

The Universal Use of Symbols for Teaching

Cynthia Holt, MA  
April 15, 2011

Unity Institute's Lyceum 2011  
*Spiritual Studies from a Global Perspective:  
The Ongoing East-West Dialogue*



Despite the mystery and intrigue of a Dan Brown novel, not all symbols were created to hide information only for a selected few who could understand them. They have been used throughout time by religions and philosophies, both East and West, dualistic and holistic, to convey intellectual concepts to the masses. A symbol can turn an abstract idea tangible. The symbol can be a word or a picture or object and it can be used by others. It is not exclusive property. It was created as a way to share with others. When effective, these symbols become a language of the people. It is only when that language or that people die that the symbols become mysterious puzzles for storytellers. The use of symbols in literature and art is to demonstrate a deeper meaning. Symbols teach the observer or reader to stop looking for surface value and to probe deeper into the art, the literature, and into themselves.

A symbol, for the purpose of this paper, is simply something that represents something else. I place symbols into four categories: the basic symbol, the analogue, the metaphor, and the object lesson. All symbols used in teaching fall into one of these four groups.

Examples of basic symbols are the letters of the alphabet and the colors of a traffic light. There is a rigidity to the definition of these symbols and are not open to interpretation. To the contrary, interpretation can give you misreadings or a traffic ticket. An archaeologist four thousand years from now may wrestle with their deeper meanings, but for us they are so much a part of our daily lives that we don't even stop to ponder their symbolic existence. They are tools used to simplify our lives.

The analogue is comparable to the part of speech known as a simile. It is a one-to-one comparison. A simile tells you what the comparison is: blank is like or as blank. She is straight as an arrow. He is as stubborn as a mule. The analogue, however, is showing only the arrow or the mule. Unlike the basic symbol, the analogue is intended to be interpreted and may require more specialized knowledge of the reader or observer. But these are simple comparisons with no deeper means.

The metaphor is not a one-to-one comparison. It is more complex than the analogue in structure and has deeper meanings. Some of these may at first appear to be analogues by their format, such as, faith like a mustard seed. At first glance it looks like an uncomplicated one-to-one comparison. But as most of us are all too aware, the meaning is so deep that entire Sunday lessons, even books, have been written on the metaphor. A true metaphor is one that has new meaning for the reader or observer as they grow personally or spiritually. With new perspective and understanding gained from education and experience, the metaphor will bear new meanings. This is the difference between the analogue and the metaphor.

The object lesson is the physical demonstration of a complex idea or metaphor. The viewer or reader's first reaction is often confusion until the light goes on. It often comes with an "ah-huh" moment when they reach at least the first level of understanding. This method is also used as a way to give new perspective to an old idea. One of my favorite object lessons, when I taught Sunday School, was used with third and fourth graders. I would bring in a hand full of corn kernels, place them in the middle of the large table and ask the children to each take a few seeds. Then I would tell them I wanted them to go home and plant them and grow us some wheat. I always got blank stares. Then I would say, "No?" and shake my head. "Oh, okay", I would say, "then let's grow rice". Finally, the obnoxious one in the group, there's always at least one at that age, would pop up and explain that you can't do that. I do love obnoxious children, God bless 'em. I couldn't have been so effective a teacher without them. Of course, this is the object lesson for as ye sow, so shall ye reap. After the physical demonstration, it makes it easy for the children to understand the idea of planting seeds of kindness. Like the metaphor, the object lesson takes on new meaning as we grow in our understanding. Seeds planted in the field must be tended: watered, weeded, fertilized. So must the seeds we plant in our lives be tended. Vegetable seeds may be

planted in fields, beds, planters. The seeds in our lives may be planted in our minds, our hearts, and our relationships.

Good symbols, no matter how they are used, are those that make you look at an object or idea in a new way. Take for instance the snake. Without any education, the student immediately responds to the image with either fear or disgust. This emotional response makes it perfect for symbolism. To be told that it represents primal energy or the physical realm does not require much stretch of the imagination by the learner. They can easily see themselves or others battling snakes (or dragons) where they would experience the same intellectual and emotional struggle as they would to primordial or physical desires.

To see themselves as snakes, who must shed their skins to become anew, requires a little deeper thinking. In Tantric Buddhism the snake symbolizes a female energy known as Kundalini (Sanskrit for coil of rope) located at the base of the spine where it usually lies in a dormant state. In Tantric or yogic practice it is the goal of the student to awaken this energy and move it up and down the spine, moving it through the charkas. This depiction of a snake sleeping inside of us requires far more concentration and contemplation than the other levels of understanding. Such multi-layered symbols become metaphors for teachers, who go back to the student's old way of thinking and extend the understanding of the student by giving them another layer of the symbol.

This paper is an exploration of symbols as used in Mahayana Buddhist sutras, Zen Buddhist Kōans, The Mérode Triptych (a Christian painting from fifteenth century Netherlands), and the Twelve Powers of Unity. We will explore what the symbols are and what categories they fall into.

Mahayana (Tibetan) Buddhists believe sutras to be the words of a Buddha, usually about the path of a Bodhisattva, an individual who is about to obtain enlightenment and who is obligated to assist others on their paths. They are holistic believers who seek enlightenment through the study of the written word.

Mahayana, meaning "Great Journey" or "Great Vehicle", Buddhism probably arose between 100<sub>BCE</sub> and 100<sub>CE</sub>, although there are no first hand historical accounts of the development and rise of the movement. Because sutras read more like legends or myths, there is little or no historical information or reference within the content that give clues as to when, or where, or even for whom they were written.

Mahayana Buddhists are distinguished from Hinayanists, the "Lesser Journey or Vehicle", by their belief in the sutras to be the word of a Buddha. Mahayana also innovated the concept of the Bodhisattva: an individual on the path of enlightenment, but not yet a Buddha, whose goal it is to attain enlightenment and to assist in the education of others on the path. Much of the literature is written about multiple Bodhisattvas. The sutras themselves appear to have been written over a five hundred year period, between 100<sub>BCE</sub> and 400<sub>CE</sub>.

For this paper, we will explore the visual symbols used in two Mahayana Buddhist sutras: *Vimalakirti* and *The Land of Bliss*. *The Land of Bliss* is about Buddha-fields and has thirty-two thousand arhats, beings who have attained the supreme purity and have conquered their enemy passions. Along with everyone else is Ananda, an exceptional individual who has yet to reach enlightenment. This is essentially the story of his enlightenment and how he envisions a Buddha-field. Symbols are sprinkled sparingly throughout the text.

*The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti* is a group of teachings also about Buddha-fields, featuring Licchavi Vimalakirti, a Buddha in disguise, living in the great city of

---

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, Richard H., *The Buddhist Religion: a historical introduction*. (Belmont, CA, Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1977): 86-87

Vaisali.<sup>2</sup> They first appear at the beginning, with the introduction of the Buddha, where the Lord Buddha is in the garden of Amrapali, in the City of Vaisali, surrounded by thirty-two thousand bodhisattvas. There are several symbols that tend to accompany the Lord Buddha, most of which represent a royal presence. Here as in *The Land of Bliss* many of the symbols are references to the power and royal nature of a Buddha.

The following are some of the royal symbols and their associated meanings:

Lions – are associated with royalty and the Buddha in several ways. Narasimha, a Hindu deity, is the fourth avatar (form) of Lord Vishnu<sup>3</sup> and is depicted as part man, part lion. In Indian and Egyptian astrology the constellation more commonly known as Orion is the sign of the lion. Twelve thousand years ago this was the first sign on the horizon at the spring equinox, referred to by modern Western astrologers as the age of Leo. Therefore in the earliest memories of mankind the lion was the leader of the constellations of the heavens. The Buddha Shakyamuni is referred to as the Lion of the Shakya, his clan. This is why he sits upon the lion throne. The roar of the lion, however, is the announcement of the Dharma or the awakening of the teaching. The lion, the lion throne, and the lion's roar all appear in both *Vimalakirti* and *The Land of Bliss*.

Parasol or Umbrella – another symbol of royalty, for only the truly wealthy could afford to own one and have someone else carry it for you. It represents the ease and power that comes with the Buddhist life of detachment. It is one of the eight auspicious symbols and is thought to offer protection from all harmful forces, obstacles, and illness.<sup>4</sup>

Other symbols refer to the power of the Buddha:

Thunder – Although it creates only a sound, it is a sound powerful enough to be felt throughout the entire body and is a symbol found in many mythologies for that very reason. Buddhist concepts of thunder go back to Indian mythology, which

“tells us that at the beginning of the cycle of the universes, there once was only one Being whose name is Prajapati.” He didn't want to be alone, so “he produced the beings of the various realms including the gods, the demons and men. When the three groups of children were mature and it was time for them to assume their respective responsibilities, they went to their father for a final word of advice.”

He tells them all the same thing with “a deep breath and pronounced in a deep rumbling tone the single Sanskrit syllable: Da.” For the gods it meant *damyata*, or “control yourself”. To the human's Da means *datta* or “give charity” and for the demons it means *dayadhvam* or “treat others as not different – be kind, be merciful.”<sup>5</sup>

Thunder is also a symbol of male energy as seen in the Dorje, a Tibetan Buddhist thunderbolt scepter used in rituals and ceremonies. Its two globes represent heaven and earth. In Chinese mythology the goddess Tien Mu, lightning, would flash to illuminate evildoers who would be by struck down by the thunder, the god Lei Kung.<sup>6</sup>

Moon – in most cultures the moon is feminine, signifying resurrection and immortality, and the cycles of nature,<sup>7</sup> but in Hinduism and Buddhism it is the symbol for Siva and therefore a masculine symbol representing the cosmic forces of nature.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Thurman, Robert A. F., translator, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti: a Mahayana scripture* (University Park, PA, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976): 20

<sup>3</sup> Klostermaier, Klaus K., *A Survey of Hinduism* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1994): 138  
Brahma as creator, Vishnu as preserver, and Siva as destroyer are the trilogy of the major Hindu Gods, each having multiple forms and consorts.

<sup>4</sup> Levenson, Claude B., *Symbols of Tibetan Buddhism*. (Paris, Editions Assouline, 1996): 56

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.khandro.net/nature\\_thunder.htm](http://www.khandro.net/nature_thunder.htm) a Tibetan Buddhist site, (initiated as an offering to, and commemoration of, the activity of the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje. It continues in devotion to the energy and activity of all Karmapas as embodied in the 17th Gyalwa Karmapa, Ugyen Tinley Dorje)

<sup>6</sup> Fontana, David, *Secret Language of Symbols* (San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 1994): 116

<sup>7</sup> Ibid: 120

<sup>8</sup> Walker, Benjamin, *Hindu World*, vol. 2 (London, George & Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1968): 406

Mount Sumeru – is the axis of the world on which the sky rests.<sup>9</sup> Mountains universally represent the eternal.<sup>10</sup> Mount Sumeru is often associated with the color white.

Ocean – represents the vastness or that which is endless. Today we would talk about the vast emptiness of space to say the same thing.<sup>11</sup>

And still other symbols represent the Dharma or things found along the path:

Flowers – represent the teaching of transience. “Flowers are beautiful in the morning, but fade in the heat of the day.”<sup>12</sup> They are also one of the eight offerings of the goddess found in the Mandala of the Universe.<sup>13</sup>

Music – in Hindu mythology Lakshmi, consort of Vishnu, “was believed to reside in musical instruments, and the enlightened soul itself was symbolized by the sounds the instruments produced”.<sup>14</sup> They considered music to be the only means to an emotional end.<sup>15</sup> But in Buddhism it represents wisdom to the ears of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas “because wisdom is a special power of the mind which penetrates phenomena. It is an essential part of Buddhist rituals, prayers, and ceremonies.”<sup>16</sup>

Lotus – probably the most common symbol used along with the wheel of the Dharma. Rising up from the mud, through water, and into sunlight, it stands for a symbol of purity and overcoming. Different colors represent different aspects: white, spiritual perfection; pink, reserved only for the Buddha; red, compassion; blue, always shown as a bud, it is the emblem of Manjushi, Bodhisattva of wisdom, who is the image of mind over matter.<sup>17</sup>

Dharma Wheel – or wheel of the Dharma, represents the teaching of the Dharma. Wheels or charkas, by themselves, represent cycles: the life cycle of death and rebirth, time, lunar, cosmic, and astronomical. The wheel of the Dharma “is present in every Tibetan Sanctuary. It generally has eight spokes, and is pictured, flanked by two gazelles or deer, on the main façade of all monasteries, whether large or small.” The two gazelles or deer “represent his first two listeners or disciples”.<sup>18</sup> The Dharma wheel has eight spokes to represent the Eightfold Path.

Bulls – (also oxen and buffalo) represent the ego in both Buddhist and Daoist works. Lao Tzu is said to have ridden a buffalo to indicate the possibility of taming the ego.<sup>19</sup>

Serpents – in many cultures represent primal energy, the physical realm as opposed to the spiritual. In Western culture to destroy a dragon is to show the triumph of the spiritual over the physical.<sup>20</sup> In Hinduism there are snake deities that are the custodians of treasures and protectors of sacred places.<sup>21</sup>

Pearls – are normally associated with the moon and things that are hidden, because a pearl is a treasure found in an oyster.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Vira, Raghu and Lokesh Chandra, *Tibetan Mandalas* (New Delhi, Pradeep Kumar Goel, 1995): 9

<sup>10</sup> *Secret Language of Symbols*: 114

<sup>11</sup> Muller, F. Max, translator, “The Larger Sukhavati-vyuha: Description of Sukhavati, The Land of Bliss”, Cowell, E.B., editor, *Buddhist Mahayana Texts* (New York, Dover Publications, 1969): 8

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.budtempchi.org/buddhist-symbols.php> The Buddhist Temple of Chicago

<sup>13</sup> Thurman, Robert A. F., *Inside Tibetan Buddhism: rituals and symbols revealed* (San Francisco, Collins Publishers, 1995): 56

<sup>14</sup> *Secret Language of Symbols*: 74

<sup>15</sup> *Hindu World*: 88

<sup>16</sup> *Symbols of Tibetan Buddhism*: 40

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*: 124

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*: 20

<sup>19</sup> *Secret Language of Symbols*: 92

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*: 80

<sup>21</sup> *Hindu World*: 387

<sup>22</sup> *Secret Language of Symbols*: 119

Gold – often a symbol for the sun and divine illumination. In Daoist belief it represents the essence of heaven.<sup>23</sup> In Hindu belief it represents truth.<sup>24</sup>

Bodhi Tree – refers to the Banyan tree under which the Buddha achieved enlightenment. Bodhi is a Pali word for enlightenment. It represents the bliss of freedom and contemplation.

At first glance these symbols appear to work as basic symbols, using a one to one substitution. From *The Land of Bliss*:

Now is the proper time, O Bhikshu. Delight the assembly, produce joy, let the lion's voice be heard, so that now and hereafter, noble-minded Bodhisattvas, hearing it, may comprehend the different subjects of the prayers for the perfection of the good qualities of a Buddha country. (11)

If we substitute new meanings for these symbols we get the following: (new meanings in italics)

Now is the proper time, O Bhikshu. Delight the assembly, produce joy, let the *announcement of the Dharma* be heard, so that now and hereafter, noble-minded Bodhisattvas, hearing it, may comprehend the different subjects of the prayers for the perfection of the good qualities of a Buddha country. (11)

Let us look at a passage with a few more symbols from *Vimalakirti*:

The Lord Buddha, thus surrounded and venerated by these multitudes of many hundreds of thousands of living beings, sat upon a majestic lion-throne and began to teach the Dharma. Dominating all the multitudes, just as Sumeru, the king of mountains, looms high over the oceans, the Lord Buddha shone, radiated, and glittered as he sat upon his magnificent lion-throne. (12)

If we substitute new meanings for these symbols we get the following: (new meanings in italics)

The Lord Buddha, thus surrounded and venerated by these multitudes of many hundreds of thousands of living beings, sat upon a majestic *royal throne of lineage* and began to teach the Dharma. Dominating all the multitudes, just as *the axis of the world on which the sky rests, the king of the eternal, looms high over that which is endless*, the Lord Buddha shone, radiated, and glittered as he sat upon his magnificent *royal throne of lineage*.

So, if these are just basic symbols, then why use symbols at all? All of the symbols listed above are not just used in Sutras, they are found in Buddhist art. Paintings, decorations on objects, sculptures and the architectural features of buildings are full of these images. It is in this art work with Buddhist symbols that really make these metaphors. They become powerful daily reminders of the Buddha and his teachings. They become images for meditation and contemplation, where Buddhists search for deeper meanings and new understandings.

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid: 119

<sup>24</sup> Ibid: 66

Zen Buddhism was founded in China (known there as Ch'an) as a reaction to the barrage of contradicting schools of thought, all Buddhist, entering China from several sources in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries of the Common Era. Each of these teachings claimed their text(s) to be the only true path. The Ch'an school of meditation was created, in the seventh century, out of the belief that the highest truth is beyond words or speech and became a solely intuitional method of seeking enlightenment, rejecting texts, rituals, and ceremonies. They sought a simpler, cleaner path. Since intellectual reasoning is a form of speech, Ch'an seeks to break down these thoughts in meditation by concentrating on contradictions until "no-mind" is achieved. Like deconstructionists, they search for Truth by pulling away the layers of falsehood to expose it. Truth is not something to be given or received; it is to be revealed. As Wu-Men said in his introduction to the *Gateless Barrier*<sup>25</sup>, "How much more foolish are those who depend upon words and seek understanding by their intellect! They try to hit the moon with a stick. They scratch their shoes when their feet itch."

Ch'an Buddhism was created in a world of mostly illiterate people at a time of social and political change in China. It is considered a blend of Mahayana Buddhism and Daoism and enjoyed great popularity in the intellectual community of seventh and eighth centuries, influencing art and literature. They took their reality paradigm from Daoism and their methods of spiritual exploration from Mahayana Buddhism. Zen (the Japanese word for Ch'an) Buddhists use Kōans as expressions of eternal law and as a tool for self discovery. Tradition holds that the Kōans themselves were a natural outgrowth of the discourse between student and teacher, each contemplating the others' questions or comments in meditation, eventually culminating in the compilation of these questions and comments into several collections. For the purpose of this paper, I am using the collection *The Gateless Barrier, the Wu-Men Kuan*, with commentary by Robert Aitken.

At first glance Kōans appear to be full of symbols: rice, water, monks, masters, mountains. And, although objects often do represent something else as basic symbols, the Kōans are in actuality, object lessons. They do not use the symbols from Mahayanist's sutras. They represent something different in each Kōan. In the object lesson for as ye sow, so shall ye reap, the kernels of corn can represent thoughts or deeds. The entire exercise of showing the children the corn and having them hold it in their hands is a demonstration of spiritual law. Kōans are stories of other such physical demonstrations with comments by others.

#### Case 7 - Chao-chou: "Wash Your Bowl"

A monk said to Chao-chou, "I have just entered this monastery. Please teach me."

Chao-chou said, "Have you eaten your rice gruel?"

The monk said, "Yes, I have."

Chao-chou said, "Wash your bowl." The monk understood.

In this Kōan the rice and the bowl could be considered basic symbols. The rice represents thoughts, the bowl the mind which holds them. Those thoughts have been digested, so it is time to clean your mind. Chao-chou is a regular character and appears in 7 of the 48 Kōans of *The Gateless Barrier*. He is an historical figure and considered a Zen master.

From my understanding, there are several things going on here. R.H. Blyth commented, "If Chao-chou had asked the monk if he had washed his bowl, and said,

---

<sup>25</sup> Aitken, Robert, trans. and commentator. *The Gateless Barrier The Wu-Men Kuan* (New York, North Point Press, 1991)

“Then put some rice in it”, there is no difference.”<sup>26</sup> I see the comment to mean that there are cycles to life and that they must be observed, a very Daoist point of view. Wu-men’s verse to this Kōan is:

Because it’s so very clear,  
it takes so long to realize.  
If you just know that flame is fire,  
you’ll find your rice has long been cooked.

“If you just know that flame is fire” means change your perspective. The last line means you already have the answers. So, in addition to obeying the cycles of life, it is our own point of view that must change for learning to take place. For Zen Buddhists spiritual laws are connected to one another and cannot be separated.

#### Case 9 – Ch’ing-jang’s Nonattained Buddha

A monk asked the priest Ching-jaing of Hsing-yang, “The Buddha of Supremely Pervading, Surpassing Wisdom did zazen on the Bodhi Seat for ten kalpas, but the Dharma of the Buddha did not manifest itself and he could not attain Buddhahood. Why was this?”

Ch’ing-jan said, “Your question is exactly to the point.”

The monk said, “But he did zazen on the Bodhi Seat; why couldn’t he attain Buddhahood?”

Ch’ing-jang said, “Because he is a nonattained Buddha.”

Sometimes there are no symbols in a Kōan. The Buddha of Supremely Pervading, Surpassing Wisdom is a title of Siddhārtha Gautama, known by most Westerners as “the” Buddha. Zazen is a form of Zen meditation with a prescribed seated form. The Bodhi Seat is a reference to the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha sat when he reached enlightenment. It took him 49 days of meditation to find enlightenment and that was after six years living as an aesthetic monk. No obvious symbology here, just references unfamiliar to non-Buddhists. But, even without the basic symbols, this is still an object lesson. The monk is focusing on the form, the zazen, and seems to give magical powers to the Bodhi tree. Indeed the location of the Bodhi tree is now a shrine and a place of pilgrimage. Like the previous Kōan, there is more than one spiritual law being sited here. It is a rejection on the reliance of things and ideas of the physical world, including the concepts of time and place. Spiritual enlightenment will take place in its own time, not on our schedules. Zazen was created to assist in meditation, but is not a direct vehicle to spiritual understanding. And, although we already have the answers, we have not yet wiped away all illusion. The Buddha of Supremely Pervading, Surpassing Wisdom may have always been a Buddha, but even he had to rid himself of falsehoods.

Like good metaphors, good object lessons reveal more each time we revisit them. They are not something to be used once and then thrown away. They should be reviewed over and over again, allowing nuances and even new truths to be discovered by us as we grow in our own spiritual understanding.

The Mérode Triptych, which currently hangs at the Cloisters in New York City, has fascinated audiences for almost six centuries. Its creator, Robert Campin, is a transitional artist who gave life and movement to his work, making the symbolism in his art a part of real life, of the everyday. It is one of the most well known examples of Christian art in the Middle Ages and all three panels contain a plethora of visual

---

<sup>26</sup> Sohl, Robert and Audrey Carr, eds. *Games Zen Masters Play: Writing of R.H. Blyth* (New York, Mentor Books, 1976): 123-126

symbols. This example of symbols is from a dualistic religion in a mostly illiterate society. Texts were for the clergy. Pictures were for the masses.

The Mérode Triptych was painted in a world where magic existed in everyday life. The arguments of the time were over whose magic should be followed. This supernatural view of the world was shared by both clergy and laymen. The church believed that they held the authority, through God, to preside over the magic of the world.<sup>27</sup> When an artist did a piece of work for a church it was with the guidance of clergy and theologians. Those same guidelines were to be followed when creating privately commissioned pieces, such as this triptych, if the artist wanted to do work for the church. There was also a tradition using the same motifs and symbols from other pieces of art, which created a visual language that could be read by any Christian of the time, regardless of their spoken language. These were more than basic symbols, they were analogues.

One of the great mysteries of the unsigned triptych was the identification of the patrons of the painting. Even though it is called the Mérode Triptych, they were the family who sold it to the Met, not the family who commissioned the original. The first confusion for art historians is in the placement of the patrons. Normally the husband would be on the left hand side and the wife would be on the right hand side.

The Annunciation as a center panel was novel in fifteenth century Netherlands. The center panel was probably the original commission. It was that very fact that first led scholars to the name of the family who first had the painting commission, “der Engle brachte”, meaning the angle brought it is the root of the name Inghelbrechts<sup>28</sup>, a name used by only one family in the area around Tournai in the fifteenth century. Peter Inghelbrechts first wife was Margarete Scrynmakers. Scrynmakers or Schrinmechers, as the name is recorded in Cologne, means ‘cabinetmaker’. Portraying Joseph as a cabinet maker is a way of paying homage to his wife’s family name. Quite possibly the left and right panels were added as a wedding present.<sup>29</sup>

But at an even later date the panels were altered with the addition of the woman and the messenger in the left panel, and the coats of arms on the windows of the center panel. As stated above, Margarete was Peter’s first wife. His second wife was Heylwich Billie of Breda, who was also his mistress during his first marriage.

Peter Inghelbrechts was an interesting character. He lived to be about eighty, had three wives, and is reported to have been involved in the murder of a local monk, Martin van Zweensberghen, in Cologne. Duke Philip the Good and a Bishop, Prince of Liège, both intervened on his behalf. Peter lost his citizenship in Cologne, but his life was spared. He left Cologne and moved to Mecheln, where his brother Rembolt lived. It was while living in Mecheln that Peter married his second wife. Since the messenger in the left panel is in the uniform of a Mecheln messenger and because he was still relatively young when he married her it is thought that the woman is the second and not the third wife, which he married at about seventy. The triptych takes on a different meaning with the addition of the woman in the left panel. It now includes a wish for children. By the time he married his third wife, he already had eleven, four of whom were illegitimate. He would have two more by his third wife.<sup>30</sup>

To understand what Campin was trying to say we need to look at the symbols he chose. Since the center panel was created several years prior to the wings, it makes sense to look at it by itself. I am going to assume that the center piece was created for the Inghelbrechts family as a strictly devotional piece.

---

<sup>27</sup> Aron Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception*, ed. Peter Burke and Ruth Finnegan, trans. Janos Bak and Paul Hollingsworth, Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1988): 103.

<sup>28</sup> Thürlemann, Felix. *Robert Campin: A Monographic Study with Critical Catalogue* (New York: Prestel, 2002): 66

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*: 71.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

The scene of Mary and Gabriel was the subject of a popular liturgical play in Belgium and Holland throughout the fifteenth century: The *Aurea Missa* or Golden Mass. It was supposed to have been created at Tournai in 1231. It was performed on Ember Wednesday of Advent, the Wednesday after December 13<sup>th</sup>. During the matins, two boys dressed as Mary and Gabriel would mount curtained platforms after the seventh lesson. At the beginning of the Mass Mary's curtains would be drawn back to reveal her kneeling. Gabriel's curtains would not be drawn until the singing of *Gloria in excelsis*. A dove would descend over Mary at the words *Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te*. It would remain there until after the *Agnus Dei*.<sup>31</sup> The painting is unique in that instead of a dove, it is the Christ entering in.

The only change made to the center panel was the addition of the coat of arms at the top of the windows. There are three characters in this panel, Mary, the angel Gabriel, and the Christ.

In the upper left side is a niche with a towel and basin - The niche is a liturgical niche (*piscina*), which belongs to the right of an altar and contains the laver and hanging towel for the priest to wash his hands.<sup>32</sup> The washing of hands may have had practical applications, but on a symbolic level it denoted the washing away of sins through baptism and penance.<sup>33</sup>

The towel next to the niche – is made of linen with twelve blue strips representing a liturgical garment and would have been equated with the stole of a deacon.<sup>34</sup>

Gabriel, the Messenger, is in a white alb with an amice around his neck, both of which are liturgical garments; the stole draped over his left shoulder and tied under his right arm show him to be a deacon at Mass.<sup>35</sup>

Mary is sitting on the floor – While there is a perfectly good bench in the room, why is Mary sitting on the floor, or ground, next to it? The Latin word for ground is *humus* from the same root as the word humility (*humilitas*), therefore, it is believed that she is sitting on the ground to show her humility.<sup>36</sup>

The book on the table is on top of a bag – the bag is an indication that the book was brought by the messenger, Gabriel. This book is more elaborate than the plain one Mary is reading. Mary is doing her devotional reading of the Old Testament, but Gabriel has brought the good news, the New Testament. The Old Testament reading by Mary is also a reference to the prophecies of Isaiah. The scroll underneath the book on the table is reminiscent of a declaration and probably meant to be the words of Gabriel to Mary.<sup>37</sup>

Lilies – they are often associated with Mary and probably appear more often in paintings of the time than do roses, but this is also a trinity. The open flowers represent Joseph and Mary, the bud represents the unborn Christ.<sup>38</sup>

Smoldering Wick – from Isaiah 42:1-4<sup>39</sup>, a text that is read as the first lesson at matins on the Tuesday of the fourth week in Advent.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Young, Karl, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2 vols., vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933): 246.

<sup>32</sup> Lane, Barbara G. *The Altar and the Altar Piece: Sacramental Themes in Early Netherlandish Painting* (New York, Harper & Row, 1984)

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Minott, Charles Ilseley, "Theme of the Mérode Altarpiece", *The Art Bulletin* 51 (1969): 271.

<sup>35</sup> Lane.

<sup>36</sup> Chapuis, Julien, "Early Netherlandish Painting: Shifting Perspectives," in *From Van Eyck to Bruegel: Early Netherlandish Painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, ed. Maryan W. Ainsworth and Keith Christiansen (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999): 11.

<sup>37</sup> Thürlemann: 67.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid: 72.

<sup>39</sup> **Isaiah 42:1-4 (English Standard Version)**

1 Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

2 He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street;

If the center panel is to stand on its own, then it has meaning contained only within the panel. Barbara Lane sees the center panel as a representation of an altar and the descending of the Holy Spirit over the altar as the moment when the bread and wine of the Eucharist are changed into the body and blood of Christ. She writes, "Since the Holy Spirit causes the conception of the 'living bread,' Christ, at the Incarnation, this event parallels the daily miracle that occurs during the Eucharistic rite performed at the altar." She substantiates this argument with John 6:51: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven." This would explain why we see a baby Jesus coming through the window and not a dove as we normally do. She also argues that the table in the center of the panel is the altar. The location of the towel and basin to the left of the table and in a niche support this reasoning.

The Left Panel depicts our patron and his second wife with a messenger in the background. The second wife, who had been his mistress during the first marriage, was from Mecheln. X-rays done by the Met revealed that when the wings were painted the left wing had only the male patron. The female patron, the messenger in the background and coats of arms in the windows of the center panel had all been added at a later time.

Roses – like the Lilies they represent the Virgin Mary. But notice that also in the left hand panel there is a rose in the hat of the patron. This is a reference to a child wished for or expected.<sup>41</sup>

Messenger in the background – the bearded man next to the gate in the left panel is a messenger of Mecheln, according to his uniform. He was added at the same time the woman was added, making the left panel a personal reflection of the other two panels.

The Right Panel was added for the first marriage and not altered for the second. Inghelbrechts first wife was Margarete Scrynmakers. Scrynmakers or Schrinmechers, as the name is recorded in Cologne, means 'cabinetmaker'. Portraying Joseph as a cabinet maker is a way of paying homage to his wife's family name.

Joseph – By the early fifteenth century there was a movement to elevate the role of Joseph, seeing him no longer as the butt of jokes, but as "a hard-working, vigorous provider".<sup>42</sup> Jean Gerson was one of the promoters of this new version of Joseph, writing a 4600 line poem in his honor entitled *Josephina*.<sup>43</sup> Gerson saw Joseph as both an intercessor, second only to his wife, and as a role model for husbands and fathers. Hahn suggests that in the Mérode Triptych Joseph is portrayed as a role model and not as an intercessor because he is not looking at the audience; he is concentrating on his work.<sup>44</sup>

Ax, saw, and rod – these are found at Joseph's feet. This may be a reference to Isaiah 10:15: "Shall the ax vaunt itself over the one who wields it, or the saw magnify itself against the one who handles it? As if a rod should raise the one who lifts it up, or as if a staff should lift the one who is not wood!" In Jerome's Commentary on Isaiah he

---

3 a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.

4He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.

<sup>40</sup> Minott, Charles Isely. "Theme of the Mérode Altarpiece." *The Art Bulletin* 51 (1969): 270.

<sup>41</sup> Thürlemann, 72.

<sup>42</sup> Hahn, Cynthia, "'Joseph Will Perfect, Mary Enlighten and Jesus Save Thee': The Holy Family as Marriage Model in the Merode Triptych," *The Art Bulletin* 68, no. 1 (1986): 55.

<sup>43</sup> The Catholic Encyclopedia, *Jean De Charlier De Gerson* (May 10, 2004 2004, accessed); available from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06530c.htm>.

<sup>44</sup> Hahn: 60.

suggests that these three objects are representative of the retribution God takes on those who do evil, idol worshippers, and heretics:

What is said by Isaiah to the Assyrian can be applied to the arrogance of heretics and to the Devil who is called the ax, the saw, and the rod in the scriptures, because through him unfruitful trees are to be cut down and split with the ax, the stubbornness of unbelievers sawn through, and those who do not accept discipline are beaten with the rod.<sup>45</sup>

Ambrose, in his Commentary on Luke, sees Joseph as the earthly representation of God the creator who uses an ax “to the unfruitful trees, cuts off that which is worthless, saving the well-shaped shoots”.<sup>46</sup> The ax at Joseph’s feet is a short handled trimming ax.

Mousetraps – the items in the window and on the table in the right hand panel were determined to be mousetraps by Schapiro in 1945. In his article he sites references to two sermons written by Augustine<sup>47</sup>: Sermo CCLXIII<sup>48</sup> and CXXX<sup>49</sup>.

White stone on Joseph’s workbench – this could be interpreted in two different ways. In Revelations 2:17: “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give a white stone, and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.” Therefore, the white stone would be a reference to Joseph’s purity. But it could also be interpreted through another text, Isaiah 6:6: “Then one of the seraphs flew to me, hold a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs”. The stone is lying with a pair of tongs.<sup>50</sup>

Fire screen – The fire screen in the center piece sits in a fire place with no fire (picture on left). The fireplace is on the wall between Mary and Joseph. This is often seen as symbolic of a spiritual marriage, free of carnal desire. However, in the right hand panel with Joseph he appears to be hard at work on another fire screen (picture on right), indicating Joseph’s need to keep the flames of his passion at bay. But, as Hahn points out, Joseph is referred to as an artisan in Matt. 13:55 and an artisan of the period was often a carpenter or an iron-worker and as Ambrose saw Matt. 3:11 as a reference to the Father of Christ as working by fire and by spirit,<sup>51</sup> which would make Joseph, as the earthly representation of Christ’s Father, as one who works by fire. The fire screen, therefore, would be representative of his work with fire and not of his own passion.<sup>52</sup>

When the two additional panels are added, a new overall theme is given to the piece. Hahn sees this as an expression of sacred marriage.<sup>53</sup> She argues that the spiritual aspects of marriage, as understood in the fifteenth century, consisted of proles (offspring), fides (chaste fidelity), and sacramentum, all of which are depicted in the three panels. Many of the smaller symbols represent the wish for children and the chasteness of the relationship between Joseph and Mary. Her placement next in a symbolic ecclesiastical environment where Gabriel brings her the good news establishes the third part of sacrament.

---

<sup>45</sup> translation by Ibid.: 58.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Schapiro, Meyer, "Muscipula Diaboli; the Symbolism of the Mérode Altarpiece by the Master of Flémalle," *The Art Bulletin* 27 (1945): 182.

<sup>48</sup> *De ascensione Domini* Migne, Pat. Lat. XXXVIII, col. 1210

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., col. 726

<sup>50</sup> Minott: 268.

<sup>51</sup> The reference is actually made about Jesus by John the Baptist: “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”, NRSV

<sup>52</sup> Hahn: 60-61.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.: 61.

Beyond Campin's revolutionary use of form, texture, and perspective, the Mérode Triptych is fascinating because it is one of the few paintings that has growth, experience, and maturity. As change came to the Inghelbrechts family, it was reflected in their devotional piece. It didn't grow old; it matured into a complex work, like any interesting life. Stuart Vyse, professor of psychology, Connecticut College, author of *Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition* believes that magic is an individual's response to life's uncertainty.<sup>54</sup> For the people of fifteenth century Netherlands, magic was part of the certainty of life. Vyse does go on to say that religious beliefs, which "are not properly within the realm of empirical inquiry" come from faith and are excluded from the empirical test as are "questions of morality and ethics".<sup>55</sup> But the magic seen in the Mérode panels are not intangible beliefs. They are a part of the reality of life, a reality that many people are still looking for in their own lives. This is what fascinates Americans today, the desire for magic in our lives to be "within the realm of empirical inquiry".

The use of analogue symbols in this piece is to not only remind people of the lessons they learned in church on Sunday morning but to place them into everyday life. God then becomes the magic of our lives. These visual reminders are open to some interpretation; they have flexibility, not rigidity in their definitions. The use of this type of symbol by the church gives the parishioner a sense of self exploration, of control over their ideas and their lives.

Unity, like Zen, is a blend of two other belief systems. They take their reality paradigm from Christian Science and their methods of inquiry from the Methodist Church, seeing the Bible as being inspired by God and open to human interpretation. Unity is a holistic belief system existing in a mostly dualistic society. Its members tend to be not only literate, but well educated. Most of their believers seek enlightenment through personal experience, but the study of the written word is not discouraged. Charles Fillmore, one of the founders of the Unity School of Christianity, created the Twelve Powers to explain the twelve attributes needed for a spiritual existence on this earth as represented in the Bible by first the twelve tribes of Israel and then by the twelve apostles. The tribes and the apostles are symbols for the qualities needed for a spiritual life. They see the Old Testament of the Bible as the development of the human as an ethical and moral person who recognizes God in their lives and the New Testament as the development of the human who recognizes the Divine within, Christ.

Unlike the other three systems, these symbols were discovered not invented. And, unlike the others, they are not utilized in the same way. Although, most Unity Students acknowledge the existence of the Twelve Powers, they do not study the apostles nor the tribes. They focus solely on the powers of the apostles: Faith, Strength, Wisdom, Love, Power, Imagination, Understanding, Will, Order, Zeal, and Renunciation. There are books, programs, classes, and the essential gift items. So, how did Fillmore discover these symbols and what kind are they?

The preface to the *Metaphysical Bible Dictionary* states, "By 'metaphysical' we refer to the inner or esoteric meaning of the name defined, as it applies to every unfolding individual and to his relation to God." These meanings or understandings may have come from prayer and meditation or from the translated meanings of proper nouns. Why these nouns are not translated in the Bible is a topic for another discussion. But by merely translating the names of people and places we get an entirely different reading of the text. Let's take a look at the first Power:

---

<sup>54</sup> Vyse, Stuart A., *Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977):10.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

Peter (Faith) – The first apostle appears in all four Gospels. And, in all of the Gospels, we are told that his name was originally Simon and that Jesus renames him Peter. Simon means to have heard, to understand; Peter means rock or stone. Simon is a common name in the Bible; Peter is not. It does not take a lot of creative thought to see that someone who listens and understands can become steadfast, rock solid, in his or her belief. Fillmore boiled it down to one word – faith. Now, according to Fillmore, the tribes of Benjamin and Reuben both represent faith, also.

Benjamin means the son of prosperity, the son of good fortune. Reuben means to see (vision) a son. For the individual who recognizes God in their lives, faith comes from the tangible things in their lives, that which they can see and use. It comes from being prosperous and abundant. But the faith of one who recognizes Christ within comes from something intangible. They don't need to see or feel things to believe. The faith of Benjamin and Reuben is fleeting, gone with wealth and prosperity. The faith of Peter is not dependent upon the trappings of this world. It is solid regardless of wealth or station in life.

Reuben has a brother: Simeon, Hebrew for hearing, understanding. Simon is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew, Simeon. The sons of Jacob, Israel, have many mothers. Reuben and Simeon are the two sons of Leah, which means weary, exhausted. Fillmore takes that to mean the human soul. By itself, without the divine, our souls are weak, weary, often exhausted. So, Reuben and Simeon are the two aspects that come from our human souls. The faith of Reuben needs the hearing and understanding of Simeon; and the understanding of Simeon needs the prosperity of Reuben. The two are not mutually exclusive. Peter also has a brother, Andrew.

Andrew means strong, manly. He represents the attribute of Strength. For the human who recognizes the indwelling Christ, faith needs strength and strength needs faith. They also are not mutually exclusive. In John 1:42, we are told that Peter and Andrew are the sons of John, meaning fertility, fruitfulness, and love. In Luke 5:1, it says that the two brothers were fishing in the Lake of Gennesaret, which means garden of the prince, valley of the riches.

So, the short meaning here is that from love and prosperity, amidst abundance, can be found strength and understanding. When approached by the Christ, that understanding will become solid faith. But that is not where this metaphor ends. The name Peter appears over 90 times in the four gospels. With each appearance or story we learn more about the aspects of faith.

Charles Fillmore may not have had much formal education, but he was very much a scholar. Although his work is not annotated, it is filled with quotes and references of a very well read individual. He was, however, a man of his time and some of his conclusions are based on the newest theories of his era. It was a time of great exploration and change. Oscar Wilde and Gilbert and Sullivan were writing for the stage. Fanny Farmer wrote her first cookbook. The fight for women's rights grew until the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was passed in 1920. Chiropractics was established, x-rays were discovered, the tootsie roll and the motion picture were introduced to the public. America was changing from a large agrarian society to a powerful urban industrial nation. Emile Durkheim and William James were questioning current beliefs of science and were exploring the human being as a member of a society and not as a pre-ordained creature without will or choice. I count Charles and Myrtle as two of the unsung pioneers in the study of the Bible and our relationship to it. They laid the foundation for a whole new approach, a whole new perspective, which is as ancient as the texts themselves.

By focusing solely on the Powers of the Apostles, Unity Students are missing out on the sacred knowledge discovered by Fillmore. They are robbing themselves and others of powerful spiritual knowledge. This need not be a strictly intellectual indulgence. As with the sutras or the Kōans their messages should be used in

meditation and contemplation. These are true metaphors and have the ability to apply to our lives as we grow and expand our world and our understanding.

It doesn't matter how the metaphysical discernment was discovered. Whether through prayer and meditation or through scholarly study, these meanings do exist. Just because penicillin was discovered on some icky old bread, does not reduce its importance to medical science. As penicillin was the foundation for the study of antibiotics, the work of the Fillmores should be the foundation for the study of Biblical text from a metaphysical perspective by scholars from multiple traditions. This however will not happen until Unity Students first embrace the scholar's approach to metaphysical Christianity.

The basic symbols used in Buddhist Sutras become metaphors in their art. The visual presentations of the same symbols are used as constant reminders of omnipresent Buddha nature. Although there may be basic symbols in Buddhist Kōans, it is the entire Kōan that is actually a symbol in the form of an object lesson. The commentaries on the Kōans may also be object lessons or full of metaphors all discussing the same spiritual principle. The combination of the Kōans and the commentaries become a dialectic reminiscent of Plato's dialogs. Christian art of the Middle Ages is full of analogue symbols used by the church to reinforce Sunday sermons, used both in the church and in private homes. In all of these examples, the symbols are not static. They are a language of the people. So recognizable are the images, characters, stories, and patterns that the users don't think of them as symbols, but as a form of communication.

From cave paintings to leetspeak,<sup>56</sup> symbols are a part of the human exchange. Each of these systems uses symbols to teach and reinforce their beliefs in simple, easy to recognize forms. Except for the Twelve Powers, they were purposely created and then evolved over time with the input of several people. All of them were created with the intention that they be used by current believers and converts. There was never any intention on the part of these teachers to develop exclusive information. They intended for their beliefs to be shown in the light, not shrouded in darkness. It doesn't seem to matter how old the system is or was, whether it is a religion or a philosophy, from a unified reality or from a dualist perspective. Symbols have and still are the common thread for teaching spiritual designs, concepts, and perspectives.

---

<sup>56</sup> Meaning elite speak or 'lite speak. Known also as 1337. It is a common language of the youth and used on the internet and text messaging.

## Bibliography

- Aitken, Robert, trans. and commentator. *The Gateless Barrier The Wu-Men Kuan* (New York, North Point Press, 1991)
- Aron Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception*, ed. Peter Burke and Ruth Finnegan, trans. Janos Bak and Paul Hollingsworth, Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1988)
- Buddhist Temple of Chicago, Buddhist Symbols, <http://www.budtempchi.org/buddhist-symbols.php>
- Charles Isely Minott, "Theme of the Mérode Altarpiece," *The Art Bulletin* 51 (1969)
- Cynthia Hahn, "'Joseph Will Perfect, Mary Enlighten and Jesus Save Thee': The Holy Family as Marriage Model in the Merode Triptych," *The Art Bulletin* 68, no. 1 (1986)
- Fahy, Everett. "How the Picture Got Here." In *From Van Eyck to Bruegel: Early Netherlandish Painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, ed. Maryan W. Ainsworth and Keith Christiansen, 63-78. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999)
- Fillmore, Charles and Cora, *The Twelve Powers* (Unity Village, MO: Unity House, 1999)
- Fontana, David, *Secret Language of Symbols* (San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 1994)
- Julien Chapuis, "Early Netherlandish Painting: Shifting Perspectives," in *From Van Eyck to Bruegel: Early Netherlandish Painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, ed. Maryan W. Ainsworth and Keith Christiansen (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999)
- Khandro Net, a Tibetan Buddhist site, (initiated as an offering to, and commemoration of, the activity of the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpe Dorje. It continues in devotion to the energy and activity of all Karmapas as embodied in the 17th Gyalwa Karmapa, Ugyen Tinley Dorje)  
[http://www.khandro.net/nature\\_thunder.htm](http://www.khandro.net/nature_thunder.htm)
- Klostermaier, Klaus K., *A Survey of Hinduism* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1994) Levenson, Claude B., *Symbols of Tibetan Buddhism*. (Paris, Editions Assouline, 1996)
- Lane, Barbara G., *The Altar and the Altar Piece: Sacramental Themes in Early Netherlandish Painting* (New York, Harper & Row, 1984)
- Metaphysical Bible Dictionary*, (Unity Village, MO: Unity House, 1931)
- Muller, F. Max, translator, "The Larger Sukhavati-vyuha: Description of Sukhavati, The Land of Bliss", Cowell, E.B., editor, *Buddhist Mahayana Texts* (New York, Dover Publications, 1969)

- Robinson, Richard H., *The Buddhist Religion: a historical introduction*. (Belmont, CA, Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1977)
- Schapiro, Meyer, "Muscipula Diaboli; the Symbolism of the Mérode Altarpiece by the Master of Flémalle," *The Art Bulletin* 27 (1945)
- Sohl, Robert and Audrey Carr, eds. *Games Zen Masters Play: Writing of R.H. Blyth* (New York, Mentor Books, 1976)
- The Catholic Encyclopedia, *Jean De Charlier De Gerson* (May 10, 2004 2004, accessed); available from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06530c.htm>.
- Thürlemann, Felix. *Robert Campin: A Monographic Study with Critical Catalogue* ( New York: Prestel, 2002)
- Thurman, Robert A. F., *Inside Tibetan Buddhism: rituals and symbols revealed* (San Francisco, Collins Publishers, 1995)
- Thurman, Robert A. F., translator, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti: a Mahayana scripture* (University Park, PA, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976)
- Vira, Raghu and Lokesh Chandra, *Tibetan Mandalas* (New Delhi, Pradeep Kumar Goel, 1995)
- Vyse, Stuart A., *Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977)
- Walker, Benjamin, *Hindu World*, vol. 2 (London, George & Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1968)
- Young, Karl, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2 vols., vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933)

The study investigated early years teachers' understanding and use of graphic symbols, defined as the visual representation(s) used to communicate one or more "linguistic" concepts, which can be used to facilitate science learning. The study was conducted in Cyprus where six early years teachers were observed and interviewed. The results indicate that the teachers had a good understanding of the role of symbols, but demonstrated a lack of understanding in regards to graphic symbols specifically. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is often promoted as an inclusive teaching methodology for supporting all students within diverse contemporary classrooms. This is achieved by proactively planning to the edges of a classroom by thinking of all the potential needs of students. There are no true "universal symbols" in literature because symbols mean different things in different culture. However, there are many commonly accepted symbolism in Western literature: For example, the good guy dresses in white and the bad guy dresses in black. Typically, white (or light) symbolizes purity, while black (or darkness) suggests evil. Each of the four seasons also is often used symbolically: Spring signifies a reawakening/rebirth; summer the height of youth and vigor; fall, the decline of youth and vigor; and winter the final years of life, a dying of hope, and death. Things tha