

# The Path of the Frog King

Stephen Spitalny

*If you really read the fairy-tales, you will observe that one idea runs from one end of them to the other - the idea that peace and happiness can only exist on some condition. This idea, which is the core of ethics, is the core of the nursery-tales. The whole happiness of fairyland hangs upon a thread, upon one thread. Cinderella may have a dress woven on supernatural looms and blazing with unearthly brilliance; but she must be back when the clock strikes twelve. The king may invite fairies to the christening, but he must invite all the fairies, or frightful results will follow ... A promise is broken to a cat, and the whole world goes wrong. A promise is broken to a yellow dwarf, and the whole world goes wrong. A girl may be the bride of the God of Love himself if she never tries to see him; she sees him and he vanishes away. . . A man and woman are put in a garden on condition that they do not eat one fruit; they eat it, and lose their joy in all the fruits of the earth.*

*This great idea, then, is the backbone of all folklore - the idea that all happiness hangs on one thin veto; all positive joy depends on one negative. Now it is obvious that there are many philosophical and religious ideas akin to or symbolized by this; but it is not with them that I wish to deal here. It is surely obvious that all ethics ought to be taught to this fairy-tale tune; that, if one does the thing forbidden, one imperils all the things provided ... This is the profound morality of fairy-tales; which so far from being lawless, go to the root of all law ... We are in this fairyland on sufferance; it is not for us to quarrel with the conditions under which we enjoy this wild vision of the world. The vetoes are indeed extraordinary, but then so are the concessions ...*

*As in the fairy-tales, all that we say and do hangs on something we may not say and do. But let us not forget that we have a veto.*

G. K Chesterton  
February 29, 1908, *The Ethics of Fairy-Tales*

For me, a "fairy tale" as distinct from other types of stories, is a true story in imaginative pictures of an individual's soul/spirit development, a symbolic representation of the struggle to become a whole and free human being. The characters in a story are all in each human being; in me and in you. The story is the story of us all. How does a spirit being descend into matter and into the sheaths of a human being, and find its way to connecting with all of its parts, to self actualization. The path to the marriage of one's own soul and spirit is therein articulated.

Fairy tales give nourishment to the developing human being as seeds of moral strength. In the telling of fairy tales to children, the children receive images of strength and determination to carry through, to overcome the evil, to learn to see. It is not always clever and older siblings who are best suited to the task, or young, strong and handsome men. While archetypes abound, it is possible for a human being to break out of a mold, to become something unexpected. Within is the promise that weak can become strong, poor can become rich, donkeys can become musicians, and what once was lost can be regained.

An adult human being of our time is blessed with a capacity for intellectual activity. In fact, our tendency is for the intellect to dominate the other parts of soul and objectify all reality and experience. The intellect has become so strong we must try to overcome it and learn to think and experience with the heart. One of the magical qualities of story is that it speaks not to the intellect but to the heart so stories can be a sort of retraining for adults. I tread the path I am leading you on now with trepidation, and recognition of the lure of the intellect. Interpretation is an activity of the intellect, yet we can try to use our hearts to discern if the intellect speaks truth.

I think about stories, meditate about them, dream about them, and sometimes am inspired by sudden flashes of insight. I read everything I can about stories by various authors, anthroposophical and other. And I read lots of

stories. I would like to share some thoughts about a particular story that is a favorite of mine as an example of a way of thinking, and in hopes that others will share their contemplations about stories to stimulate and inspire us all. I hope that you all can keep in mind that these merely are thoughts from me. This is absolutely not THE ONE AND ONLY TRUTH about this story, so please don't quote me. And, of course, we know that this realm of speaking about stories is for the grown-ups. For the children, the images speak so well on their own. And for the adult, reading and rereading many times the same stories, letting them wash over you again and again, learning them well enough to tell and inwardly seeing the images as you are telling; these all will help the story to be able to speak to you on deeper and deeper levels. I invite you to let the fairy tales into your heart and listen to what your heart thinks.

So for many years I have asked *The Frog King*, or *Faithful Henry*, "Who are you, what are you saying to me? And what does that have to do with the modern human being?"

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*The princess is weeping at the spring into which her golden ball has fallen and disappeared from sight. There is profound grief in the soul for what is lost when incarnating, the access to the wellspring of wisdom and connectedness of the spiritual world. The golden ball of the wisdom of the heavens falls to the earth and disappears into the depths.*

*A voice calls out, the princess looks around and says; "Oh it's you, you old croaker." She recognizes the frog. The soul recognizes the ego that it is on a path toward unity with. The frog lives in the spring. He has been enchanted. The watery realm is already an in-between place, between earth and heaven, and a frog reminds us of transformation, of metamorphosis. It was a tadpole and drastically changed to become a frog. This frog-ego still lives in the water, not yet fully on earth. The princess-soul is an earth dweller. Even the forest with the spring is a border realm between sense and spirit worlds.*

The king's son is a frog; the ego is trapped in an enchanted form and not yet able to reveal its

true form, and arise to its rightful self-leadership. Yet the frog consciousness can dive into the depths to find wisdom.

*"I believe I can help you. But what will you give me if I bring you your plaything? . . . I don't want your clothes, your jewels or even your golden crown. But if you will love me and let me be your dear companion, and eat from your golden plate ... and sleep in your bed .. . The frog will go into the depths and help but he has three conditions that the princess agrees to.*

*But the princess thinks, "How can he be a companion to anyone? He lives in the water with other frogs and croaks." Something in the soul is not quite honest. The selfishness of the soul is not ruled by integrity. So the princess gets her ball back due to the frog's efforts and she runs off.*

*"Wait, wait. Take me with you. I can't run like you." He croaked and he croaked at the top of his lungs but it did him no good. The princess ran all the way back to the palace and there was nothing left for the frog to do but to go back down into the well. The next day the frog comes knocking at the palace door, and says; "Princess, youngest princess, let me in. Don't you remember what you promised yesterday by the cool spring?" The princess did make a promise in order to get her ball back. The soul also made a promise to join with the spirit and the spirit is asking the soul to remember, to once again make something as one. And now the princess-soul knows what is in question and is resisting her commitment. In some ways, the untransformed soul is a fun place to live; ruled by unbridled feelings and desires and self-serving motivation.*

*The king says, "Once you have made a promise, you must keep it." The wise king, the old wisdom insists she honor her word. The soul is immersed in the dilemma of saying "yes" or "no." Here she is reminded that she has already said "yes" to an agreement. But when the frog insists on getting in her bed a line is drawn. Here is where the soul says no and holds her boundary.*

*She picked up the frog and threw him against the wall. But when he fell to the floor he was a frog no longer but a king's son with beautiful smiling eyes. He told her that no one but she alone could free him from the spring. Only she could break the spell, only the soul can free the ego from enchantment. And the ego recognizes boundaries and hence can reveal itself.*

And then they can go back to his kingdom, as a joined soul/spirit being. To get there, the young king's faithful servant, Henry, drives them in a carriage. Henry has held his heart together with three iron bands to keep it from bursting with grief and sadness. On the way to the kingdom, one by one, the iron bands crack and fall away, *because his master has been set free and is happy.* The heart (Henry) has these qualities of faith and iron strength for the patience to be able to wait until the spirit is disenchanted and free, and soul and spirit wed. Thus

the heart is freed from its self-created bondage of protection and can carry both soul and spirit to the kingdom of heaven.

I have assumed a basic common understanding of fairy tales and symbolic representation so the introductory comments were brief. There are wonderful resources to further your study of this subject if your thirst is not appeased by this short article, including *The Wisdom of Fairy Tales* by Rudolf Meyer, and another, *The Wisdom of Fairy Tales* by Ursula Grahl. Perhaps you will also find in Nancy Mellon's several books something to inspire your thinking in this realm.

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