the Witch calls upon her last resort. Similarly, when the ego is threatened with dissolution it will defend itself with every resource at hand,

and it is no different with the Wicked Witch of the West. Using the final order of the Golden Cap she orders the Winged Monkeys to destroy the intruders. The Scarecrow is torn apart and the Tin Woodman is dropped from a height onto sharp rocks, closely paralleling the dismemberment and torture by demons so common in shamanic initiatory experience. Finally, the Cowardly Lion (Action) is bound up and carried to the castle to be enslaved.

But Dorothy could not be harmed due to the Witch of the North's protective kiss upon her forehead, for even the Winged Monkeys recognized that the Power of Good is greater than the Power of Evil. Therefore she and Toto were delivered unhurt to the Wicked Witch, to be imprisoned in her castle. The Witch was unable to harm her either but thought she could enslave her since Dorothy was ignorant of the power of the silver shoes. Finally, one day the Witch tricked Dorothy and managed to steal one of the shoes. This so enraged Dorothy that she picked up a bucket of water and doused the Witch, which caused her to melt away.

Dorothy's silver shoes represent the way Home and indirectly immortality. Thus the struggle of the Witch to get the shoes, symbolizes the ego's futile struggle to insure its own immortality, for even the Wicked Witch with all her magic could not cross the impenetrable barrier of the desert surrounding Oz. But the illusion of death (and consequently the fear of it) comes from identification with one's temporal, transitory form as a fundamental and autonomous identity. And these are fears best dispelled by the feminine qualities of Intuition and Feeling. It will be remembered that the body of the Wicked Witch of the East dried up in the sun (Fire), while the Wicked Witch of the West was melted by Water, feminine aspects both.

The Wicked Witch of the West may also represent our own dark side as a projection, and water as the unconscious. When one confronts the dark side it can be robbed of its threatening nature and dissolved back into the unconscious in healthy integration.

The rescue and repair of the Scarecrow and Tin Woodman typifies the renewal and rebirth that follows the initiatory death of the old self. In the reuniting of the party is signified an integration of another sort: Body (Cowardly Lion), Soul (Tin Woodman), Mind (Scarecrow), and Spirit (Dorothy). After the Winkie celebration, the companions are flown back to the Emerald City by the Winged Monkeys. Since Dorothy is the inheritor of the Golden Cap, she now has command of these creatures. As

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esoteric traditions everywhere stress, demons torment us until all the ego's attachments and compulsions have been conquered, then the demons become our strengths and valuable resources at our command.

Back in the Emerald City, the Wizard keeps them waiting for days until the Scarecrow threatens to call the Winged Monkeys if he doesn't keep his promise. Finally they enter the Throne room, this time all together and integrated, though the task still remains to unseat the ego from its false rule over the Heart-Center. Balance has been accomplished but Transcendence has yet to be. In the Throne room, the Wizard pretends to be invisible and everywhere, as God truly is. Desperately he tries to conceal all his humbugery, but it is soon uncovered. Once exposed, the Wizard freely admits he is a humbug. Likewise, we must all eventually wean ourselves from our dependence on the ego, as well as all teachers, guides, and gurus outside ourselves.

The Wizard was originally a ventriloquist turned circus balloonist from Omaha, Nebraska. He was still a young man when one day he was carried to Oz in his run-away balloon. After landing, he was driven out of the yellow country by the Winged Monkeys commanded by the Wicked Witch of the West, attesting to the inability of the ego alone to deal with the demonic forces of the psyche. Nonetheless, the people of the central green country accepted him as ruler and built the city and palace for him. But in spite of all his folly, it should be remembered that the Wizard did originate from the same land as Dorothy. As the Wizard himself said, "I'm really a very good man, just a very bad Wizard."

Yet even after admitting himself as a humbug and assuring them they each already have what they seek, the four travelers still insist that the Wizard grant their requests. So he does what he can. First he fills the Scarecrow's head with pins to make him "sharp". In the Tin Woodman's chest he put an "unbreakable" silk heart, stuffed with sawdust. To the Cowardly Lion he gave a drink of courage out of a square green bottle. Reflecting later, the Wizard says to himself "How can I help being a humbug, when all these people make me do things everybody knows can't be done?"

This scenario, however, does illustrate an important psychosocial principle in that human's hunger for rituals. Dorothy's escorts needed a ritual to believe they really had what they always had. So perhaps there is some real magic in what the ego

does after all, in using symbols to catalyze the true powers within.

As for Dorothy, the Wizard decides to take her back to Kansas himself, leaving the Scarecrow to rule in his stead. And that the Emerald City is left ruled by a stuffed man is another spoof on authority. When the balloon has been constructed and readied for flight, Toto once again runs and hides, and Dorothy misses her chance to accompany the Wizard as he rises into the Air, wildly out of control. Intellect is capable of producing a tremendous amount of "hot air", but alone by itself it is incapable of directing the return Home. This requires a surrender to Spirit and a trust in its guidance. Here Toto does Dorothy a favor as Guide in preventing her from following the misguided leadership of the ego at this critical point.

Now she must seek out Glinda, the Good Witch of the South, as her last hope to return Home. Dorothy's three companions, now in possession of the qualities they sought, accompany her as she travels to the south. Again, the party encounter and overcome many obstacles until they finally arrive at the castle of Glinda. Here, the Good Witch of the South symbolizes the highest level of Intuition, or True Guidance. Glinda has red hair, like the color of the country she rules, and blue eyes, symbolizing the integration of lower and upper chakras. She wears the white dress of spiritual purity. From her Dorothy is assured that she has had the power to return over the desert within her all the time, in the form of the silver shoes. But, of course, we know that Dorothy's "forgetfulness" was necessary, for otherwise the three companions would not have made their gains and acquired their kingdoms to rule.

Similarly, the Bardo Thodol teaches that the soul's liberation is already accomplished and has only to be realized. Until then, one makes himself a prisoner of sangsara, or the phenomenal universe, which includes the heavens and the hells. Both Buddhist and Hindu cosmologies describing the sangsara are replete with color, direction, and alchemical symbology. The latter consist of the traditional four elements plus the fifth of ether. But Nirvana itself is Reality, devoid of elemental distinctions. Upon realization of Shunyata, or Void (Kansas), one leaves these behind and acquires the Dharma-Kaya, or Divine Body of Truth (Uncle Henry - Aunt Em.)

Glinda tells Dorothy she can return in three steps (the three Bardos), "and each step will be made in the wink of an eye." But

first she promises to deliver the three companions back to their respective kingdoms by using the three commands of the Golden Cap (symbolic of the seventh chakra halo or nimbus). The sequence in which the Winged Monkeys are instructed to carry them back is the same order in which they were found by Dorothy, and Dorothy herself is the last to return. In her flight, however, the silver shoes fall off, "lost forever in the desert", as in her final return to Spirit they are no longer needed.

The movie colored the shoes red, and not altogether inaccurately, for red, the color of the first chakra is where the kundalini sleeps, well "grounded" until called to carry the soul Home. In a flash, the kundalini rises, up through all the chakras and all the colors of the rainbow. Dorothy finally achieves her One desire, for all along she knew that "somewhere over the rainbow"..."there is no place like Home.

1W. Y. Evans-Wentz, ed., The Tibetan Book of the Dead. London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1937. p. 93

2Ibid., p. 162

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