

Moses and the Deep Magic

The deep magic – that is what CS Lewis named the great mystery that orders the chain of events in history. You'll know about the deep magic if you were lucky enough to have had someone read *The Chronicles of Narnia* to you when you were a child – or if you read them yourself. CS Lewis was a British novelist, poet, academic, medievalist, literary critic, essayist, and lay theologian who, among his many other pursuits, held professorships at Cambridge and Oxford. Along with William Shakespeare, he is honored in the Poets Corner of Westminster Abbey. The *Chronicles of Narnia* have been translated into 46 different languages, so if you've never read them, now is not too late. The first book was written during the time of the Blitzkrieg, when many British children were sent out of London to the countryside for safety. They tell the story of Narnia, from its creation to its destruction. Except for one, all the human characters are children.

The first question is: what is this burning bush and what is the Great I AM?

The story of Moses, the burning bush and the great I AM is a story of deep magic – so deep that the story itself predates the existence of the Semitic tribes that became the people of Israel by at least two thousand years: a child, born in secret and put in a basket made of rushes and pitch, set in a river by his mother; rescued and raised by royalty and given a mandate by the Great I AM to bring his people together in order that a great nation might be founded.

The Deep Magic exists before time itself – it is what the theologian Paul Tillich called the Ground of Being. In Narnia, a land beyond time, the great lion Aslan describes the Deep Magic as being both evil and good. The two sides are constantly at war with one another. Sometimes it seems good has prevailed, sometime evil. The difference, Aslan explains, is that there is an even deeper magic that only the good has access to – it is the magic of sacrifice, the kind of sacrifice Jesus was willing to make when nothing else – not teaching, not healing, not fighting – when nothing else is enough.

Now, in our story, Moses was taking care of his father-in-law's sheep and had let them wander up a mountain when he saw a fire, a bush that was burning and burning. Curiosity led him to go closer when something told him to stop. STOP! This is holy ground you're standing on. Moses was terrified. He covered his face, not daring to see what was talking to him. "Moses! I, the God of your ancestors, am telling you that I have seen my people's suffering and enough is enough! You, my friend, are going to go back to Egypt and let Pharaoh know that you plan to lead my people out of Egypt." Moses was not amused. After all other excuses are used up, Moses says, "the people are going to want to know which god you are. They'll ask, who sent me – what am I supposed to say to them? Tell them "I AM" sent you.

The second question is: what does this story accomplish? Maybe the answer is obvious: people have stories about how they came to be where they are. The Garden of Eden story – also part of the ancient human legends – gets humans out of the paradise of total dependency and into the adult world of work and responsibility.

Moses and the story of the escape from Egypt followed by years of being displaced, living in tent cities, moving away from danger, to find water, to just keep surviving – it's beginning to sound familiar, isn't it?

Epic legends always report epic numbers of people involved. The number of people escaping Egypt would have been in the millions – 600,000 men with their corresponding wives and children and animals. The immigration of a million people into Germany has changed the face of this country. The so-called Promised Land however, was no

treasure – it was at best a scattering of villages, some of them – like Jericho - the poor remnants of once-important cities. It was the Dark Ages of the Bronze Age.

There are a number of interesting stories that the remains of great empires tell us. One that, for me as an American, hits home is King Shu-Sin's response to the pesky nomadic Amorites who kept crossing the border in search of greener pastures: he built a 270 kilometer wall between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to keep them out. That was 4,000 years ago - near the end of the fabulously evolved and powerful Ur dynasty. Ur – or the neo-Sumerian dynasty – lasted 200 years. The United States has been a dynasty for over 100 years.

The answer to my final question – what does this story mean to me now? – is that, if the biblical prophets and legends teach us anything at all, it is that the empires we build, when they become too big and too arrogant, will fall. When I think of Narnia and the Deep Magic, it occurs to me that, when humanity's ability to think humanely becomes disabled by greed, the Deep Magic steps in to correct the balance of things.

We humans are only part of creation. And we are dependent on the rest for survival, but we easily forget this.

Jesus showed us another way to live with and for each other – a non-violent way so radical that the empire of the time could only respond with violence.

When he had had enough of crowds and worry and frustration, Jesus went back to nature: the mountains, the water – to where he could hear God's voice, connect to the Deep Magic.

A few days ago I received in my emails a quote, written by the American author, poet and environmental activist, Walter Berry. On that day I was not in the mood to hear his idealistic ideas and deleted the message. A day later, as I was searching for a way to get myself and this sermon out of the wilderness of frustration that I feel as I watch the fragments of my country's democracy be torn apart, I rescued Berry's words from the trash:

When despair for the world grows in me and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children's lives might be, I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds. I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water. And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light. For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Let us rest in the grace of the world; Let us practice kindness;

Rosalind Gnatt – February 5, 2017