

FINAL DUTIES, OLD BONES
Luther Askeland

"Ye shall be as gods."

Early on -- much earlier even than one would have thought -- we began to understand those gods. Certainly it is true, as one *would* expect, that the earliest ones emerged from our exuberant first sketchings, variegatedly and rather crudely, as lustful, vengeful, capricious, philoprogenitive, generous, or clairvoyant, as individuals endowed with gender and personality, as caught up in lives ripe for the telling -- in short, as colorful exaggerations of ourselves. But as with any first roughing in, we soon grew uneasy. These "gods" conveyed nothing at all of that boundless reality and dense mystery -- of that final, perhaps even unutterable truth about *This* -- which escapes all our usual perceivings and articulations, and which we had hoped to gather together and embody just in *them*. Already in Xenophanes, therefore, we amused ourselves with the thought that the Ethiopians' gods are flat-nosed and black, the Thracians' blue-eyed and red-haired. Already in Plato we enjoyed a detached play with such gods as imaginary beings, inhabitants, not of Olympus, but of myth.

In the powerful creator gods who replaced them the extravagant multiplicity of our first attempt shrank to trinity or even uniqueness. And though they did so infinitely, they or it exaggerated now only our better qualities; they were more -- indeed, immeasurably more -- real, powerful, just, aware, and compassionate than we. But soon -- indisputably by 500 A.D. -- we realized our second attempt, too, had failed. For these gods were no more able than their all-too-human predecessors to give off that scent of absolute mystery which sometimes dizzied us. They lacked the edgeless transparency of that luminous opening we sometimes fell out into or became. We could not rediscover in *them* the opaque density of that obscure dark face or life we sometimes brushed up against. And now we also knew *why* all these gods, even the "better" ones, had failed.

They had failed because of that presence (the one which changes everything) we now realized encloses all that we know, ponder, or merely dream: the inconceivable. For by this time we were no longer content to let that dark gleaming within us which we call "awareness" be contained and bound by the words which suddenly appear -- who can say just how or from where -- within it. Instead, having first placed them outside and before us, we had learned to look at the words *themselves*. And once we had truly looked *at* the words 'the world' and 'the universe', thus breaking their ancient spell and rendering them, instead, inert -- once we had actually been together *with* those now tiny and mysterious syllables *within an immediately felt, but utterly unknown and unknowable "something else"* -- then, inevitably, we would never again be able to squeeze our new and now much vaster awareness back into the old and miniscule dream of being in "the world." Instead, we remained outside "the world," and dwelled instead within that uncontained, immediately felt "something else" which has no name and cannot be thought. Hereafter, that inconceivable "something" was what flashed through our minds whenever we heard or thought the sound 'reality'. It was what we now knew to be *This*.

From this discovery it was clear: the gods, those highest *embodiments* of "truth" and "reality," must once again be reborn. For the logic of the inconceivable -- of that which cannot be imagined, cannot be *thought* -- was quickly worked out. If X is inconceivable -- if X cannot possibly be an object of thought -- then, obviously, X is not even a *possible* subject of discourse, which means: it is not possible to make statements, reflect, or even ask questions *about* it. Indeed -- and these further

impossibilities lie deeper still -- verbalized awareness cannot even focus on, attend to, or turn to it, cannot, in fact, relate to it in any conceivable way. And so we knew: even the supremely real, if inconceivable, cannot possibly be, but can only *seem* to be talked or thought about. And as a corollary of this we knew that whenever supreme reality or the gods are or rather *seem* to be talked or thought about, the result can only be pure fabrication, sheer "myth." For, obviously, just to think or speak of the inconceivable as having characteristics, or as knowing, acting, or existing, is to misrepresent it entirely, is to portray it as being what it absolutely is not. Or just as obviously and more plainly, it is nonsense -- no matter how they or it is identified or conceived, the supposed subject of all such sentences *does not exist*.

Once the gods had become inconceivable, the one thing we still *could* do -- in words -- was take back all the myths which had reduced the unthinkable to the conceived, had processed mind-breaking reality into verbalized *unreality*. And so we pointed out over and over again in and through Dionysius and many others that God has no name or knowledge, is not "good," and doesn't "exist." We realized and then taught in the Vedanta that *brahman*, being "actionless," never "does anything." As the Mahayana we made it clear that Perfect Wisdom "neither knows nor perceives," and we explained that the Perfection of Wisdom is perfect precisely "because of its nonexistence." Wearing the body and mind of Plotinus, we warned against diminishing and falsifying the One by thinking of it as able to "identify" or "distinguish" itself. "In the most hidden recesses of its nature," so we or Eriugena wrote, joyfully, 1200 years ago, the unthinkable divinity is unknown "even to itself."

Just in itself this absolute demythologizing of the gods was -- relatively speaking, at least -- easy. In our relation to reality construed primarily as "reality out there" or as "the gods out there," we were able -- early in our collective (and similarly early, frequently, in our individual) history -- to acknowledge that it transcends conception. And we were then able to apply *to* such reality and to all our picturings of it the obvious, and obviously relevant, rule: all would-be *conceivings* of the inconceivable misrepresent its very nature and so are utter falsifications of it -- are pure myth -- from the first word on. In Eriugena and in many others we have adjusted to, or even learned to delight in, the absolute unthinkability of such reality "out there." But on the other hand: what is harder, or even all but impossible, for us to accept or merely take up for honest consideration is the applicability -- one might say, the *obvious* applicability -- of all these discoveries and adjustments to reality *in here*, that is, to "ourselves."

For remarkably, and in fact: that we as *conceived* beings -- as apparent topics of conversation, as seeming objects of thought -- are pure myth is a truth more readily accessible to us than is the mythical nature of any conceived *god*. Used instinctively, spontaneously, and blindly, in the way we usually use *all* words, the sound 'I' *seems* to relate to reality, seems, indeed, to relate most explicitly, comprehensively, and urgently to reality now experienced as "in here." But as we invariably find, if we then attempt to define, or just to locate or discern that "I," we can do neither, so that, as we have already admitted in the words of the Buddha, Hume, Kant, and numerous others: the "I" is a verbal, not an ontological, phenomenon. It is a linguistic nexus or function. Its reality is "formal."

The "I" as talked and thought about -- the "I" as *conceived* -- is fiction. All my questions about who "I" am and what "I" should do, and all my utterances describing what "I" did, experienced, think, want, know, or feel -- together with my perception that "I" exist, or that "I" am -- are questions, utterances, and perceptions occurring within the realm of myth. In relation to *reality*, they are empty, are sheer nonsense -- the conceived subject of all these declarative and interrogative sentences *does not*

exist. But on the other hand: even after all these clouds of myth are dissipated, and after the purely verbal functions from which those clouds emanated have been seen for what they are, that immediately experienced "in here" remains. Indeed, now that it is no longer enveloped and pervaded, and so hidden, by myth, it can at last be *known*. And in its infinitely subtle and elusive -- in its word-transcending presence -- the innermost reality of "in here" is immediately *experienced* as sharing in the mystery, the numinosity, the dense, inconceivable reality of the real "out there." It is like -- indeed it is hard to distinguish it *from* -- "the gods."

As immediately available to introspection, these truths are "obvious." Certainly they are more accessible than similar truths about the gods or reality "out there." But we resist them with a singular determination we display nowhere else, and we resist for one reason: awareness of the inconceivability and of the elusive, mysterious, even godlike reality which finally constitute "in here" is incompatible with our desire or virtual compulsion -- the deepest wish of the "rational animal"! -- to exist as myth. It interferes with, frustrates, and complicates that tenaciously clung to form of life which myth alone makes possible: to seem to ourselves to be objects of thought, to be *conceived*.

For from early on -- ever since we embraced, with such trusting ardor, the diligently selected name behind which our bewildered parents concealed, even from themselves, the sheer mystery we were and are -- we have been entranced by and entangled in myth, in *a* myth, one immeasurably more vivid, intimate, and enchanting than the myth of Olympus. It is the I-myth, based on the protagonist "I" and revolving around the primary plot "my life." As our mother tongue led us into the realms of "objectivity" and "subjectivity," that name -- and that even more hypnotically compelling pronoun 'I' -- encompassed us, sealed us in, and defined us. They made us conceivable. They posited us as the possible subject or object of countless sentences. Contained, fixed, and defined by them, that indivisible, subtly unthinkable "in here" was transformed into a mythical place more vivid and palpable than Olympus, into a mythical life more urgent than Athena's or Odin's, into a character just as mythical, much closer, and, to us at least, incomparably more "interesting" and "unforgettable" than Hera, Indra, or Thor. Here was the -- *mythical* -- character with which we, henceforth, would identify "ourselves."

In the vast and far-reaching effects of this enchantment and this capture an ultimate fatality can be discerned. For ever since those two events, and as their result, we have been talking and thinking -- even more frequently, familiarly, and earnestly than Homer and Hesiod about the gods -- about the kind of person "I" am, about what "I" do, have done, and will do, about "my" experience, about what "I" think about the world and know about "myself." Even while attempting to explore, catch the attention of, alter, control, or ward off objectivity's world "out there," we have been ardently engaged - - "in here" -- in building up "my life"; we have been intently examining, worrying about, dreaming about, evaluating, reorienting, and in numerous other ways relating to, that now utterly mythologized "I."

Even before we are twenty, therefore, we may already have shed the Olympians. We may have dismissed the gods, ancient bearers of numinous reality "out there," as "dead." But with virtual unanimity: even after time has carried us, silently, far into adulthood, childhood's innermost certainty -- the mythical self's self-creating axiom that the sound 'I' identifies and fixes "in here," rendering it transparent -- remains intact. Even in "maturity," consequently, we continue perceiving that mysterious "in here" mythically as an "I" amenable to identification and description, as a verbally accessible "I" one might try to understand, as engaged in a "my life" which can be narrated and perhaps even explained.

Well past fifty we often take it as given that we can focus attention on and relate to "ourselves." Even then we unhesitatingly talk and think -- with the fundamentalist's literalist certainties -- about what "I" have done or intend to do, about what "I" experienced last week or might experience in the future, about what "I" think or want or should have done, about the "kind of person" "I" have become. etc. We still find genuine content and meaning -- still discern a singular urgency -- in the subjectless sentences "I am," "I exist." At sixty, outwardly, the child we once were will have become unrecognizable, but even then we may well believe, just as we did fifty years ago, that we can be thought of, that we can be "conceived."

In these and countless other ways we continue to cover up the perfect mystery -- the imperceptible and unimaginable *reality* -- we are, just as theologians less alert and more quarrelsome than Dionysius or Eriugena cover the mystery and reality of "God." And later in life when that reality - - *our* reality -- may begin to stir or even to intrude itself forcibly on our attention, our first response is a stony unwillingness even to admit it, just as with serious illness or any other highly unpleasant fact.

That stirring and quickening, deep within us, of our own reality typically comes "later," if it comes at all, because that is the time, generally, when the mythmaking impulse ebbs and facts begin crowding in, leaving us little choice but to surrender at least some increasingly implausible fictions, to give in here and there to "the real." Our inconceivable reality now stirs and intrudes because at this stage time has already processed and left behind the greater and best part of the mythical I's invariably most appealing side -- its mythical future -- leaving but a few shapeless shreds. It suggests itself to our attention because, as happened in our relation to the gods a millennium and a half ago, the pretense that we can "know" or even bring into clear *focus* a defined and delimited "I" is each year harder to maintain. It quickens and turns somewhere deep within us because sooner or later, all but inevitably, awareness will sometime happen to slip or fall out of the syllable 'I' and then discover, if only imperfectly and briefly, the sheer mystery of "in here" -- once this initiation has taken place, the word-made I's power to enchant can never be perfectly restored.

In this and other ways -- "later" -- our own previously unheeded reality now offers itself to us. And we in turn spontaneously and unwaveringly *resist* it because that stirring and that intruding put at risk consciousness' most profound instinct, one which by now is also our most deeply engrained habit, the choice we all too blindly have become. For what is now put at risk is the very form or mode of our existence -- is the life-and-death issue of what it is, finally, we are up to, what it is we ultimately *seek*. And in this greatest and most fateful of all matters our simultaneously instinctive and habitual preference is unmistakably clear. We prefer -- for *ourselves* -- myth rather than reality. Without hesitation, absolutely, even desperately: we would rather be fictions which are *conceivable* than something boundless and real which cannot be thought.

The intimate illusion now at risk -- our life-long central myth -- is the mythical "I," the purely fictional verbally accessible, verbally self-transparent self. It is the illusion that the mythical acts portrayed in the I-myth as "being aware of ourselves" and "relating to ourselves" are actual processes, is our habitual attribution of existence -- the result of confounding words and reality -- to the subject of I-sentences. As soon as our name and the hypnotic 'I' offered themselves -- decades ago -- to awareness, we abandoned ourselves, eagerly, to their all-encompassing embrace. We became -- or, rather, we dreamed ourselves to be -- that mythical "I." That is the myth which we have lived ever since, the myth to which reality now, at last, lays siege.

Let us review those decades -- our "lives"! -- in the light of this singular and fateful devil's

bargain we have made. For on the one hand, and as that event's most dramatic consequence: all these years we have failed to live within -- have lived, utterly oblivious to -- our own unfathomable and inconceivable mystery. Instead, as it enclosed us, the mythical "I" delimited and diminished us, made us less than we are. It reduced our boundless and unimaginable *reality* to a particular mythical appearance. It made us -- relative to ourselves -- "small." But in doing so it also granted our most fervent wish: to be -- to *seem* to ourselves to be -- conceivable. For now that we were conceivable, we would be enabled, henceforth, to direct our thoughts towards, reflect on, and relate to "ourselves." From now on we would be able to refer to "our" birth and death, and to the many stranded story of "our lives," as to given, perfectly self-evident things. It became possible for us to say and think and believe, with error's invincible self-confidence, what all these years we have been saying and thinking and actually *believing* -- that now "I" am doing this and yesterday experienced that, that "I" intend to do that, that "I am," and that "I" am like, know, feel, think, or want this or that.

This our preferred mode of existence -- the only one we can "imagine" for ourselves -- is now at risk, for reality has begun to deal ever less gently with *all* our fantasies. And naturally we resist this slowly gathering siege with unprecedented steadfastness -- reality is now threatening our way of life itself. In part this is simply because we are now habituated to a purely mythical existence as finite and thinkable -- it is the only form of life we know. And in part it is because reality chooses to intrude just at that time of *general* abatement, when, with each passing day, we feel less and less "invulnerable," feel steadily more fragile, "smaller," less capable of bold actions and new directions. And so in consequence: now even as it shows itself to us if only most obscurely and from afar, we lack the nerve even to contemplate, as a mere *possibility*, our own unfathomable mystery, our immensity, our numinous reality extending infinitely beyond all conception and all myth.

But in addition to these partial reasons, and much more importantly and decisively: after all those decades during which the conceived and verbalized "I" has held center stage "in here," we now equate -- automatically and absolutely and doggedly equate -- that *fiction's* dissolution with *ours*. We cling to a purely *imaginary* life as to our own, defending *it* as if fighting for our own survival, and horrified at the prospect of *its* disappearance, as if what is real "in here" would then cease to be. To justify our stony resolve to ourselves, we keep telling ourselves that if we aren't that "I" we have been talking and thinking about all these years, then we cannot imagine *what* we might be. And naturally we are immediately reassured by this "argument" which our desperation keeps advancing, all the more because it is in its factual premise perfectly true: other than by words and images -- other than *mythically* -- there *is* no way in which we can picture, imagine, or direct our attention to "ourselves," no other way in which we can be "conceived."

All this enables us to better understand the striking historical paradox: we demythologize the gods, with comparative ease, long before it even *occurs* to us to demythologize ourselves. And more individually and personally, it explains why -- of all the myths we accumulate so easily early on, and and then later on will slowly and grudgingly surrender -- the myth of our own conceivability should be the last, and the most painful, unnerving, and difficult, to let slip from our grasp. That series of ever more dismal abdications will likely begin as we are compelled to abandon various fictions about the people, things, and gods -- about "the world" -- "out there." But then we shall have to turn to "ourselves." In its early stages we will perform this work, too, with relative ease, for we will limit ourselves at first to discarding various non-essential, more or less arbitrary, more or less ornamental variants of the central conceivability myth. And even as they are abandoned, others remain or new ones can be "conceived" -

- the real is one and unchanging, but illusion manifold and prolific, and can always be formulated anew.

Then at a certain point -- though now after greater resistance, and with both fear and sadness -- we will acknowledge the futility of further maintaining, and so will begin to relinquish, our more urgent and seemingly indispensable, though still "particular," fictions about ourselves. We will let go of the myth of "invulnerability" and of fictional declarations and predictions relating to "the person I'll be," to "really still quite young," to "much time left," to the assuagements of "I'll do that sometime," etc. We will acknowledge and slowly come to terms with the perception that "I" have become *this* person rather than that other I dreamed of, that "I" have done this, but have not done, and never will do, that. Though with reluctance, we will gradually let our gaze drift towards, and even perhaps begin adapting ourselves to, that impoverished, precarious, all-too-profane, much-too-temporary "right now" which the once glorious "my future" has now, in the end, become.

But even as reality wrings these ever more distasteful capitulations from us, we will still wrap ourselves within and may not even think of *questioning* the myth -- that what is real "in here" can be approached verbally -- which we, from childhood, have lived, and from which, now, we can scarcely disentangle or even distinguish ourselves. We will give up countless particular fantasies, but still cling doggedly to the central myth of ourselves -- to our preferred mode of existence -- as conceivable beings. For us nothing is harder than to break out of that "mode" and that I-creating fantasy, out of what has been, for decades, our "form of life."

In practical terms this means that nothing is harder -- nothing is more "against the grain," nothing more unlikely -- than that we should part with the habits of thought, acquired nearly a lifetime ago and hardened through decades, in and through which that form of life incessantly, concretely, and most intimately realizes itself. And perhaps paradoxically this means: as time passes, we shall be required to surrender many things, but the hardest of all -- and the one that comes last, if it ever comes at all -- will be to renounce our habitual enchantment by the stream of casual, often scarcely noticed word-strings pulsing faintly through awareness. For as airy and seemingly insignificant as they are, they are the curiously spellbinding narrators who incessantly extend, uphold, and renew the myth. They are its guarantors, confirming each waking moment our conceivability. They it is who moment by moment, and most intimately and persuasively, seem to display to us our own reality and the reality of "our lives."

It is therefore possible -- indeed it is perhaps what is most likely -- that having surrendered all *particular* myths, we will yet continue to inhabit, all the way to the end, the now empty shell of myth's bare form. All the way to that "end," then, those word-strings will still seem to bring into focus and to illuminate everything "in here." They will still seem to define "me." It is true that their *contents* will have changed, for the depleted I-myth of "old age" tends as it were to be the very opposite of the Olympian myth, tends to be colorless, arid, muted, a lament rather than an entertainment. But the myth's rigid verbal templates remain fixed. And so indefinitely, and without change, we may go on mechanically thinking and saying, and just as mechanically *believing*, that "Yesterday I did this," "This afternoon I'll do that," "I've been there," "I want this," "I'm learning or have forgotten that" -- all variants, familiar and habitual from decades of constant use, of the I-myth's incessant leitmotifs: "*I* act," "*I* am in space and time," "*I* have experiences," "*I* want," "*I* know," etc. Each year we will relinquish more substance, will seem to ourselves to have become still "less," but without change we may go on and on thinking, and attaching meaning to, and drawing superstitious reassurance from, the I-myth's self-creating premise that "*I* am," that "*I* exist." By then we will perhaps have surrendered everything

else, but even as death approaches, we may remain as convinced as we were fifty or seventy years ago that "we" can be thought of and can relate to "ourselves," that "we" can be conceived.

It may even be that all *alternatives* to this scenario belong to anomaly or amount, even, to miracle. But then: at all times the unknown exceeds the known. And the strange and "anomalous" is infinitely vaster than the familiar -- of all the things that are or even are just imagined, is there but one that was "predicted"? And more telling still: uncontained and inconceivable reality, which in its pure mystery shatters all myth's templates and norms, defines and has already boundlessly *established* anomaly; and the sheer act of being itself -- pure reality's naked, mind-breaking, utterly unqualified and utterly unanalyzable 'is' -- has already defined miracle, has put in place, eternally, what "you wouldn't believe." So that finally -- and let us then hope that this happens in good time, well before the I-myth's long-apprehended, much talked about, and never concretely experienced "my death" -- something may drive or induce us to break with fiction, and we will decide or recognize that it is time *now* to abandon the pretence of being, and the vain attempt to be, finite and imaginable, time now, instead and at last, for reality, for "our" reality.

Then finally -- and let us in fact hope for the additional miracle that we then will have many years, even decades, to inhabit the consequence -- we will take upon ourselves that one act towards which all these years have aimed us, that last surrender in which is fulfilled in us our surprising destiny: having been stripped, piece by piece, of all finitude and all unreality, to have nothing left in the end but trying on, nervously, our divinity. Coming as it does after all those other, easier, merely partial capitulations, I do not know what crisis or mortification, what sudden panic, illumination, recklessness, revolt, or sea of weariness with the conceivable will now precipitate this our last great death and rebirth, our final and hardest work, our last hope, our secret and sublime purpose. But at that time we will find ourselves awakening from the dream all those decades have been. We will break with and leave behind, absolutely, that devil's bargain which made them and that dream: to blind ourselves to our own reality, just so that we might *seem* imaginable, might seem to be possible objects of thought.

Undoubtedly: as the critical moment approaches we will look and consider and speculate, and then look again. We will hesitate. Again and then again we will attempt (vainly) to imagine or somehow test "the inconceivable." But then soon after that final surrender gestating within us crosses its unknown threshold and becomes inevitable, we will all at once find ourselves being carried out into our own edgeless mystery. We will sense something infinite, nameless, and utterly unfamiliar -- our own *reality* -- flowing into and through us. Freed from conception, "in here" will be a place, or freedom from place, unencompassed, undivided, and unmapped by words. Where "we" were, there will be dense, boundless mystery uncluttered by any "I," by "I do" or "I want" or "I know," by a slowly put together "my life" or a constantly changing how "I" am.

Demythologized, that incomparably subtle and elusive "in here" which the diphthong 'I' once seemed to enclose and define reveals its mystery and its infinity. But even as we enter into and begin to inhabit -- even as we realize we now are and always have *been* -- that oceanic something else, it is unlikely that those around us will discern the change. We ourselves will have outgrown and shaken off -- will be beyond -- myth. "In here" will no longer be inhabited by an "I" which exists, acts, wants, and knows, which has "experiences" and a "my life." Within our own unthinkable reality we will be unidentified, unnamed, edgeless, neither "many" nor "one." It will not occur to us to dream that "we" can relate to, observe, ponder, or conceive "ourselves" -- to ask how "I" really feel about "myself" or "my life" will seem as odd as asking in all seriousness how Zeus really feels about his. Instead of

looking at the inconceivable exclusively from the outside, and theologically, we will now, just like the gods, *be* it. But at the same time, and as it were in spite of this unprecedented transmutation "in here," we will now know to be true of us what we also have long known to hold for those gods: that it is only as pure myth -- only falsely, only as what we absolutely are not -- that we can exist *publicly*, that is, that we can be or rather *seem* to be perceived.

Therefore we will continue to act and speak as a particular "I" distinguished by a particular birth, name, and life, by various traits, plans, wants, feelings, thoughts, etc. As unsayable and real, we ourselves will inhabit "in here" a myth-free vastness where there is no "I," and no "acts," "events," or "experiences." When that soundless, ghostlike syllable 'I' phosphoresces momentarily *within* awareness, we may marvel at its own sheer mystery, but not associate it with a referent; when sentence fragments concerning "my" remembered or intended actions flit silently past, as they often will, we may notice them, but we will attach no meaning -- no connection with *reality* -- to them.

But in conversation we will unhesitatingly speak of how "I" "drove to town," "visited X," "experienced Y," "want to read Z," etc. Our talk about "my" birthday or childhood or age, and our conscientious plannings and preparings for "my death," will be perfectly free and easy, unencumbered as they will be by thoughts of myth's "my birth" and "my death." "In here" we will not discern anything like "self-knowledge" or even "self-consciousness," for we will have entered into the perfect self-oblivion of the gods -- in the "hidden recesses" of our nature we will be, just like them, utterly "unknown" to ourselves. Indeed, we will have passed beyond *all* sight, will transcend all possible "viewing" by gods or men. But in conversation we will still be able, just as before, to describe, discuss, and analyze our mythical unreality in unending detail, for, again: it is only as what we are not, only as *myth*, that the uncontained mystery we *are* can be discussed, analyzed, or "explained," can be or rather *seem* to be talked about or thought about at all.

In those days the horizonless transparency "in here" will not be complicated by the concept 'is' or the concept 'is not', but outwardly we will still feign to "exist." Our strides will not be restricted by the syllables 'I walk'. When we meet, 'you' and 'I' will no longer keep us apart. "My" death won't be that hard, for it won't occur. I imagine now, most likely mistakenly, that we will be visited now and then in those days by obscure glimpsings or premonitions of ourselves as like a river, or winds, or weather, as unpredictable sinuosities or as protean worlds of invisible energies, all of which move and change and "act," sometimes even dramatically, but without effort, explanation, or thought. At times we will feel "in here" as a cool mass of darkly gleaming ore at rest deep underground, dense with mystery. A fleeting sensation of being cloudless sky, radiant and infinite and utterly transparent just because of its emptiness, its absolute transcendence even of all "is-ness," will sometime pulse through us. Or it will be as if we are embryo in its first moment, a mysterious quickening, still wholly unformed, of essence and energy and still utterly unknown life.

But then if in those days we *are* visited by such glimmerings, we will soon recall that they, like all our previous self-picturings and self-comprehendings, are glimpsings of ourselves, not as what we are, but as myth. They transpose and falsify reality by suggesting there is something we are or are like. They conceal our very essence, which is to be inconceivable, a mystery *never to be thought*. For by now we will have recognized the fact -- and may even have begun to adapt ourselves to it -- that no conceivable thing is or could be like "us," and "we" like no conceivable -- that is, mythical -- thing. Indeed, by now we may be half-comfortable with the recognition that there is no "we" which might be like anything else. For by now we will have begun at last to inhabit and even perhaps feel at home in

what has *always* been the reality of "in here," has always been *our* reality. As before, we will eat, sleep, walk, laugh, write, talk, forget, and cry. It may well be that we will be better, happier, more spontaneous, perhaps even more "colorful" than we were before. And "you" and "I" will do and be all these things -- and this is the great mind-breaking fact -- just out of our very knowledge, final and boundless, that 'you' and above all 'I' are diphthongs, or rather pure mysteries themselves, to which no conceivable content or meaning can be attached.

Having broken, early enough, out of the mythical and conceivable, and so having fallen out into our own boundless and inconceivable reality, we will have time for at least a taste of the gods' eternal adventure. For that infinite realm -- the eternal oneness of the real and the unthinkable -- we now so tardily and so hesitantly enter is the condition or place which has been theirs forever. We have known for centuries, after all, that the contentless syllable 'gods' is as irrelevant to *divine* reality as we soon shall know 'you' and 'I' to be to ours -- that is the guarantee that they, and we, are not mythical. That is the proof, as it were, that they, and we, *are*. And so along with everything else we shall slowly realize: as soon as we become as free of the 'I' as the gods are free of 'the gods', there will no longer be any conceivable way to distinguish the unthinkable "in here" from the inconceivable "out there," no way to separate *their* word-transcending reality from *ours*. Even if we should not wish to receive them, how, then, shall we be able to *avoid* certain clues or even tastes suggesting how the gods, in their beginningless experiment, may have fared?

All too soon, perhaps, we will have felt enter us the first waves of a terminal weariness, an exhaustion all the more ominous for being divine. For it may be that existence as an absolutely unknown and unknowable and unbounded something which cannot be verbalized, identified, or conceived -- existence as a nameless, numberless "one" or "One" which cannot be called either "person" or "thing," and of which we cannot even say that it "is" or "is not" -- inevitably sinks after just a few eons into an equally boundless vacuity, an unremitting ennui from which there is no escape. To the inconceivable, that is, to anything that is not mythical, eternity would then seem a prison, immortality the greatest torment. All too soon, perhaps, our one pitiable consolation in all that boredom and futility -- a consolation the gods long since wore out -- will be the grim joke that as for "emptiness," we have now had our fill.

Or what is just as likely (for right now we have no way even to guess at probabilities): we may begin soon to discover that the mode of being in which pure reality and utter inconceivability are one is the celestial paradise of supreme joy, divinity's true mark. Perhaps the gods themselves sometimes tremble in sheer gratitude for their very being, unimaginable as it is even to them. Perhaps their uncontained and uncontainable joy then overflows, again and yet again, in the making of vaster, subtler, more intricate, more difficult to create worlds. To be edgeless, weightless, indiscernible -- because utterly perfect -- transparency; to be unencompassable and inconceivable being utterly transcending even the most divine knowing; to be uncontained, and then, eternally, to be reaching farther out towards, and happily never touching, a limit; to be, always, more; each day to be present to oneself as more inconceivable -- as more and more the very *opposite* of an object of thought -- than ever before; again and again, to lose track of oneself while being, in the very same moment, the one who escaped; to be pure mystery falling eternally out into ever greater, darker, denser, more mysterious mysteries -- such are a few of the divine pleasures we may soon be required to taste.

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NOTE: Quotations in the fifth paragraph are taken from *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines & Its Verse Summary*, p. 143 (tr. Edward Conze); *Buddhist Texts Through the Ages*, p. 151 (ed. Edward Conze et al.); and Eriugena's *Periphyseon*, III, p. 181 (tr. I.P. Sheldon-Williams).