



Samson (I)

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Samson and Delilah are famous in Western culture. Their story, dramatic and emotional, impresses our sentimentalism and, therefore, the lyrical stage has found it attractive. John Milton wrote (even though he was almost blind) a drama, *Samson Agonistes*, and Handel used it for his oratorio. The tale of Samson was the subject for at least a dozen operas, including the Saint-Saëns' masterpiece and a libretto written by Voltaire. The story, reduced to its main idea, became part of Western culture: a deceiving, treacherous woman is a "Delilah"; a very strong man is "Samsonian." Yet the tale hides a spiritual meaning, not only a religious, but also a metaphysical one.

From the start, the story is saying: beware of the hidden meaning! Dante would have said: "Aguzza qui, lettor, ben gli occhi al vero"¹! Indeed, at the very beginning, the angel of God announces the miraculous birth of a child.

Every time an old cycle is dying, a *savior* descends from Heavens to rescue the seeds of the new Cosmos and replace the old world with a new one. The sacred writings mark this event describing the miraculous nativity of a child. A trace of this spiritual wonder was perpetuated in our "childish" explanation of birth. The stork brings the newborn to the parents lowering the baby through the chimney. The stork is an emblem of the supreme Principle. When this bird flies, it looks like a flying snake. The "Feathered Serpent" unifies the bird and the serpent, Heaven and Earth, illustrating the Principle, One without a second.² The chimney is a representation of the *Axis Mundi*; it is the spiritual way of the fire to ascend to Heavens. The "elected" neophyte will learn the "fire route" to accomplish the Liberation. The Divine Presence uses the same route to come down in our world as *avatâra*.³

¹ "Reader, if you seek truth, sharpen your eyes, / for here the veil of allegory thins / and may be pierced by any man who tries," Dante's *Purgatorio* VIII.19-21 (Mentor Classic, 1961, tr. John Ciardi).

² Quetzalcoatl, the lord of wisdom, a most important god of ancient Mesoamerica, is the "Feathered Serpent." The flying dragon of the Chinese tradition, *Hamsa*, the swan of Hindu tradition, and the ancient Dacians' standard – a flying dragon with a wolf head, are closely related to the same symbolism. The peacock is also the bird-snake, an image of the supreme Principle; when the peacock flies, its tail is folded, that means the World is absorbed into the Principle. The tail is the World, the "mortal" part of the Principle. A Romanian legend specifies that only the stork was capable of passing through the "Clashing Mountains" (the Sundoor, the passage to immortality), yet the rocks cut its tail. See B. Petriceicu-Hasdeu, *Etymologicum Magnum Romaniae*, Editura Minerva, 1976, p. 214. Coomaraswamy also mentions this legend in his *Symplegades* (Trad. Art, p. 533). The stork losing its tail illustrates Samson losing his seven locks.

³ In full accordance with Hindu tradition, Meister Eckhart compares our "soul" with a spark. The spark's terrestrial father (the "unworthy" husband) is the fire, the wood is the mother, and the other sparks are its brothers and sisters. Yet the spark ascends to the sky, to its real father – Heaven (the "spiritual parent" of

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The tale about the stork bringing the newborn gets its reality from two sacred concepts: the “spiritual paternity” and the *avatâra*. The real father of any being is the Principle, the spiritual Sun. In Greek mythology, Zeus is the “Feathered Serpent.” He takes the form of a swan to visit Leda, Helen and Pollux being – as a result – their immortal children. Zeus is the divine father and husband. Tyndareus is Leda’s mortal husband, the “unworthy” one. Zeus is also Hercules’ father. He takes the appearance of Alcmene’s husband, Amphitryon, to trick the virtuous woman. Alcmene’s chastity is a substitute for virginity; actually, she is the Virgin. Zeus made the divine night of love last three times longer, which is a sign announcing a miraculous birth. Amphitryon is the “unworthy” husband and that is also the function of the suitors in Ulysses’ home. The myth clearly reveals that Zeus and Amphitryon are “twins,” having the same appearance. Like Pollux and Castor, they represent the immortal and the mortal “soul,” *Spiritus* and the body-soul aggregate, the Self and the *ego*. The traditional doctrines consider that any being has a mortal and a divine father; without the divine one, the being is not going “to be.”⁴

In the same way, any child is potentially an *avatâra*, coming down into the world along the *Axis Mundi* (the chimney). Any newborn is also a potential candidate for the spiritual journey; in fact, just a few of them are qualified: the “elected” ones. An *avatâra* is a divine child who is more than a miraculous newborn. This child is an already liberated being whose essence is one with the divine father’s essence. And only an overwhelming spiritual compassion makes the divine child accept the sacrifice and come down into the world. The *avatâra* doesn’t need a spiritual realization having already escaped the mundane bondage, and hanging by the noose of the “Golden Chain.” The *avatâra* will embark though, on a spiritual path just for the sake of mankind, wanting to establish a pattern to be followed, to be a guide, to give a personal example.

There are usually two ways to announce the birth of an *avatâra*. The first one presents a very old couple, with a barren wife. They can be king and queen or just a poor old man and his old wife. The second one tells about a widow or a virgin giving birth to an “illegitimate” child of spiritual paternity. In the virgin’s case, often her father tries to kill the newborn; a prophecy told him that the child will take his place. Both scenarios are revealing the change of the cosmic cycles. The old king is the dying world; he is now the dragon, the same dragon he beheaded as solar hero at the beginning of the cycle.⁵ His son or grandson is the new solar hero and the *savior* who will rejuvenate the Cosmos.⁶ The infertility is also a characteristic of the dragon; *ab intra*, in non-manifestation, the dragon is sterile, blind, without feet.⁷

fire), forgetting its family. Moreover, for love of its heavenly father the spark forgets itself, because going up through the cold air it will become extinguished. See Maître Eckhart, *Les Traités*, Éd. du Seuil, 1971, p. 113.

⁴ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Bugbear of Literacy*, Perennial Books, 1979, p. 92 ff. In Celtic tradition, Cú Chulaind, for example, has at the same time a divine (Lug) and a mortal father (See *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, Penguin Books, 1981, p. 133).

⁵ The dragon Vritra tells Indra, the solar hero: “You are now what I was before.” *Panchavimsha Brâhmana* (XXV.15.4) specifies, “The Serpents are the Suns” (Coomaraswamy, *La doctrine*, p. 38).

⁶ The meaning of the “solar hero” has to be stressed. The “solar” character illustrates his spiritual qualification, not a physical phenomenon. Never a corporeal element symbolizes another corporeal element. It would be superfluous. Always the corporeal order symbolizes a higher order, as the spiritual one. That is the law of symbols.

⁷ In the unity of the metaphysical order, the barren woman and the virgin are not different from the dragon.

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The birth of Jesus Christ is very familiar to the Western world. We have here all the elements that announce the birth of an *avatâra*. The mother is the Virgin, the Hindu *Shakti*. She has two husbands, the “unworthy” one, Joseph, and the divine one, the Holy Spirit.⁸ An aspect of the dragon and of the old cycle is Herod who will try to kill baby Jesus. “The massacre of the Innocents” (Matthew 2:13 ff.) belongs to the same spiritual pattern as the birth of Perseus⁹ and of Moses.¹⁰

Abraham and Sarah are old and they don’t have a child. God says to Abraham: “your wife Sarah shall bear you a son whom you are to name Isaac” (Genesis 17:19). Sarah laughs since she is old and infertile; yet Isaac is born miraculously. In the same manner, the Angel Gabriel is sent by God to announce to the virgin Mary that she will conceive and bear a son and she must name him Jesus; and Mary is amazed since she is a virgin (Luke 1:32-35). A similar thing happens to Hannah. “The Lord had made her barren” (1 Samuel 1:6) and Hannah prayed before God, and her husband thought she was drunk.¹¹ God listened to her prayer and gave her a child, Samuel. Manoah’s wife is also barren, without children.

The angel of the Lord appeared to this woman and said to her, ‘... you will conceive and bear a son. No razor is to touch his head, for the boy shall be God’s nazirite from his mother’s womb. It is he who will begin to rescue Israel from the power of the Philistines.’ ... The woman gave birth to a son and called him Samson. (Judges 13)

We are told, almost without veil, that Samson is an *avatâra*, an image of “Lord of the World,” unifying the sacerdotal and temporal powers. He is predestined to become, like Christ, through his sacrifice, a *savior* and an initiatory and cosmic “example.” His name seems to derive from Hebrew *Shimshôn*, “sunny.” Samson is an aspect of the spiritual Sun; the seven locks of his hair are the seven solar rays, the seven *shaktis* – Samson’s “powers” that generate and sustain the Existence. At the same time, his long hair is a divine mark and “initiatory secret.” Samson is an “elected” person, which Hebraic tradition calls *nazirite*, i. e., “vowed to God”; no razor shall touch a *nazirite*’s head (Numbers 6). In her prayer before God, Hannah made a vow, saying: “O Lord of hosts! If you will take notice of the distress of your servant ... and give her a man-child, I will give him to the Lord for the whole of his life and no razor shall ever touch his head” (1 Samuel 1:11).¹²

⁸ In Buddhism, the Virgin is queen Mâyâ. Buddha’s divine father descends upon Mâyâ taking the appearance of a white elephant.

⁹ Acrisius, Perseus’ grandfather, will try to suppress the newborn; an oracle told him: “Your grandson must kill you.” Perseus’ divine father, Zeus, came down upon Danae, in a shower of gold. The golden rain is a typical symbol for the spiritual influences. See Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*: 1, Penguin Books, 1973, p. 238.

¹⁰ The Pharaoh has given the order that all the boys born to the Hebrews be killed. Moses was saved, like Perseus, by an ark. It is safe to assume that here the real Virgin mother is the Pharaoh’s daughter herself. The Pharaoh, like Acrisius, is the dragon-grandfather (Exodus 2).

¹¹ It is, as we already explained, a spiritual drunkenness.

¹² When Moses blessed the tribes he said: “May the hair grow thick on the head of Joseph, of the nazirite one” (Deuteronomy 33:16). The symbolism of Joseph deserves a study by itself.

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The long hair is bondage, a divine and a cosmic one, always mingled together. Homer describes the Greeks in his epics as “long haired.” Achilles’ father vowed the hair of his son to a river god; Achilles cut his long hair only to mourn Patrocles, his *alter ego* (Iliad XVIII.27).¹³ Theseus at the age of sixteen sacrificed a part of his hair to Apollo, in Delphi.¹⁴ The *nazirites* or the Greek heroes’ hair ties them in with God. Cutting the hair could symbolize, as in the case of Theseus or in the case of the Sun Dance, cutting the corporeal ties in order to actually realize the divine bondage. It could stress, as in the case of Achilles, the abandonment of the world. It is an initiatory sacrifice.

Greek mythology speaks of Medusa’s hair being made of appalling serpents. Medusa’s symbolism is vast; it is enough to say now that she is the Dragon as an emblem of the Pole, of the immutable yet active Principle in the Center of the Wheel. Medusa’s locks are the “one thousand feet” of the spiritual Sun. In Hindu tradition, Shiva’s hair is Gangâ, the celestial river, having as terrestrial projection Ganges, the stream issued from a Himalayan cave. In one respect, Gangâ is Shiva’s *shakti*, that is, his “energy” or “power.” We said before that beheading the dragon and liberating the sun and his rays or the seven rivers, illustrates *Fiat Lux*. The hair is here a symbol of the fertile solar rays or celestial rivers producing a new cycle, the new Cosmos. In the *Râmâyana*, we find a beautiful illustration. The sage Kapila burnt to ashes sixty thousand princes, symbolizing *Ragnarok*, the fire that ended the World. No water could be found to fulfill the rites for the dead princes. The lack of water means the “abduction” of the rivers, the absorption of the manifestation back into the Principle. Eventually, Shiva released Gangâ from his hair, and seven rivers began to flow down, producing the new Cosmos.

The locks, like Samson’s seven locks, are also the Sun and Agni’s seven rays (Rig Veda I.50.8, II.5.2) representing the six directions of the spatial development of the World, plus the central, invisible “seventh Ray” (the “one foot”). The hair is the light producing the cosmos from chaos, and also the cosmic mesh with its mundane spokes. “Just as the spider emits the thread (of the web) out of itself and again withdraws it into itself, just as the plants emerge from the earth, *just as the hair grows from a man alive*, likewise the universe emerges from the Imperishable” (Mundaka Up. I.1.7). Hence, producing the universal manifestation means to release the “powers,” to unleash the rivers, to unplait and let down the seven luminous locks, and, in the extreme, to cut the hair.¹⁵

¹³ “Let him have time to tear his curled hair,” says Lucrece stressing the fact that a deep distress or penitence is illustrated by cutting the hair. See Shakespeare’s poem, *The Rape of Lucrece*, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, Gramercy Books, 1990, p. 1179.

¹⁴ Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952, p. 2. “(Theseus) clipped only the fore part of his head, as Homer says the Abantes did (Iliad II.542). And this sort of tonsure was from him named Theseus.” Iamblichus says that Pythagoras was “everywhere celebrated as the long-haired Samian” (*Life of Pythagoras*, Inner Traditions International, 1986, tr. Thomas Taylor, p. 5).

¹⁵ The English word “plait” derives from Latin *plecto*, “to fold, to braid (plait).” The words “complication” and “explication” have the same Latin root and Nicholas of Cusa uses them to define God (as complication) and the World (as explication). The same symbolism is borne in the peacock’s tail. “Unplaiting the hair” is a celestial point of view, indicating the Principle as “owner” of the locks. “Cutting the hair” is a terrestrial point of view, suggesting an independent existence of the World (which is the illusion created by Hindu Mâyâ).