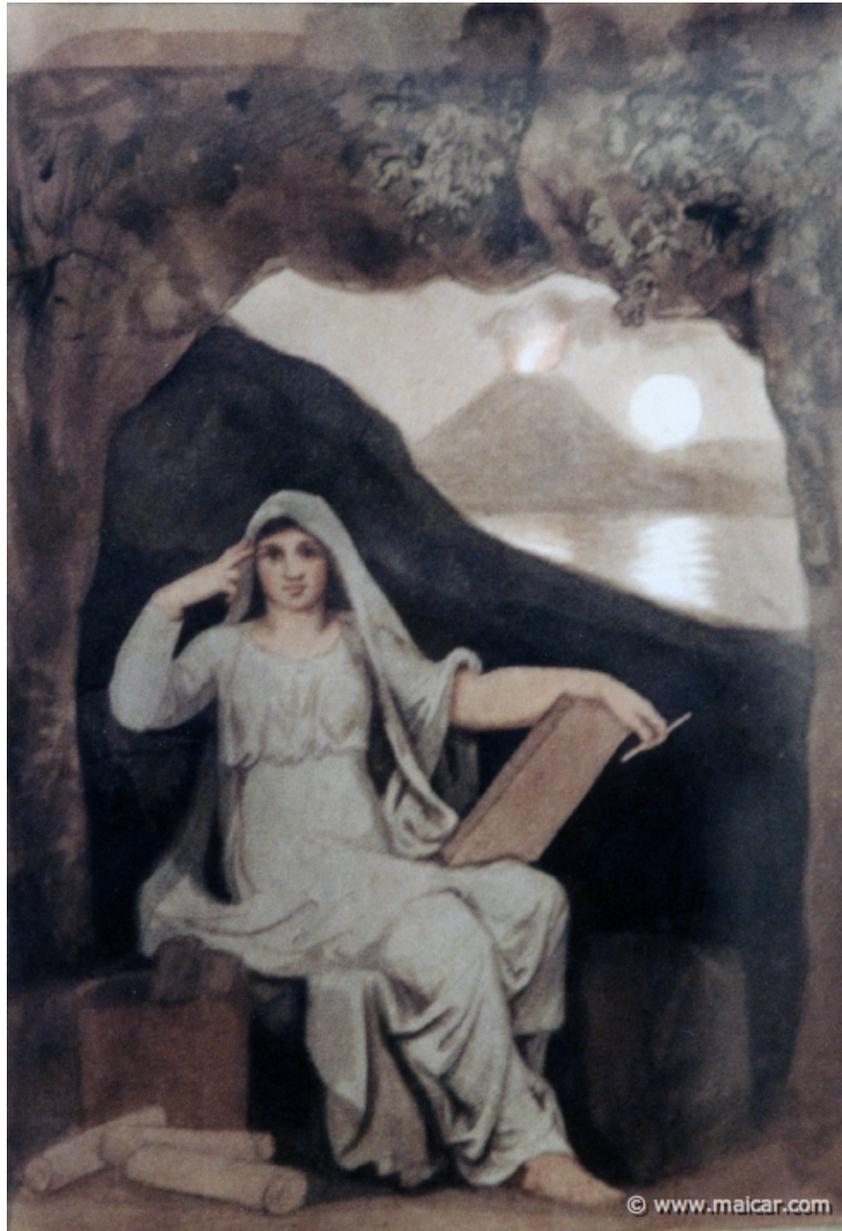


Building up Spirituality for Ground Zero

New Years Day 2016



The Sibyl of Cumae. 3730: Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein, 1751-1829: Sibylle von Cumae, um 1805. Landesmuseum Oldenburg, Das Schloß.

***"Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis
vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent:
Sibylla ti theleis; respondebat illa: apothanein thelo."***¹

**I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.**

T.S. Eliot

**The awful daring of a moment's surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed
Which is not to be found in our obituaries
Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor
In our empty rooms**

The Wasteland

The blows of his chisel, which hurt us so much, are what make us perfect. The suffering in the world is not the failure of God's love for us; it is that love in action. For believe me, this world that seems to us so substantial, is no more than the shadowlands. Real life has not begun yet.

C.S.Lewis²

"The mold in which a key is made would be a strange thing, if you had never seen a key: and the key itself a strange thing if you had never seen a lock. Your soul has a curious shape because it is a hollow made to fit a particular swelling in the infinite contours of the divine substance, or a key to unlock one of the doors in the house with many mansions.

Your place in heaven will seem to be made for you and you alone, because you were made for it -- made for it stitch by stitch as a glove is made for a hand."

¹ This Sibyl was not a goddess, although she was seven hundred years old when Aeneas met her. But Apollo (she said) offered her endless life if she consented to the god's love. And she, as if accepting his gift, pointed to a heap of sand, and prayed that she might have as many years of life as there were sand-grains in the pile. However, she forgot *Youth, without which immortality is worthless*, so the god, hoping that she would yield to his love, promised endless youth as well; but she, having spurned the god's gift, was fated to become the prey of a long Old Age. For the amount of sand-grains were one thousand.

² In 'Shadowlands', a play by William Nicholson

— C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain

From Ground Zero
From No-thing
Ayin
Small steps only are permitted
“Marche a petit pois”
we begin again.

From the wastelands of old theologies
the broken shards
prior suppositions evaporated in the winds of heresy
from the shadowlands
prior self-bloated opinions
deflated in the power of the rational
the prowess of the Id having been once again
demonstrated

We start again..
ever so still
קל דממה דקה
awake in the dark night of the soul
nailed to the cross of Simone Weil
the psalter of Das Niemandrose
“*Sprache, Sprache. Mit-Stern. Neben-Erde*”
Paul Celan ever present,
“*Non, je ne regrette rien*”
Piaf is my teacher here.
So, having put away the *daf*
Having allowed the obsessive guilt to subside
(For it takes its own toll)
I face the empty sheet on the desk
In the middle of the sleepless night
I face the *t'fillin* bag lying in front of me
And the circumcised lips
Silent
Unable to pray Tikkun Chazot
The words like molasses will not emerge from the mouth
Silent.

Fully emptied of the sheer mass of Rabbinic corpus
For a while, thankfully
Not buzzing through my head
The inner *kritik*
Not pointing out my *apikorsus*
For a moment.

Allowing myself to see the obsessive halachic disorder
With more clarity
In the dark stillness
(despite my father's voice ringing:
"it has survival value for the observant"
and..
"Uncle Strauss (his partner circa 1959) will not sit in the same portion
of the next world as I...who rise during the cold wet freezing winter mornings
in the dark, to daven in shul daily (for uncle was reform)"
Is it possible now?
To see this as mythical behavior
These rituals?
Born over centuries of accretion
To return to them in a mythic key say of G minor?
Without the obsession? The encrustation?
Take what makes sense,
Leave what is unethical,
Leave what does not make the bar of your inner sense of mythical right?
("her" critical voice ringing "it's a package deal! None of this choosing what is
convenient!") in front of the kids!
of course drowns out the voice of the father
Le Nom du Pere!

Small steps please!
Don't jump the gun!
We've been here before
Any act performed for self, ego, the other,
To be condemned
Impress nobody
Motive is everything
Purity of spirit is the yardstick
Examine each cranny of the mind for residual pomposity
Remember your Viennese roots
Where everything is for show.
Hubris permeates all desire
Pride is the very yeast of the doughy self image.
The "*ich zog*" must be forever abandoned for its delicious self righteousness.

Once more agree you just can't walk away from decades of study
The archive is so ready for access,
the neuronal circuits are ingrained,
The midrashic tropes are so present
Like soldiers on parade
A Military Tattoo
Each one waiting to be called forward
To be used when the situation arises
Stepping forward with a quote from the *Tanach*
And its wonderful midrashic twist
Those late antique Rabbis knew a thing or two about the divine!
Revealing how human God really is!
Resisting the philosophical opposition to anthropomorphism
Oh how I loved to sport those specific naughty parables
Of God's weaknesses and foibles.
It made the pain tolerable
And the post-Holocaust nightmare abler to survive

Yet the sheer weight of rabbinic training
The heaviness of parental and mentors
Lies on the aging shoulders
And the Apollonic guidance its wisdom
And the Sybilian price to pay for ignoring youth
(Each grain of sand another year
Each grain of sand another *blatt*)
I, like her in the cage
Shrinking in mind and vigor
Pointed at by passers by,
Paying the price for having engaged the gods
Guiding this inner soul to places where I should not have visited
Now condemned like her, until nothing is left but her voice.

Silence of thought mind and deed is the purifying waters
The order of this New Years Day.

"You shall have your wish, and with my guidance you shall see the dwellings of Elysium and the latest kingdom of the universe; and you shall see your dear father's shade."

"Here I am, the plain-speaking Sibyl of Phoebus,
Hidden beneath this stone tomb.
A maiden once gifted with voice, but now for ever voiceless,
By hard fate doomed to this fetter.
But I am buried near the nymphs and this Hermes,
Enjoying in the world below a part of the kingdom I had then."

The Sibyl to Aeneas. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 14.110