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## Review Article

# First Days after Death – A Jungian Comparison between the Beliefs of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Post-mortem Experiences in the Tibetan Bardo Plan

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This study examines the psychological aspects of the Bardo Thodol according to C.G. Jung and its relationship with Serbian Orthodox Christianity. Through a comparison of Jung's work "The Seven Sermons to the Dead" (published 12 years before his encounter with Buddhism) and "The Tibetan Book of the Dead," the researcher identifies similarities between these texts, the Bardo Thodol and the writings of the orthodox Church (with an accent on the Serbian Orthodox Church) These similarities include the significance of the soul after death, salvation symbolized by a luminous element, and the presence of an initiator guiding the soul towards salvation (reminiscent of the Orthodox belief in angels). Additionally, the interval between the moment of death and deliverance, present in both traditions, is highlighted.

Jung's postscript to the translation of "The Tibetan Book of the Dead" provides valuable insights into the psychological aspect of the book and the varying concept of the soul in Eastern and Western literature. He emphasizes that metaphysical assertions are expressions of the soul and, hence, psychological in nature. Jung describes the Bardo Thodol as a process of initiation aimed at restoring the divine nature of the soul, lost through birth.

The Bardo Thodol is deeply rooted in the archetypal representations of the unconscious. Jung's concept of archetypes as universal and hereditary psychic structures helps to understand the connection between the Bardo Thodol and the collective unconscious. Furthermore, the journey through the Bardo of Reality can be seen as a representation of the process of individuation, seeking to achieve wholeness and completeness.

Drawing parallels between Orthodox Christian mythology (mitarstva) and the Bardo of Reality, the researcher observes numerous similarities. This raises the question of whether mitarstva, with its well-organized structure involving demons, angels, repentance, and the 40-day journey of the soul after death, represents archetypal representations translating the layers of the collective unconscious in a Christian-pagan population.

Therefore, this study sheds light on the intriguing similarities between the Bardo Thodol and Serbian Orthodox Christianity from a psychological perspective, deepening our understanding of the complex interplay between ancient religious traditions and the universal elements of the unconscious mind.

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"Clouds do not disappear; they simply transform into rain."  
(The Buddha)

## Introduction

The realms of spirituality, philosophy, and psychology have long captivated humanity's collective imagination, offering insights into the fundamental questions of existence. Among the rich tapestry of religious and spiritual traditions, three distinct yet interconnected pathways stand out: Orthodox Christianity, Bardo Thodol (Tibetan Book of the Dead), and Jung's profound psychological theories. Together, they form a multidimensional framework for understanding the intricacies of human consciousness, the afterlife, and the human psyche.

Orthodox Christianity, deeply rooted in ancient traditions and sacred texts, has played a central role in shaping the Western spiritual landscape. Its theological doctrines and teachings encapsulate a worldview that revolves around the notions of sin, redemption, and salvation. The Orthodox Christian belief in the resurrection of Christ and the promise of eternal life after death holds profound implications for understanding the journey of the soul beyond earthly existence. Through rituals, sacraments, and prayer, adherents seek to attain spiritual transformation and unity with the divine.

In contrast, the Bardo Thodol, a sacred Tibetan text also known as the "Book of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State," delves into the transitional phases between death and rebirth. Within the context of Tibetan Buddhism, this spiritual guide explores the concept of the bardo—the intermediary state that follows death and precedes reincarnation. Drawing from ancient wisdom, it provides instructions on navigating the afterlife and achieving liberation from the cycle of birth and death. The Bardo Thodol presents a unique perspective on the ephemeral nature of existence and the potential for conscious evolution through the death-rebirth process.

Amidst these spiritual insights, the pioneering work of Jung emerges as a bridge connecting the realms of religion and psychology. Jung's profound exploration of the collective unconscious and the archetypal symbols shared across cultures provides a lens through which the human psyche can be understood in its deepest dimensions. His concept of individuation, the process of achieving self-realization and wholeness, aligns with the spiritual goals of Orthodox Christianity and the transformative journey portrayed in the Bardo Thodol. Jung's approach acknowledges the universality of certain psychological patterns and explores how they intersect with spirituality and mythology.

This essay aims to explore the intricate interplay between Orthodox Christianity, the Bardo Thodol, and Jungian psychology. We will delve into the common threads that weave these diverse narratives together, examining how they address the profound questions of human existence, the afterlife, and the psyche's mysteries.

## Religion

The etymology of the word "religion" comes from the Latin words "*relegere*" meaning "to re-read" or "*religare*" meaning "to bind." Jung favored the term "*relegere*" (and "*religio*") in its ancient sense of 'scrupulous attention, a conscious attitude,' as opposed to "*religare*," which emphasizes the connection with the divine. Nevertheless, in both cases, these words signify an active and persevering process, a desire to establish a connection between one thing or person and another, to perform an action. When discussing religion, we address questions about what created us, where we go after death, and who or what gives meaning to our lives. The word "God" elicits admiration or fury, divides or unites us, helps or provokes us – we are not passive when it comes to defending or criticizing it.

Therefore, we are not neutral concerning religion, whether we are atheists, agnostics, gnostics, or part of a religious group. The metaphysical questions underlying this interest continue to feed our curiosity, stimulate us, and make us active. Religion, along with philosophy and science, attempts to situate our existence in the world around us. Religion is diverse because the languages we use are diverse. How do we describe an individual and intimate, intuitive, and mysterious experience? How do we understand a "non-psychological existence," as Jung put it?

Jungian psychology places significant emphasis on spirituality, which involves "qualities pertaining to the realm of the spirit," as one of the many definitions of this term suggests. To study what carries spiritual life, we must also study, understand, and contextualize religion within the social, historical, and cultural framework. In guiding our patients who face various emotional, cognitive, and social challenges on their journey of individuation, we need to be capable of observing their spiritual values, religious roots, and how these values interact with their everyday lives.

Working with patients from all corners of our planet, we often realize their similarities. Their human qualities and spontaneous emotions in moments of crisis do not categorize them according to their religious affiliations. The fear of death is an example we frequently encounter in the clinic. Cognitively, patients may share different visions of the afterlife; emotionally, they may interpret them differently, but they are never indifferent to the termination of their current existence on the planet.

Embracing a patient in their entirety means opening the door to the intimate and difficult-to-express dimension. At this moment, we must use our resources, intuition, and intimate language. It is evident that we may not share the same convictions or values as the people we seek to understand. The bond between two human beings

transcends the shared language in the therapy room. We must be cautious not to add confusion, not to get lost in interpretations. Even though the study of comparative religions cannot provide all the explanations, it provides a good foundation for starting the communication around the invisible. It is also the moment when we invite "imago Dei" into our relationship.

Jung spoke of "*imago Dei*." For him, it was an autonomous psychic reality and not an external God. Jung primarily referred to the Christian God. Having grown up with a pastor father, Christianity was Jung's first faith. However, through his reflections and questioning, he allowed himself to criticize it and question his father's spiritual experiences: "I had experienced what my father had not understood – the will of God to which he opposed himself on the best of grounds and on the deepest faith. That is why he never experienced the miracle of grace... he did not know the living God." Here, I will make a personal digression. This Jung quote deeply resonates with me as I also harbor doubts about my religious roots. I grew up in the Serbian Orthodox Christian environment, which, despite its name, still maintains intimate ties to ancient pagan remnants. The years of communism further amalgamated these two beliefs – one monotheistic and Western, the other ancient, polytheistic, and animistic, stemming from vast European-Asian lands.

On a personal note, our compatriots often speak of God and paradise. In intimacy, the boundaries with magical thinking blur. A world of demons and angels opens up, reminding us of scenes from the "Tibetan Book of the Dead."

In the following lines, we would like to briefly present the Serbian Orthodox view of the afterlife, specifically the aerial toll-houses the soul encounters during the first 40 days after death. Then, we will focus on the more characteristic aspects of the texts on the Tibetan Bardo of Reality and the Bardo of Becoming. Finally, we would like to add an analytical psychological layer to the comparison of these two visions of the fate of the soul after death.

## Soul, in general

In Jungian and post-Jungian terminology, the concept of the soul holds significant importance and is often referred to as the "psyche." The soul, or psyche, encompasses the total personality of an individual, both conscious and unconscious aspects. It includes the ego (conscious self), the personal unconscious (repressed or forgotten experiences), and the collective unconscious (the universal, inherited reservoir of experiences and symbols shared by all humans). Jung believed that the soul's journey involves the process of individuation, which is the integration and harmonization of these various elements within the individual.

The soul, according to Jung, is not just an individual entity but is connected to the greater collective unconscious, where universal symbols, archetypes, and myths reside. These collective elements influence the personal experiences and perceptions of an individual and are expressed through dreams, fantasies, and creative endeavors.

In post-Jungian terminology, scholars and psychoanalysts have further developed and expanded Jung's ideas about the soul. Post-Jungian theorists, such as Hillman and Moore, have emphasized the importance of soul work, imagination, and the symbolic life in understanding the soul's depths. They consider the soul to be more than just an inner psychological entity but a bridge between the inner and outer worlds, connecting the individual to the larger cosmos and the natural world. The soul, or psyche, is a multidimensional and complex entity that goes beyond the individual ego and is deeply connected to the collective unconscious and the broader cosmos. It is a central concept in understanding the human psyche and its relationship with the world.

Hillman emphasized the importance of soul work and the symbolic life. He focused on the idea of the soul as a living, dynamic force that shapes our experiences and perceptions. Hillman believed that the soul expresses itself through images, myths, and dreams, and that these symbolic manifestations are essential for understanding the depths of the human psyche. He rejected the idea of reducing the soul to a mere psychological concept and emphasized its autonomy and independence.

Giegerich, on the other hand, argues that the soul is not a separate, individual entity, but a reflection of the self's movements and transformations. He suggests that the soul is inseparable from the self and cannot be fully understood without considering the broader context of the self's development. In his view, the soul is intricately linked to the ego and is subject to constant transformation and metamorphosis. He emphasizes the importance of confronting the darker aspects of the soul and the need for a deeper understanding of the psychological processes that shape our experiences and actions.

In the context of the Bardo Thodol, also known as the Tibetan Book of the Dead, the concept of the soul holds significant importance and is central to the text's teachings on the afterlife journey. The Bardo Thodol is a Tibetan Buddhist funerary text that serves as a guide for the deceased during the transitional state between death and rebirth. The soul, often referred to as the "consciousness" or "mindstream," undergoes a series of experiences and encounters various visionary realms after death. These visionary experiences are collectively known as *bardos*, and they represent different stages or intervals during the soul's journey. The teachings of the Bardo Thodol aim to guide the soul towards liberation and enlightenment, ultimately breaking the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (Samsara) and achieving the state of Buddhahood or Nirvana.

In Serbian Orthodox Christianity, the concept of the soul plays a central role in understanding the nature of human existence and the relationship with God. The soul is considered an immortal and spiritual essence within everyone, created by God and endowed with free will. According to Serbian Orthodox beliefs, the soul is believed to be the true self, distinct from the physical body. It is the seat of consciousness, thoughts, emotions, and moral responsibility. The soul is seen as eternal and destined for either salvation or damnation based on one's choices and actions in life.

Death in Serbian Orthodox Christianity is seen as the separation of the soul from the body. After death, the soul is believed to face a particular judgment by God, determining its fate in the afterlife. Those who have lived righteous lives and repented for their sins are believed to experience *theosis*, which is the process of becoming more like God and achieving spiritual perfection.

The Serbian Orthodox Church also believes in the resurrection of the dead, where the souls of the departed await the Second Coming of Christ when all souls will be reunited with their glorified bodies. The destination of the soul is either Heaven or Hell, depending on its moral state at the time of judgment. This, the soul plays a vital role in one's relationship with God and the ultimate goal of achieving spiritual growth and communion with the Divine.

There is another concept worth mentioning in this context. The Jungian concept of the "death of the soul" symbolizes a profound psychological and transformative process that individuals may experience during their journey of self-discovery and individuation. It is also known as the "dark night of the soul" or the "*nigredo*" in alchemical symbolism. It is a stage in the process of individuation, which is the process of integrating and harmonizing the various aspects of the self, including both conscious and unconscious elements. During the individuation process, individuals may confront their shadow, which represents the repressed and often darker aspects of the psyche. This can be a challenging and painful experience as one becomes aware of their own inner conflicts, unresolved traumas, and undesirable traits. It may feel like a symbolic death of the old self, as the individual grapples with the need to let go of old patterns, beliefs, and identifications that no longer serve their growth and development.

Therefore, all three philosophies define the afterlife of the soul not as a literal death but as a symbolic transformation that ultimately leads to a more authentic and whole sense of self.

## Serbian Orthodox Church

When researching Christianity, one can find a rich bibliography describing Catholic theology at the forefront, often followed by books on Protestantism. However, publications about the Orthodox Church still remain somewhat hidden on the lowest shelves of bookstores. This separation is not a new phenomenon.

The schism between the Western and Eastern churches dates back to 1054. Its origin can be traced to the Filioque controversy. Patriarch Photius was the one who denounced the addition to the Nicene Creed by the Western Church, accusing it of heresy. This addition ("*ex patre filioque procedit*") claimed that the Holy Spirit proceeded from both the Father and the Son, a notion that has never been accepted by Orthodox Christians.

Over the centuries that followed, differences continued to accumulate (currently, there are approximately ten major differences). One notable difference is the absence of purgatory in the teachings of the Orthodox Church. Purgatory is neither mentioned nor studied in Orthodox theology.

An important characteristic of the Orthodox Church is its association with various territorial churches that celebrate liturgies according to five different rites and adhere to the theology of the first seven ecumenical councils of Christianity and the canons they established.

The Orthodox Church in general, and especially the Serbian Orthodox Church, is significantly influenced by Gnostic cosmology. The concept of "aerial tollhouses" is often cited as an example of this influence, as it bears a striking resemblance to their concept of the Seven Heavens (celestial spheres). It is also linked to the Egyptian Duat or the Persian Ahriman-abad. The idea revolves around the belief in a celestial underworld situated between the materialistic reality and the heavenly reality. This realm is populated by manipulative and malevolent entities that feed on the energy of human souls after death.

The biblical verse that corresponds to this description is: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). In Orthodox teachings, these heavenly places are referred to as "aerial tollhouses" (also called "télonies," from the Greek: *τελώνεια* / *telonía*, customs). In Serbian, they are known as "mitarstva," named after the "mitar," who collected taxes during the early centuries of the first millennium. These "mitars" were unscrupulous individuals who were always present in the main squares of cities, and "it was impossible to escape their persistent gaze."

At the moment of death, the soul separates from the body. This soul is described as a substance similar to air, flies, butterflies, and birds (these animals should not be killed in the house of the deceased during the first 40 days after their death). The souls of the

deceased could mix with the souls of those who dream (hence the fear of sleep in the house of the deceased).

In the first two days after death, the soul visits its relatives on Earth. On the third day, angels accompany the soul as it begins its ascent to heaven.

Despite this Christian teaching, Serbs remain cautious about the visits of the soul to its relatives and its previous home during these 40 days, fearing their revenge. In practice, Serbs maintain a pagan view of the period after death. Malinowski wrote on this subject: "They express contradictory emotions: love for the deceased and hatred towards the corpse."

From the first day of death and especially after the funeral, candles are lit around the grave, and food is offered (especially specially prepared cakes and cooked wheat in sweet water, along with red wine and water) to provide enough sustenance for the deceased before they encounter the souls of their ancestors. The deceased's chair is kept during meals at home (the chair remains empty, but a plate of food is served).

Another reason for these food sacrifices is to appease the deceased so that they do not turn against their relatives. The fear of vampires is still present in Serbian villages. The soul of the deceased could visit their family and neighbors and scare them, as they retain their individual memories of their previous life for up to a year after death and may act against their relatives based on those memories. The stone on the tomb, which replaces the wooden cross (a symbol with magical significance from pre-Christian times), also serves to symbolize the departed's successful departure. Here, I digress by mentioning Tibetan beliefs. Tibetans are opposed to burial because when a body is buried, the spirit of the deceased could recognize the body and try to return to it. If successful, it creates a vampire. Hence, the idea of vampirism (premature or improper return of the soul to the unprepared body) goes beyond Slavic and Western mythology.

The angels that accompany the soul during the first 40 days are not coincidental. The principal angel is the one who has been guarding a person since birth and accompanies them throughout their life. Their assistance is especially crucial during the first two days when the soul observes its weeping relatives without comprehending what is happening. The angel is present to provide explanations.

From the third day onward, the soul travels through the aerial path, where it must pass through the tollhouses. Demons or malevolent souls stop it at each tollhouse and show it its sins from past lives. The principal angel and the other angels are there to support the soul by reminding it of all the good deeds it has done. However, in response to these reminders, the demon-mitar shows even more sins. If the demon accuses the person of an unrepented sin, a payment must be made to pass through the tollhouse. This payment is deducted from the good deeds performed during life or from the prayers of the living. For this reason, the sick who fear their death in the following days often ask for forgiveness from their neighbors, especially those with whom they had disputes. One way to forgive the sick person is to make them touch the ground; contact with the earth will lighten their death and give them strength.

If a person has not expressed repentance for their sins during their lifetime and has no good deeds or prayers to present for toll payment, the demons take them to hell to await the final judgment. Each unrepented sin is considered a sacrifice to Satan (Satan is the name used for the devil; here, we add a digression reminiscent of Jungian thought: the corresponding Serbian name is Djavo, which represents God's shadow incarnation as observed by God, like a reflection in water).

"It is intriguing that the mitars accuse the soul of sins it has never committed. The mitars provoke and lie. God is aware of these actions and strategies of the mitars. 'And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.'" God allows these accusations by the mitars because 'all souls are to be evaluated impartially, so that the soul may see that justice is the only victor.' This reflection reminds me of Jung and his critique of *privatio boni*. Indeed, in the Serbian Orthodox Church, God is not identified with demons, but they permit the demon-mitars and justify their actions. 'There is nothing strange if they are instruments of God's justice.' In fact, as Theophane Затворник said, 'God's judgment is simply a response to the inner mood of the soul, the one it built on its own in its relationship with God and spiritual beings.'

In this battle with the mitars, the soul is protected by its previous good deeds, all acts of generosity, and the angels who remember the soul's goodness. For this reason, the monk Евгариј advises his soul 'to have consciousness and be sure to have the strength to endure the sudden separation from its body, for when the terrible angels come to fetch it, it must remember everything it did during its life on earth.' Jean Chrysostome confirms the ambivalence and apprehension of the soul ascending to heaven. "The soul trembles; it is afraid. It is conscious of its sins, and for this reason, it ascends and descends before daring to ascend for real."

Numerous prayers exist to seek help during the passages through the tollbooths. The help of the remaining loved ones on earth is essential. Their prayers encourage the soul to remember its generous acts ('My salvation depends on my neighbor,' said Saint Anthony).

The tollbooths are ordered according to a precise scheme: 1st tollbooth: the tollbooth of gossip (the demons present the faces of all the people we have judged); 2nd tollbooth: insults; 3rd tollbooth: jealousy; 4th tollbooth: lies; 5th tollbooth: anger; 6th

tollbooth: arrogance; 7th tollbooth: blasphemy; 8th tollbooth: vain words; 9th tollbooth: usury and fraud; 10th tollbooth: laziness; 11th tollbooth: greed; 12th tollbooth: drunkenness; 13th tollbooth: resentment; 14th tollbooth: magic and sorcery; 15th tollbooth: gluttony; 16th tollbooth: idolatry; 17th tollbooth: pederasty; 18th tollbooth: those who use makeup; 19th tollbooth: adultery; 20th tollbooth: crime; 21st tollbooth: fornication; and 22nd tollbooth: lack of compassion.

If the soul successfully passes a tollbooth, the angels sing a song of support and celebration. At that moment, the soul forgets the pains of its previous life and the difficulty of the battle with the mitars. This process repeats for each tollbooth.

The demons attempt until the twenty-second tollbooth to hold the soul and drag it to hell. Therefore, it is necessary to light candles every 40 days. Thus, the soul can find its way, but it can also be protected from vampirism (vampires are often those who died in darkness, without anyone to bring them light).

The outcome of the journey, whether the soul ascends to paradise or falls to demons, mainly depends on the soul's state at the time of death. The regular and ritualized prayers of loved ones during this period cannot do anything if the soul had never sought forgiveness.

These 22 tollbooths serve as a summary of the soul's earthly life. It is necessary for the soul to systematically and gradually learn about its nature and become aware of its actions. On the 40th day, the decision about its fate is made. It is also the day when the deceased's loved ones can restart their clocks, which were stopped on the day of death, 'so as not to put pressure on the wandering soul.'

The question of the orthodoxy of this teaching has been a subject of controversy. Thrace (Xth century) recounted in detail the post-mortem experience of a disciple of Saint Basil the Younger, Theodora. Several saints of the Orthodox Church considered this experience authentic, like Saint Theophane the Recluse, but emphasized that it should not be taken literally.

The first Orthodox theologian to take an interest in Jung's psychology was Paul Evdokimov. He linked Jung's thought to Orthodox teaching, highlighting the ability to differentiate between 'true demons' and projected demons. He also emphasized their importance: 'The existence of evil, of absurdity, is the greatest proof of God's existence, for one cannot speak of absurdity without involving meaning.' By metaphorically examining the aerial tollbooths, we can imagine these 22 passages as internal challenges for humans and the importance of their progressive and systematic understanding.

It is interesting that in the Rig Vēda (1500-3000 years before Christ), it is written that the souls of good people go to an empire where they rejoice together with the souls of their ancestors, while the souls of bad people are subjected to torture and suffering. There are indications that Plato might have been influenced by this idea and brought it to Western thought and Christianity. This could be the first link between what has just been described and another major religion, Tibetan Buddhism."

## The Vision of Bardo Thödol

Mahayana Buddhism asserts the non-duality between nirvana and samsara. It appears that the higher dimension referenced in the teachings is not fundamentally separate from the phenomenal dimension, but rather, the difference mainly arises from the practitioner's misperception due to attachment to duality. This attachment prevents the disclosure (apocalypse) of the ordinary dimension, which would grant access to the higher dimension, enabling one to perceive things as they truly are. This defect can be likened to the "original sin" in Christianity or "ignorance" in Buddhism. The remedy involves initiating an inner transformation (referred to as "conversion" or metanoia) to dissolve the physical and mental blockages that bind the individual, hindering them from acting with their innate spontaneity and simplicity. This transformation also aligns with Jungian individuation.

This text delves into an Eastern thought that also concerns the afterlife and all that it may imply and associate with. Both Orthodox Christianity and Buddhism are, in essence, "religions for the living, not the dead." The Tibetan Book of the Dead, known as Bardo Thödol (or "Liberation Through Understanding in the Afterlife"), has fascinated people since its translation in 1927. Jung, in turn, began showing interest in Eastern thought in 1928 following an exchange with Richard Wilhelm. This period saw Europe, destabilized and vulnerable after the Great War, starting to open up to ideas from the East and to a different perspective on the psyche than it had known.

The term "Bardo" is derived from two words: "Bar," which represents the existing aspect of phenomena located in the middle, between the superior and inferior, anterior and posterior; and "Do," signifying that which is at the center, like a cord connecting the beginning to the end. Interestingly, in some Croatian and Serbian writings on aerial tolls, they are also referred to as "passages" or "transitions," the same words used to translate "Bardo."

Bardo Thödol, attributed to Padmasambhava, is a text intended to be read by a Lama at the bedside of the deceased, instructing and guiding them through the various intermediate states (or Bardos) they will encounter during the forty-nine days (a symbolic number: 7x7, distinct from the Orthodox 40 days) separating death from their next rebirth. Hence, it is the Lama, not an angel, who guides the soul.

Lama Anagarika Govinda states, "The different Bardos are none other than the different states of consciousness in our life." He lists these states as the awakened

consciousness, dream consciousness (here, associating with ancient Slavs who also distinguished this consciousness), the state of agony, the moment of death, and the consciousness of rebirth.

Govinda concludes, aligning with Saint Théophraste Le Reclus and V. Jeroetic, that "the Bardo Thöдол is not a guide for the dead, but a guide for all those who seek to transcend death by transforming its process into an act of liberation." In other words, it revolves around the idea of "freeing oneself from the illusions of our egocentric consciousness, which perpetually oscillates between birth and death, existence and non-existence, hope and doubt." In the following lines, we will describe the stages of Bardo Thöдол.

From the moment of death and for three and a half to four days, the "Knower" or conscious principle of ordinary individuals remains in a state of sleep or trance, unaware that it is separated from the human plane. This period, akin to the first two days in Orthodox belief, is referred to as the first Bardo (Chikkhai Bardo). The first Bardo is characterized by a clear light. The second Bardo is Chönyid Bardo, or the Bardo of Reality, during which the Knower awakens and realizes that it has died. This period involves karmic illusions. The third Bardo, or Sidpai Bardo (the Bardo of Becoming), is the search for rebirth.

The second Bardo is defined by symbolic visions, hallucinations created by the karmic reflections of the actions performed by the Knower in their earthly body. One can vaguely associate the second Bardo with the "mitarstva" described earlier.

These hallucinations are manifestations of thought-forms born in the mind of the perceiver. Lama Dawa Samdup and Evans-Wentz define them as "personified forms of the intellectual impulses of the living in their dream state after death." For Tibetan Buddhists, these hallucinations always represent manifestations of universal divine forces. They involve Peaceful Deities that personify emotions and Wrathful Deities emanating from the center of the brain, representing reasoning.

Regarding the Bardo of Reality, Jung is clear in his analysis of the Bardo Thöдол text: "Not only the wrathful deities but also the peaceful deities are samsaric projections of the human soul." The Bardo Thöдол states, "It is sufficient for you to know that these appearances are reflections of your own thought-forms." They are merely the contents of consciousness "visualized by karmic action as appearances in the intermediate state, airy nothings woven in dreams."

It is also interesting that the visions in the Bardo change from day to day, in accordance with the eruption of thought-forms of the perceiver, "until their karmic driving force is exhausted on its own." These changes and chronology resemble the "mitarstva," which are rigid in their order (it should be noted that the Bardo Thöдол describes the successive appearance of forty-two peaceful deities, followed by ten vidyadharas, and finally, a predetermined order of the Wrathful ones). On another note, the driving force called karma could vaguely be analogous to the Orthodox deceased's will to repent during their earthly life.

The end of the dying process is considered to begin when the clear fundamental light emerges. At this point, the body-mind link is severed, "but the mind still resides in the center of the heart" (recall, at this moment, the biblical homo cordis). Subsequently, the mind leaves the corpse and becomes the illusory body. Longchenpa clarifies this idea: "As one has departed from this Body, which was the support of the grasping of the 'self,' the absolute Reality of divine bodies and wisdom manifests unmistakably."

The Bardo of Reality is followed by the Bardo of Becoming, during which the being assumes a mental body and perceives unstable, dream-like appearances, karmic hallucinations that push them toward the place of rebirth (which I will not analyze here).

## The Psychological Aspect of the Bardo Thöдол according to C.G. Jung and its Relation to Serbian Orthodox Belief

Christine Maillard compared Jung's text "The Seven Sermons to the Dead" (published 12 years before his encounter with Buddhism) with "The Tibetan Book of the Dead." She outlined the similarities between these texts. Firstly, she emphasized the significance of the soul after death and salvation symbolized by a luminous element. Secondly, she noted the presence of an initiator accompanying the soul through the stages leading to salvation (here, associating it with the angel in Orthodox belief). Thirdly, she highlighted the interval between the moment of death and the moment of deliverance (also present in Orthodox beliefs).

Jung wrote the postscript to the translation of the "Tibetan Book of the Dead." This text is highly instructive as Jung explains both the psychological aspect of the book and the varying concept of the soul in Eastern and Western literature. Jung states, "Metaphysical assertions are expressions of the soul and, therefore, psychological... It is the soul that enunciates the metaphysical proposition through its divine and innate creative power... It is not only the condition of the metaphysical Real but is itself this Real." Moreover, he elaborates on the greatness of the Bardo Thöдол, which imparts to the deceased the supreme and ultimate truth that even the gods are reflections and manifestations of their own soul. He concludes that the Bardo Thöдол is an initiatory process aimed at restoring the divine nature of the soul, lost through birth.

Jung focuses on the soul rather than death or the Knower. This soul has a purpose, to seek what is missing and become whole (here, we can naturally associate this idea with the process of individuation). According to Jung, the Bardo Thöдол draws from the archetypal representations of the unconscious. These archetypes, as he describes, take on concrete forms when an individual undergoes an experience. They are "dominants of the unconscious." According to Jung, there is a universal, differentiated, and hereditary psychic structure that determines, even commands, all experiences lived in a certain sense and form. The layer of the unconscious soul consists of dynamic forms of archetypes, generally prevalent in the collective unconscious. In other words, archetypes are "in a way, the pre-rational organs." The Bardo Thöдол addresses the collective unconscious, and the described structures and deities are indeed archetypal structures. The reality experienced in the Bardo of Reality is, in fact, the reality of thoughts.

The danger is that this process, like the process of individuation, represents a "conquest of the Self," meaning the totality of the Self, which includes both the object of fear and the worlds of psychic dominants with their challenges and difficulties. Trungpa Rinpoche characterizes the "realm of hell" as the state of anger, and the other realms (hungry ghosts, animals, humans, jealous gods, and gods) are also traits and behaviors that human beings confront throughout their lives, easily reminiscent of biblical sins. The conquest of the Self is, therefore, the development of totality, which includes both Good and Evil, without the repression of evil (here, this idea can be associated with Jung's principle of *privatio boni*, as mentioned earlier).

Drawing an analogy between the Book of the Dead and life, Jung emphasizes that the third part (the Bardo of Becoming or Sidpai) should follow the second, not the other way around, as the Chönyid state resembles fragmentation and psychotic dissociation.

Thus, the Bardo Thöдол "prepares for the process of transformation of the unconscious that takes place during analysis and is the natural analog of religious initiations... The world of gods and spirits is nothing other than the collective unconscious within me." "Human life is, therefore, the vehicle of the highest fulfillment: in it alone is created the karma that allows the deceased to remain without an object in the void of luminous plenitude and thus ascend to the hub of the wheel of rebirth, liberated from all illusion regarding birth and death. The Bardo life does not bring eternal rewards or punishments but only a descent towards a new life that must bring man closer to his final destination" (or individuation?).

This is not the first time Jung mentions karma. In "Memories, Dreams, Reflections," he states, "... karma is found... seized at birth, it incorporates without any personal continuity," and later, "What is experienced as karma could be an impersonal archetype that holds the world in suspense."

Towards the end of the postscript, Jung states that "the West has nothing that can be compared to the Bardo-Thöдол, except for a few occult writings that are not relevant for the general public and science."

Jung did not study Orthodox thought. In his commentary on the sizes of Western tombs, he mentions Lenin's mausoleum and is surprised by its existence in a supposedly irreligious country (communist Russia at the time). Nevertheless, for Russia, which, like Serbia, has been influenced for centuries by a Christianity amalgamated with the pagan mythology of the ancient Slavs, it remains significant to preserve the body of their deceased leader. The size of tombs in Serbia is still remarkably large, where the cult of the dead continues to persist.

We refrain from drawing explicit parallels between Orthodox mythology (mitarstva) and the Bardo of Reality but observe numerous similarities. Thus, we are uncertain whether Western thought is purely eschatological, as Jung suggests. The ancient Slavs migrated from Asia in the 6th century and gradually, often involuntarily, embraced Christianity on their journey. It is not inconceivable to consider that the ancient Slavs intertwined different influences while incorporating their own oral mythology.

If this could be considered a hypothesis, could the rigidly organized mitarstva, with demons and angels, the desire for repentance, and the entire journey of the soul for 40 days after death, also be archetypal representations, a translation of the layers of the collective unconscious into a Christian-pagan population? The Bardo of Reality concludes with the beginning of the Bardo of Becoming, where the soul sets out to become divine. Could it be that the soul, which questioned itself during its life, was benevolent to its surroundings, and survived the 22 aerial tollhouses and all the challenges of life, is, in fact, also a human being walking on the path of individuation?

## The similarities between the Bardo Thöдол and Orthodox Christianity regarding the after-death experience

It is essential to recognize that while there are striking similarities, the specific details and theological interpretations may differ between the Bardo Thöдол and Orthodox Christianity. However, these similarities provide fertile ground for further scholarly exploration and cross-cultural dialogue on the intriguing topic of after-death experiences. We will list some of them:

### *The Journey of the Soul*

Both the Bardo Thödol and Orthodox Christianity depict a journey of the soul after death. In the Bardo Thödol, the soul navigates through different stages or bardos, facing various experiences and encounters before reaching its ultimate destination. Similarly, in Orthodox Christianity, the soul is believed to undergo a process of judgment and purification, experiencing different states or realms before entering its eternal destination, either heaven or hell.

### *The Role of an Initiator/Guide*

In both traditions, there is the presence of an initiator or guide who accompanies the soul during its journey. In the Bardo Thödol, this guide helps the deceased navigate through the bardos and provides guidance for attaining liberation. In Orthodox Christianity, angels or other divine figures are often considered to guide the soul towards its judgment and destination.

### *Salvation and Liberation*

Both traditions emphasize the pursuit of salvation and liberation for the departed soul. In the Bardo Thödol, the soul's goal is to achieve enlightenment and break free from the cycle of birth and rebirth (samsara). In Orthodox Christianity, the soul seeks to attain union with God and eternal life in heaven.

### *Importance of Prayer and Rituals*

In both the Bardo Thödol and Orthodox Christianity, prayers and rituals play a crucial role in assisting the deceased soul. In the Bardo Thödol, recitations and prayers by the living aid the deceased in their journey through the bardos. Similarly, in Orthodox Christianity, prayers for the dead and memorial services are believed to offer comfort and support to the departed soul, helping it on its journey.

### *Time Between Death and Judgment*

Both traditions acknowledge the existence of an intermediate state between death and judgment. In the Bardo Thödol, this is the state of transition through the bardos. In Orthodox Christianity, this intermediate state is often associated with concepts like the "tollhouses," where the soul encounters various trials and temptations before facing final judgment.

### *Emphasis on Repentance and Purification*

Both the Bardo Thödol and Orthodox Christianity underscore the importance of repentance and purification for the soul's journey. In the Bardo Thödol, the soul's past actions and karma are significant factors in determining its path. Similarly, in Orthodox Christianity, the concept of repentance and seeking forgiveness for sins is crucial for the soul's journey toward salvation.

### *Belief in Spiritual Realms*

Both traditions describe different spiritual realms or planes of existence that the soul traverses after death. In the Bardo Thödol, these are the bardos, each with its own characteristics and challenges. In Orthodox Christianity, the soul encounters different stages of judgment and experiences corresponding to its spiritual condition.

## **Incorporating Jungian psychology into the comparison of the Bardo Thödol and Orthodox Christianity regarding the after-death experience**

Jung's insights shed light on the underlying psychological processes and archetypal patterns that could be at play in the belief systems described in the previous chapter. We can draw some parallels between the Bardo Thödol, Orthodox Christianity, and Jungian Psychology:

### *Collective Unconscious and Archetypes*

Jung's concept of the collective unconscious and archetypes helps to understand the universality of the after-death journey. Both the Bardo Thödol and Orthodox Christianity can be seen as symbolic expressions emerging from the collective unconscious. The various stages and encounters in the after-death journey represent archetypal motifs that resonate with the human psyche across cultures and time.

### *Individuation and Spiritual Transformation*

Jung's idea of individuation, the process of self-realization and integration of the psyche, parallels the pursuit of enlightenment and liberation in the Bardo Thödol and Orthodox Christianity. The soul's journey through different realms or bardos can be viewed as a metaphorical representation of the individuation process, where the soul confronts its own shadow and unconscious contents to achieve spiritual growth and wholeness.

### *The Self and the Guide*

Jung's concept of the Self, representing the totality and center of the psyche, aligns with the presence of an initiator or guide in the after-death journey. This guide, whether in the form of a spiritual figure or angel, can be seen as an expression of the Self archetype, providing wisdom and direction to the soul in its transformative journey.

### *Symbolism and Rituals*

Jungian psychology recognizes the significance of symbolism and rituals as potent means of accessing the deeper layers of the unconscious. The rituals and prayers observed in both the Bardo Thödol and Orthodox Christianity serve as powerful symbolic acts that assist the soul in its psychological transition and transformation.

### *Integration of Light and Shadow*

Jung's emphasis on integrating the light and shadow aspects of the psyche resonates with the themes of salvation and purification present in both traditions. The soul's encounter with both benevolent and challenging experiences in the after-death journey can be interpreted as an opportunity to confront and integrate its own light and shadow elements.

### *Archetypal Images and Afterlife Realms*

Jung's understanding of archetypal images as manifestations of the collective unconscious provides a framework for interpreting the various afterlife realms described in both traditions. These realms can be seen as symbolic representations of different psychic states and potentialities that the soul explores during its journey.

Overall, Jungian psychology enriches the comparison of the Bardo Thödol and Orthodox Christianity regarding the after-death experience by illuminating the psychological underpinnings of these beliefs. It invites us to explore the universal aspects of the human psyche and the shared symbolic language used to describe the profound mysteries of life, death, and the transcendent realm. By intertwining Jung's psychological insights with the cultural and spiritual contexts of these traditions, we gain a deeper appreciation for the profound connections that unite human beings on their quest for spiritual realization and self-discovery.

## **Areas of tension between Jungian psychology and Orthodox Christianity**

As mentioned earlier, Jung did not explicitly write about the Orthodox Christianity. However, based on the previous chapter, we can address some points of divergence:

### *The Nature of the Divine*

While Jung viewed religious symbols as psychological expressions, Orthodox Christianity affirms the belief in the objective reality of God and the divine. Some Orthodox Christians may see Jung's approach as reducing the transcendent nature of the divine to mere psychological constructs.

### *The Role of Religion*

Jung believed that psychology could fulfill a role similar to religion in providing meaning and purpose. For some Orthodox Christians, this idea may be seen as downplaying the unique salvific role of Orthodox Christianity and the importance of religious practices and sacraments.

### *Esotericism and Occult*

Some elements of Jungian psychology are criticized, notably by the Orthodox Church, because of their associations with esoteric and occult practices which this Church links to potential spiritual dangers.

### *The Concept of the Self*

Jung's understanding of the Self as an archetype representing the unified and integrated psyche can be different from the Orthodox Christian understanding of the self as the personal identity united with the divine in *theosis*.

Here, it is worth mentioning that some Orthodox Christians (such as important Serbian Jungian scholar Vladeta Jerotić or, earlier mentioned, Evdokimov) have found value in Jung's psychological insights, particularly in his exploration of symbols, individuation, and spiritual growth. At the same time, others may approach Jung's ideas with caution, emphasizing the distinctiveness of Orthodox Christian teachings and practices.

## **Conclusion**

This paper explored the psychological aspect of the Bardo Thödol, as elucidated by Jung, and its potential relationship with (Serbian) Orthodox belief. We identified similarities in the themes of the soul's journey after death, the quest for salvation symbolized by light, and the presence of an initiator guiding the soul. Jung's postscript to the translation of the Tibetan book provided valuable insights into the

psychological nature of the soul and the concept of archetypes within the collective unconscious.

Jung's perspective on the Bardo Thödol as a process of initiation aimed at restoring the divinity of the soul, lost through birth, raised intriguing parallels with the concept of individuation. The paper delved into the significance of the unconscious and its dynamic archetypes, which play a crucial role in shaping human experiences and spiritual transformation. Moreover, it highlighted how the Bardo Thödol addresses the collective unconscious, reflecting the reality of thoughts and experiences.

While Jung's analysis focused on Eastern texts, the paper also acknowledged the enduring presence of Orthodox beliefs in Serbia, intertwined with elements of ancient Slavic mythology. The connection between Orthodox mitarstva and the Bardo of Reality raised questions about the possible archetypal representations within a Christian-pagan population. The theme of karma emerged as an essential thread, offering a bridge between the Eastern and Western perspectives.

It is evident that Bardo Thödol's psychological significance resonates beyond its cultural context and offers insights into the universal journey of the soul. The soul's pursuit of self-discovery, the confrontation of both light and darkness, and the quest for transformation are common threads present in various religious and philosophical traditions.

This exploration of the psychological dimensions of the Bardo Thödol according to Jung and its potential correlation with Serbian Orthodox belief opens up avenues for further research and dialogue between Eastern and Western spiritual traditions. Understanding the transformative nature of the soul's journey and the archetypal patterns that underpin it can enrich our comprehension of the human experience and the quest for spiritual fulfillment. As we continue to explore these intricate connections, we gain a deeper appreciation for the shared aspects of the human psyche that transcend cultural boundaries and unite us in our quest for self-realization and enlightenment.

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