

The cosmic myth is a story that tells truth even though it may not be historically true. Thus, the classic cosmic myth is familiar to each of us because the story is our own. It is the storyline of Hamlet, *Star Wars*, *Tom Jones*, *Princess Bride*, Adam and Eve, and Job.

The cosmic myth is always in the pattern of a chiasmus.¹ In its simplest form it looks like this:

The hero is required to leave home.
He is given a seemingly impossible task.
He confronts overwhelming odds and certain failure
He succeeds in accomplishing the task.
He returns home, triumphant.

A way of writing that so it would be more meaningful to Latter-day Saints, is this:

The hero is required to leave his/her premortal home .
Before leaving, he/she is given a difficult task.
On earth he/she confronts overwhelming odds.
Notwithstanding the difficulties, he/she succeeds.
He/she returns triumphant to the celestial home.

A perfect ancient literary example of the symbolic cosmic myth is the “Hymn of the Pearl” that is found near the conclusion of the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*. It is called “The Hymn of the Soul” in this early translation by Anthony Ashley Bevan.² It is among the oldest and most

¹See: John W. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Provo, Utah, FARMS, 1981).

²*The Hymn of the Soul Contained in the Syriac Acts of St Thomas, Re-edited with an English translation by Anthony Ashley Bevan* (Cambridge, University Press, 1897), 12-31.

The Hymn of the Pearl, as it is usually called, is found near the conclusion of the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*. James explained that this is “a most remarkable composition, originally Syriac, and certainly older than the Acts [of Thomas], with which it has no real connection. We have it in Greek in one manuscript, the Vallicellian, and in a paraphrase by Nicetas of Thessalonica, found and edited by Bonnet.” (p. 411) All of the following translations listed below are from the Syriac, except the last one by Bentley Layton. That is from the Greek version.

Hdgar Hennecki (Edited by Wilhelm Schneemelcher, English translation edited by R. McL. Wilson), *New Testament Apocrypha, Writings Relating to the Apostles; Apocalypses and Related Subjects*, Vol. 2, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, p. 498-504.

Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri, an Egyptian Edowment* (Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 1975), 267-272.

beautiful of the non-canonical writings, and is a perfect example of the cosmic myth.

“The Pearl is the soul itself, rescued and returned from the depths.”³ It is the story of a young prince who must leave home, is given a seemingly impossible task, but when he arrives at his destination he meets another like himself (“an anointed one”) and they assist each other in preparing for the darkness to come. Though we do not hear about him again, the friend is a central part of the story. It is true the hero must fulfill his covenants alone, but it is also true that his loving Father will not that aloneness be void of loving family and friends. The hero sinks into the despair of insurmountable obstacles, but again a loving Father comes to his aid—not to fulfill his covenants for him, but simply to remind him who he is and what he has come to do. The hero recognizes and acknowledges his princely Self. “I remembered that I was a son of kings And my noble birth asserted itself.” In an act of triumph he discards the identifying uniform his assailants have given him, obtains the pearl for which he came. As he leaves the alien country, he meets messengers who hand him the garment he left behind, now greatly enriched by his seeming unhappy experiences. While the boy was wallowing in the muck of this world, the robe had to grow so it would still be able to fit the boy when he returned. His experiences were the source of this growth, and he finds that he and the garment is a perfect expression of his newly discovered Self. The robe (the inner garment that Nibley calls his “garment of light”) had symbols on it which represented the boy’s having become like God. Then he returns home, gloriously enrobed and triumphant.

The Hymn of the Soul Contained in the Syriac Acts of St Thomas, Re-edited with an English translation by Anthony Ashley Bevan [The Bevan translation below is in italics.]

*1 When I was a little child,
And dwelling in my kingdom in my Father’s house,
2 And in the wealth and the glories
Of my nurturers had my pleasure,*

1-2. In my first primeval childhood I was nurtured in the royal house of my Father with loving care in the midst of abundance and glory.⁴

*3 From the East, our home,
My parents, having equipped me, sent me forth.*

David R. Cartlidge and David L. Dungan, Documents for the Study of the Gospels (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1980), 46-50.

Robert M. Grant, Gnosticism (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1966), 116-22.

Montague Rhodes James, The Apocryphal New Testament (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975), 411-15.

Bentley Layton, The Gnostic Scriptures (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1987), 371-75.

³Hugh Nibley, Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri, 268.

⁴Nibley, Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri, 267-68.

3. our home in the East (the source of light),⁵

*4 And of the wealth of our treasury
They had already tied up for me a load,*

*5 Large it was, yet light,
So that I might bear it unaided-*

*6 Gold of⁶
And silver of Gazzak the great,*

*7 And rubies of India,
And agates (?) from the land of Kushan (?),*

*8 And they girded me with adamant [diamond ⁷]
Which can crush iron.*

9. They removed from me the garment of light, which they had made for me in love.⁸

*9 And they took off from me the bright robe,
Which in their love they had wrought for me,*

*10 And my purple toga,
Which was measured (and) woven to my stature.*

*11 And they made a compact with me,
And wrote it in my heart that it should not be forgotten:*

11 And they made with me a covenant

And wrote it in my heart, that I might not forget:⁹ covenant is also in ^{10 11}

*12 "If thou goest down into Egypt,
And bringest the one pearl,*

*13 Which is in the midst of the sea
Hard by the loud-breathing serpent, [devouring serpent,¹²]*

*14 (Then) shalt thou put on thy bright robe
And thy toga, which is laid over it,*

*15 And with thy Brother, our next in rank,
Thou shalt be heir in our kingdom."*

*16 I quitted the East (and) went down,
There being with me two messengers,*

⁵Nibley, Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri, 267-68.

⁶A head note reads: "In the Translation, dots indicate that the Syriac text is corrupt or unintelligible."

⁷Nibley, Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri, 268.

⁸Nibley, Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri, 268.

⁹Hennecki, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 499.

¹⁰Nibley, Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri, 268.

¹¹James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 411.

¹²James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 412.

17 *For the way was dangerous and difficult,
And I was very young to tread it.*
18 *I passed the borders of Maishin,
The meeting-place of the merchants of the East,*

[They arrive at Maishan, where the merchants of the East gather.]¹³

19 *And I reached the land of Babel.
And entered the walls of [Sarbug¹⁴]*
20 *I went down into Egypt,
And my companions parted from me.*

24-28 [There he meets a young nobleman from his own country, born in the Covenant, with whom he shares full confidence, and he warns him against the temptations and defilements of Egypt.]

23 And when I was single and alone,
A stranger to those with whom I dwelt,
24 One of my race, a free-born man,
From among the Easterns, I beheld there-
25 A youth fair and well favoured,
[a son of great rulers.] -
26
...and he came and attached himself to me.
27 And I made him my intimate,
A comrade with whom I shared my merchandise.
28 I warned him against the Egyptians
And against consorting with the unclean;¹⁵

24 But there I saw a Cousin¹⁶ of mine from the East-a free person,
25 Gracious, handsome, and young, a child of members of court:
26 Who came and kept me company,
27 And whom I made my friend and partner in my travels: had as a constant companion:
28 And exhorted to guard against the Egyptians and against intercourse with their impurities.¹⁷

13Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 268.

14Hennecki, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 499.

15Grant, *Gnosticism*, 118.

16Layton's footnote reads: "Probably not an indication of close blood relationship, but rather an Eastern title bestowed at royal court as a mark of honor." n. "d," p. 372.

17Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 372.

21 *I betook me straight to the serpent,
Hard by his dwelling I abode,
21 (Waiting) till he should slumber and sleep,
And I could take my pearl from him.*

23 And forasmuch as I was alone I made mine aspect strange, and appeared as an alien to my people.

24 And there I saw my kinsman from the East, the free-born
25 a lad of grace and beauty, a son of princes (or an anointed I one).

26 He came unto me and dwelt with me,

27 and I had him for a companion, and made him my friend and partaker in my journey (OT merchandise).

28 And I charged him to beware of the Egyptians, and of partaking of those unclean things ¹⁸

23 And since I was all alone
I was a stranger to my companions of my hostelry.

24 But one of my race I saw there,

A nobleman out of the East,

25 A youth fair and lovable,

26 An anointed one,

And he came and attached himself to me

27 And I made him my intimate friend,

My companion to whom I communicated my business.

I (He ?) warned him (me ?) against the Egyptians

And against consorting with the unclean.¹⁹

As I was alone, [I was a stranger
to my hosts who were my companions].
But there I saw one of my fellow countrymen
from the East, a free man, a youth gracious and favored,
a son of the mighty.

He came and joined me,

and I made him my bosom companion,

my friend, to whom I communicated.

I warned him to watch the Egyptians

48

and their unclean companionship.²⁰

23 And when I was single and alone,

18James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 412 .

19Hennecki, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 499.

20Cartlidge and Dungan, *Documents for the Study*, 47 .

*A stranger to those with whom I dwelt,
24 One of my race, a free-born man,
From among the Easterns, I beheld there-
25 A youth fair and well favored
26 and he came and attached himself to me.
27 And I made him my intimate,
A comrade with whom I shared my merchandise.
28 I warned him against the Egyptians
And against consorting with the unclean;
29 And I put on a garb like theirs,
Lest they should insult (?) me because I had come from afar;*

29 But I clothed myself in garments like theirs,
That they might not suspect that I was come from without.²¹

*30 To take away the pearl,
And (lest) they should arouse the serpent against me,
31 But in some way or other
They perceived that I was not their countryman;
32 So they dealt with me treacherously,
Moreover they gave me their food to eat.*

I forgot that I was the son of a king,
and I served their king,
[and I forgot the pearl
for which my parents had sent me].
And from the heaviness of their food,
I fell into a deep sleep.
While I suffered all this,
my parents were aware of it and suffered for me.
A proclamation was announced in our kingdom
that all should come to our gate.²²

32 They gave me a mixture of cunning and treachery, and I tasted their food,
33 I did not (any longer) recognize that I was a child of the (Great) King, but rather acted as
servant to their king.
34 And I even came to the pearl for which my parents had sent
me on the mission
35 But sank into deep sleep under the heaviness of their food,²³

33 I forgot that I was a son of kings.

21Hennecki, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 499.

22Cartlidge and Dungan, *Documents for the Study*, 48.

23Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 372.

*And I served their king;
34 And I forgot the pearl,
For which my parents had sent me,
35 And by reason of the burden of their... [food ²⁴]
I lay in a deep sleep,*

36. Meanwhile the heavenly parents, aware of what has happened,
37. call a family council
38. of all the great and noble relatives,
39. who decide it is time to act.²⁵

36 But when this befell me, my fathers also were ware of it, and grieved for me,
37 and a proclamation was published in our kingdom. that all ft should meet at our doors.²⁶

*36 But all these things that befell me
My parents perceived and were grieved for me;
37 And a proclamation was made in our kingdom,
That all should speed to our gate,
38 Kings and princes of Parthia
And all the nobles of the East
39 So they wove a plan on my behalf,
That I might not be left in Egypt,
40 And they wrote to me a letter,
And every noble signed his name thereto:
41 "From thy Father, the King of kings,
And thy Mother, the mistress of the East,
42 And from thy Brother, our next in rank,
To thee our son, who art in Egypt, greeting!
43 Up and arise from thy sleep,
And listen to the words of our letter*

43Awake and rise up from thy sleep,
And hearken to the words of our letter.
44Remember that thou art a son of kings.
See the slavery -- Him whom thou dost serve!²⁷

*44 Call to mind that thou art a son of kings!
See the slavery-whom thou servest!*

45 Remember the pearl for the which thou wast sent into Egypt

24Hennecki, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 500.

25Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 269.

26James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 412.

27Hennecki, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 500.

46 Remember thy garment spangled with gold,
47 and the glorious mantle which thou shouldest wear and wherewith thou shouldest deck thyself.
Thy name is named in the book of life,
48 and with thy brother whom thou hast received (thou shalt be) in our kingdom.²⁸

*45 Remember the pearl
For which thou didst speed to Egypt!
46 Think of thy bright robe,
And remember thy glorious toga,
47 Which thou shalt put on as thine adornment.
When thy name hath been read out in the list of the valiant,
48 And with thy Brother, our: ..
Thou shalt be ...in our kingdom.”*

48And thou with thy brother, our crown prince,
Be heir in our kingdom.”²⁹

*49 And my letter (was) a letter
Which the King sealed with his right hand,
50 (To keep it) from the wicked ones, the children of Babel,
And from the savage demons of ... [Sarburg³⁰]
51 It flew in the likeness of an eagle,
The king of all birds;
51 It flew and alighted beside me,
And became all speech.*

53At its voice and the sound of its rustling
I awoke and stood up from my sleep,
54I took it and kissed it,
Broke its seal and read.
55And even as it was engraven in my heart
Were the words of my letter written.³¹

*53 At its voice and the sound of its rustling,
I started and arose from my sleep.
54 I took it up and kissed it,
And loosed its seal (?), (and) read;*

28James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 413 .

29Hennecki, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 501.

30Hennecki, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 501.

31James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 413 .

54. He kisses the letter, breaks the seal, and reads,
55. Lo, it is the same letter as that which he brought
with him from on high written in his heart.
56. He remembers that he is a King son, and his royal nature asserts itself.³²

54 I took it up and kissed it,
And loosed its seal [?], [and] read:
55 And according to what was traced on my heart.
Were the words of my letter written.
56 I remembered that I was a son of kings,
And my freedom longed for its own nature.
57 I remembered the pearl,
For which I had been sent to Egypt,³³

65 And as with its voice it had awakened me
[So] too with its light it was leading me
66 For the royal garment of silk
Shone before me with its form,
67 And with its voice and its guidance
It also encouraged me to speed,
68 And with its love was drawing me on.³⁴

55 But what was written there concerned that which was
engraved in my heart.
56 And on the spot I remembered that I was a child of kings and that my people demanded my
freedom (?).
57 I also remembered the pearl for which I had been sent on the
mission to Egypt,³⁵

*55 And according to what was traced on my heart
Were the words of my letter written.
56 I remembered that I was a son of kings,
And my free soul longed for its natural state.*

56 I remembered that I was a son of kings
And my noble birth asserted itself.³⁶

*57 I remembered the pearl,
For which I had been sent to Egypt,*

32Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 270.

33Grant, *Gnosticism*, 119-20.

34Grant, *Gnosticism*, 119-20.

35Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 373 .

36Hennecki, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 501.

58 *And I began to charm him,
The terrible loud-breathing serpent.*

58 And I began to cast a spell
On the terrible loud-breathing serpent.

59 I brought him to slumber and sleep
By naming my father's name over him,³⁷

*59 I hurried him to sleep and lulled him into slumber,
For my Father's name I named over him,
60 And the name of our next in rank,
And of my Mother, the queen of the East;
61 And I snatched away the pearl,
And turned to go back to my Father's house.*

I began to cast a spell on the fearful serpent.
I subdued him by naming my father's name.
And the name of our next in rank,
and of my mother, the Queen of the East.
And I snatched the pearl,
and I turned to go to my father's house.
I stripped off their dirty robe
and left it in their country.³⁸

62 And I stripped off the filthy garment and left it in their land,
63 and directed my way forthwith to the light of my fatherland
in the East.³⁹

*62 And their filthy and unclean garb
I stripped off, and left it in their country,
63 And I took my way straight to come
To the light of our home, the East.
64 And my letter, my awakener,
I found before me on the road,
65 And as with its voice it had awakened me.
(So) too with its light it was leading me*

66 For at times the royal garment of silk (shone) before mine eyes,)
67 (and with its voice and its guidance it also encouraged me

37Hennecki, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 501.

38Cartlidge and Dungan, *Documents for the Study*, 48.

39James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 413.

to speed,)⁴⁰

66 *Shone before me with its form,*
67 *And with its voice and its guidance*
It also encouraged me to speed,
68. ... *And with his love was drawing me on.*
69 *I went forth, passed by ...*
I left Babel on my left hand,

68 And drawing me with its love.
69 I went forth, passed through Sarburg,⁴¹

70 *And reached Maishin the great,*
The haven of the merchants,
71 *That sitteth on the shore of the sea*
....

72. His garment of light and his outer robe were
waiting for him here,⁴²

72 *And my bright robe, which I had stripped off,*
And the toga wherein it was wrapped,
73 *From the heights of Hyrcania (?)*
My parents sent thither,
74 *By the hand of their treasurers,*
Who in their faithfulness could be trusted therewith.
75 *And because I remembered not its fashion-*
For in my childhood I had left it in my Father's house —

55 But what was written there concerned that which was
engraved in my heart.

56 And on the spot I remembered that I was a child of kings and that my people demanded my
freedom (?).

57 I also remembered the pearl for which I had been sent on the
mission to Egypt,⁴³

40 James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 414.

41 Hennecki, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 502.

42 Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 270 . Nibley
adds, "Note that raiment is put on not only at the beginning of the
journey and at the end, but is also donned at intermediate stages."

43 Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 373 .

76 but suddenly, [when] I saw the garment made like unto me as it had been in a mirror.
77 And I beheld upon it all myself (or saw it wholly in myself), I and I knew and saw myself through it,
78 that we were divided asunder, being of one; and again were one in one shape.
79 Yea, the treasurers also which brought me the garment
80 I beheld, that they were two, yet one shape was upon both, one royal sign was set upon both of them.⁴⁴

*76 On a sudden, as I faced it,
The garment seemed to me like a mirror of myself.
77 I saw it all in my whole self,
Moreover I faced my whole self in (facing) it,*

78 For we were two in distinction
And yet again one in one likeness.
79 And the treasurers also,
Who brought it to me, I saw in like manner,
80 That they were twain [yet] one likeness,
For there was graven on them one sign of the King,
81 Whose hands [they were] "which restored to me[?]
My treasure and my wealth by means of them,
82 My bright embroidered robe,
which was decorated with glorious colours;⁴⁵

*78 For we were two in distinction
And yet again one in one likeness.
79 And the treasurers also,
Who brought it to me, I saw in like manner;
80 That they were twain (yet) one likeness,
For one kingly sign was graven on them,*

80 That they were two of a single form,
For one sign of the king was impressed upon them,⁴⁶

*81 Of his hand that restored to me (?)
My treasure and my wealth by means of them,
82 My bright embroidered robe,
Which....with glorious colours;*

44James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 414 .

45Grant, *Gnosticism*, 121.

46Hennecki, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 502.

82 My splendid robe adorned
Gleaming in glorious colours,⁴⁷

83 *With gold and with beryls,
And rubies and agates (?)*
84 *And sardonyxes varied in color,
It also was made ready in its home on high (?)*.
85 *And ,with stones of adamant
All its seams were fastened;*

85. Fastened everywhere with diamond clasps⁴⁸

86 *And the image of the King of kings
Was depicted in full allover it,*

86 And the likeness of the king of kings
Was completely embroidered all over it⁴⁹

86. And the image of the King of Kings covered the whole thing.⁵⁰

87 *And like the sapphire-stone also
Were its manifold hues.*
88 *Again I saw that all over it
The motions of knowledge were stirring,*
89 *And as if to speak
I saw it also making itself ready.*

89 And as if to speak
I saw it also making itself ready.
90 I heard the sound of its tones,

47Hennecki, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 502.

48Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 271 . Nibley adds this note: "All its seams were sewn with diamonds" (Adam). This indicates that the garment, though the same one, is now enhanced, *gesteigert*, the same garment, but a better one, enriched by earthly merits and victory (Hoffmann, p. 286)

.....
If the whole rest of the poem is applied to the garment only, it is full of strange anomalies, which become perfectly clear in terms of the well-known Veil of the Temple."

49Hennecki, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 503.

50Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 271 . Nibley adds this note: "If the whole rest of the poem is applied to the garment only, it is full of strange anomalies, which become perfectly clear in terms of the well-known Veil of the Temple."

Which it uttered to those who brought it down [?]
91 Saying," I am he who is mighty in deeds
I whom they reared for him in the presence of my father,
92 And I also perceived in myself⁵¹

*90 I heard the sound of its tones,
Which it uttered to those who brought it down (?)*

91 I am of him that is more valiant than all men, for whose sake I was reared up with the Father himself.

92 And I also perceived his stature (Greek reads, "I perceived in myself that my stature grew in accordance with his working).

93 And all Its royal motions rested upon me as it grew toward the impulse of it (And with its kingly motions it was spreading itself toward me).

414

94 And it hastened, reaching out from the hand of (him that brought it) unto him that would receive it,

95 and me also did yearning arouse to start forth and meet it and receive it.

96 And I stretched forth and received it, and adorned myself with the beauty of the colours thereof ,

97 and in my royal robe excelling in beauty I arrayed myself wholly.

98 And when I had put it on, I was lifted up unto the place of peace (salutation) and homage,

99 and I bowed my head and worshipped the brightness of the Father which had sent it unto me,

100 for I had performed his commandments, and he likewise that which he had promised,

101 and at the doors of his palace which was from the beginning I mingled among (his nobles),

102 and he rejoiced over me and received me with him into his : l palace,

103 and all his servants do praise him with sweet voices.

104 And he promised me that with him I shall be sent unto the gates of the king,

105 that with my gifts and my pearl we may appear together before the king.⁵²

*91 Saying, "I...
Whom they reared for him (?) in the presence of my father,*

91"I belong to the most valiant servant,

51Grant, *Gnosticism*, 121 .

52James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 414-15.

For whom they reared me before my father,
92 And I perceived also in myself
That my stature grew according to his labours."
93 And with its royal movements
It poured itself entirely toward me,
94 And in the hands of its bringers
It hastened, that I might take it;⁵³

*92 And I also perceived in myself
That my stature was growing according to his labors."*
*93 And in its kingly motions
It was spreading itself out towards me,*
*94 And in the hands of its givers
It hastened that I might take it.*
*95 And me too, my love urged on
That I should run to meet it and receive it,*

96. And I stretched out and received it, adorned myself with the beauty of its colors
97. and wrapped myself completely in my shining mantle.⁵⁴

*96 And I stretched forth and received it,
With the beauty of its colors I adorned myself.*
*97 And my toga of brilliant colors
I cast around me, in its whole breadth.*
*98 I clothed myself therewith, and ascended
To the gate of salutation and homage;*
*99 I bowed my head, and did homage
To the Majesty of my Father, who had sent it to me,*
*100 For I had done his commandments,
And he too had done what he promised,*
*101 And at the gate of his princes
I mingled with his nobles;*
*102 For he rejoiced in me and received me,
And I was with him in his kingdom.*
*103 And With the voice of...
All his servants glorify him.*

All his subjects hymned with beautiful voices.⁵⁵

*104 And he promised that also to the gate
Of the King of kings I should speed with him,*
105 And bringing my gift and my pearl

53Hennecki, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 503.

54Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 271.

55Cartlidge and Dungan, *Documents for the Study*, 50 .

I should appear with him before our King.