

Myth as a key to our preverbal experiences

From babyhood till conception

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Summary

Research on imprinting has shown that the first emotional learning experiences are the most important ones in the life of an animal or human child. Prenatal psychology/psychotherapy has taught us that a baby is a fully sentient human being – from the moment of conception. On the basis of these two levels, I propose the hypothesis that the creation myths of the ancient peoples repeatedly tell stories of this early period, of the fears of a baby and its experiences during birth. And ultimately, each myth of origin is a story of what a god, and that means a baby in its mother's womb, experiences. This is the basis of my book: *Ancient Myths and the Trauma of Birth*.

Taking the Sumerian-Babylonian creation myth, which is around one thousand years older than the Flood in the Bible. I demonstrate how this flood myth can be understood at the deepest level as a story about procreation: a "hero" Atrahasis survives, while everyone else is destroyed in the floodwaters. This myth, I believe, is an image or a symbol for the sperm cell, which succeeds in fertilizing the ovum, while all the other sperm cells are condemned to perish. And in the Sumerian-Babylonian flood myth the hero Atrahasis is given the gift of eternal life by the chief of the gods: the sperm is permitted to live on in each cell.

Against this background, the myths can be understood as representing the various, pre-verbal levels. Firstly, at the level of the alienation of mother and baby, as can be observed in all advanced civilisations. Secondly, at the next, deeper level a myth is a story about birth. Thirdly, each story about the gods is a portrayal of what a baby experiences in its mother's womb during the pregnancy. And at the deepest level the myth is a story of procreation. I only hinted at this aspect in my book, here I elaborate on it in more detail. Finally, the myths, the old stories of the gods, can act as a mirror in which we can understand the symbolism of our dreams from a pre-natal viewpoint: the myths are the great dreams of the ancient peoples – and an individual dream is our own private myth.

¹ Summary of my German article: *Mythen als Schlüssel für unser vorsprachliches Erleben*. In: *The international Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Medicine*, Vol. 18, 2006: 262-274