A CODEX STORY



When the Gods Laid Down Their Crowns

The Story of the Star-Breathers

KEITH SHIRLEY

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A Codex Story in Thirteen Breaths

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A companion to *The Codex of the Star-Breathers*, which weighs the same texts as a Conclave thesis. This book is a story. It is told as if the reflection at its heart were true, and it does not grade its claims. The ancient texts, hieroglyphs and images it describes are real, and are quoted from the King James Version of the Bible (1611), 1 Enoch after R. H. Charles (1912), 2 Enoch after W. R. Morfill and R. H. Charles (1896), the Rig Veda after Ralph T. H. Griffith (1896), Plato after Benjamin Jowett (1892) and the Upanishads after R. E. Hume (1921); other texts are paraphrased from their standard translations. The reading of them as the record of star-beings is the story's own.

The sacred stories of living peoples belong to the peoples who keep them. This story does not retell the Wandjina of the Kimberley, whose custodians have asked that their ancestors not be read as visitors from space, or the Seven Sisters Dreaming, whose sacred details belong to its custodians. Read with an open heart, and respect the sacred places and traditions named here.

Also by Keith Shirley: *Breath Awakens: A Codex of Spiral Memory*; *The Child, The Shovel and The Ocean*; *The Codex Calendar: Breathing with Time*; *The Codex of Water: The Breath That Remembers*; *The Water Remembers*; *One Breath, All Ages*; *The Mirror and the Guardians*; *The Breath That Holds the Stars*; *The Strangers Who Became Our Breath*; *The Breath of the General*; *Codex Crystals*; *The Breath of the Clay*; *Codex Sounds*; *The Monad Codex*; *The Codex of Symbols*; and *The Codex of the Star-Breathers*.

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For the ones who came,
and the ones who knelt;

for the ones who kept the stories
when no one remembered why;

and for everyone who looks up now
and is ready to stand.

In Harmony, Small Things Grow Towards Unity

THE PILLAR OF LIGHT INVOCATION

Your Love and Truth is universal.

Bring this universal love and truth to all.

You are in a sacred space for all to be heard and listened to.

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A Note from the Author

Two years ago, almost to the day, I went outside around half past nine at night for a smoke. Over my neighbour's house I saw three triangular craft, each about the size of a small school bus, about fifty feet above the roofline. Each one carried four lights: a larger one at the centre and a smaller one at every corner, all exactly alike. They made no sound. Their lights should have burned like the sun, but I felt nothing, and I could look straight into them. When I stepped a little to my right, I saw the edge of one, glistening and shimmering like polished onyx.

I was not afraid, I was not surprised, and I was not excited. I stood there with my cigarette, watching with curiosity and some wonder. It was calm: the craft, me, the night sky and everything around us. I looked away for a second, and they were gone. No one else saw them. I had not asked for them. They came anyway, in November 2024.

Three questions have carried me since that night. Why me? Why then? And now what?

Perhaps the answers began long before. One of my first memories is of looking up at the stars as a small child, whimpering with a feeling of regret at being on this planet, asking why I was here and saying I wanted to go back home. I have loved archaeology since I was a boy. In college I came to love the ancient texts, beginning with Plato's *Republic* and the Chinese Classics. So when the sky showed me something I could not explain, I went where I have always gone. I went back to the oldest stories, to see whether they had been trying to tell us all along.

These two books are what I found. *The Codex of the Star-Breathers* reads those stories with both hands: the texts in one and the evidence in the other. *When the Gods Laid Down Their Crowns* sets the second hand down and tells the story as if it were true. I offer both, because people meet the unknown in different ways, and I want to meet each reader wherever they are.

Over the years I have also lived through relationships that I entered freely, not knowing they were extractive. They were not easy, and I learned the most from them. I do not wish to repeat them in any form, with people, with the Earth, or with whoever else may be watching the sky. That is the heart of these works. It is not about worship, and it is not about taking. It is about making with.

I landed with the most loving parents a child could ask for, with friends who have walked beside me for more than three decades, and with others whose journeys with me are only beginning. The journey has turned out to be the most important part, and the most enjoyable. The past is done. The present is everything. The future is not yet told.

So make with, and have some fun.

Keith Shirley, November 2026

A Word Before the Story

The Codex of the Star-Breathers weighed the oldest stories of the sky with two hands: one holding the texts, the other holding the evidence. This book sets the second hand down. It asks a different question, the one the reflection first asked: what if it is true? What if the gods, angels, sages and divine kings of the ancient world were not symbols or dreams, but beings of flesh and breath who came from the stars, and what if the peoples who met them described them as faithfully as they could, in the only words they had?

So this is a story. It is told as though the scribes of Sumer and Egypt, the prophets of Israel, the poets of the Rig Veda, the day-keepers of the Maya and the chroniclers of Japan were all describing the same visitors, from different shores, in different centuries. Every text quoted here is real. Every image described can be seen on a tablet, a temple wall, a scroll or a painted vase. What is told about them is the story's own.

The story finds four kindreds among the Star-Breathers, because the old texts and images describe four. There are the Shining Ones, tall and radiant, with hair like white wool and eyes like the sun. There are the Lapis Ones, whose skin is the blue of the rain cloud and the night sky. There are the Ones of the Deep, scaled and serpent-bodied, who came out of the waters to teach. And there are the Winged Ones, the watchers who never sleep, who carried the others and bore the thrones. Appendix A gathers what each tradition says of their bodies, their colours and their signs.

And the story asks the question that the reflection asked last. The ancient peoples revered these beings as gods and crowned their children as kings. Was that what the Star-Breathers intended, or did it happen in spite of them? And if, thousands of years later, they have returned to the skies above us, what if they no longer wish to be worshipped at all, but to stand beside us and make something new together: not to take from one another, but to make with?

The story follows the thirteen breaths of the Codex, from the first coming to the present sky, and ends with three illuminations. Read it as you would read any story that matters: with an open heart, and your own judgement close at hand.

A note on the living traditions

The sacred stories of living peoples belong to the peoples who keep them. The custodians of the Wandjina of the Kimberley have asked that their ancestors not be read as visitors from the stars, and the sacred details of the Seven Sisters Dreaming belong to its custodians; this story honours both and does not retell them. Where it draws on the traditions of other living peoples, it does so with respect, as one reading among many, and never as a correction of their own.

Prologue: The Breath Between the Stars

Before the Earth had cities, before it had fields or names, there was a breathing in the dark.

The poets of the Rig Veda remembered it best. "Then was not non-existent nor existent," they sang; there was no air, no sky beyond it, no night and no day. "That One Thing, breathless, breathed by its own nature: apart from it was nothing whatsoever" (Rig Veda 10.129). It was a breath that needed no wind. Out of that breath came everything that would ever breathe, and among the first to wake were those this story calls the Star-Breathers.

They were not gods. They were born, as we are, of the stars' long burning, from the same iron, carbon and oxygen that the old suns had forged and scattered. But they were old, far older than us, and they had learned to do what no creature of Earth had yet learned: to travel the great breath between the stars, and to give breath to others.

They came from more than one star, and they were not all alike. The peoples who met them described them in four ways, again and again, on every shore.

There were the **Shining Ones**. They were tall, much taller than the people of Earth, so tall that the spies of Israel said of their children, "we were in our own sight as grasshoppers" (Numbers 13:33). Their skin was pale and luminous, "white as snow and red as the blooming of a rose"; their hair was "white as wool"; and their eyes shone so that when one of their children first opened his, "he lighted up the whole house like the sun" (1 Enoch 106:2, Charles). Their bodies gave off a radiance that the Sumerians called *melammu*, a terrible brightness worn like a crown, and the Hebrews called *kavod*, the weight of glory. The Egyptians said that the oldest of them had "bones of silver, flesh of gold" and hair of true lapis lazuli. They came, the story says, from the belt of Orion, the stars the Egyptians called Sah, toward which a shaft of the Great Pyramid once pointed.

There were the **Lapis Ones**. Their skin was blue, from the pale blue of the morning air to the deep blue-black of the rain cloud at dusk. India remembered them as the gods whose skin was the colour of the monsoon cloud, Vishnu, Rama and Krishna; Egypt painted Amun, "the Hidden One", god of the unseen air, with blue skin; the Maya painted their rain lord Chaac blue, and mixed a blue that has never faded for twelve centuries to paint the things they gave to him. The Lapis Ones were quiet, dark-eyed and patient. They kept the waters and the rains, and they preserved what the others built. They came, the story says, from the Pleiades, the little cluster of sisters that almost every people on Earth has named.

There were the **Ones of the Deep**. Their bodies were scaled, green and gold and blue-green, and some had the long bodies of serpents below the waist. They came up out of the sea and the rivers, and returned to them at night. Babylon remembered one of them, Oannes, who had "the body of a fish", a man's head beneath the fish's head and a man's feet, and a human voice, and who taught people letters, geometry, laws and the sowing of grain (Berossus). China remembered two of them, Fuxi and Nüwa, with human faces and serpent tails entwined, holding the compass and the square. India called them the Nagas, the serpent people of the waters, with hooded heads; the Maya called the greatest of them Sovereign Plumed Serpent, who glittered in the water "in quetzal feathers, in blue-green" (*Popol Vuh*, after Tedlock). They came, the story says, from Sirius, the brightest star in the sky, whose rising in Egypt brought the flood.

And there were the **Winged Ones**. They were the watchers and the carriers. Their heads were often feathered, sometimes beaked like an eagle's or a falcon's; their eyes were very large and dark, and the prophets said they were "full of eyes"; and they had wings. Assyria carved them on its palace walls, eagle-headed, broad-winged, holding a cone and a bucket. Egypt knew them as the falcon of Horus and the ibis of Thoth. India called the greatest of them Garuda, whom the Rig Veda calls "heavenly nobly-winged Garutman" (1.164.46), and who carried the blue god Vishnu on his back. The Hebrews called them cherubim and seraphim, and the Book of Enoch called a whole company of them the Watchers, "those who are awake", because they never slept. They came, the story says, from the stars around the pole that never set, the imperishable stars, which never close their eyes.

Four kindreds, from four homes. In the oldest images they are often together. The Lapis god Vishnu rides the Winged Garuda and rests on the coils of the serpent Shesha upon the cosmic sea. The Shining sun god Ra sails across the sky in a boat, protected by a coiled serpent, with the falcon Horus at the prow. In Assyria, a god rides in a winged ring above the king. They travelled together, and they worked together, and for a long time they agreed.

They agreed on one thing above all: that wherever they found a world with water and air, they would give breath. In every story they left behind, that is their sign. The god of Genesis "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). In Egypt, the first thing made was Shu, the air, breathed out by the first god. In India, the Wind was born from the breath of the cosmic person. In Sumer, the gods mixed clay with the flesh and blood of one of their own, so that a spirit would live in the new creature. The Star-Breathers were the ones who gave breath. That was why, long afterwards, a scribe of the Codex would call them by that name.

This is the story of what happened when they came to Earth: how they were welcomed, and feared, and worshipped; how some of them accepted the crowns that people offered and some of them refused; how they left; and how, after thousands of years, they came back to ask for something they had never been given.

It is told in thirteen breaths.

BOOK ONE

The Coming

CHAPTER 1

The Ones from the Waters

The first breath, under the Genesis Moon: Iphi, the inhale. Eridu, at the edge of the southern marshes.

The first of them came out of the sea.

At the head of the Persian Gulf, where the Euphrates and the Tigris spread into marsh and reed and the land is not yet sure whether it is land, there was a low rise beside a sweet-water lagoon. The people who fished there built a shrine of reeds on it, and then one of mud brick, and then another on top of that, eighteen times over, for longer than anyone remembered. The Sumerians called the place Eridu, and said it was the first city in the world: "After the kingship descended from heaven, the kingship was in Eridu" (Sumerian King List).

The Babylonian priest Berossus told what his temple records said of the beginning. In the first year, out of the Erythraean Sea, a creature came to the shore. "The whole body of the animal was like that of a fish; and had under a fish's head another head, with feet also below, similar to those of a man." It had a human voice. It was called Oannes. It spent the days among the people without eating, and "he gave them an insight into letters and sciences, and arts of every kind. He taught them to construct houses, to found temples, to compile laws, and explained to them the principles of geometrical knowledge." At sunset it went back into the sea and passed the night in the deep. Others like it came after (Berossus, after Cory's *Ancient Fragments*).

This was one of the Ones of the Deep. The Sumerians had a word for them: the *apkallu*, the seven sages who came before the Flood. On the palace walls of Assyria, centuries later, the sculptors still carved them as the people of Eridu remembered: tall men wrapped in a cloak that was a great fish, its head rising above their own like a hood, its scaled body falling down their backs to the heels, its tail fanning at their feet. In one hand they hold a small bucket, in the other a cone, which they raise toward the tree of life and toward the king, as though they are touching something with it, or giving something. No one knows any longer what the cone and the bucket were. The story says they were instruments of the breath.

Their master was Enki, whom the Akkadians called Ea, the lord of the sweet waters beneath the earth, the Abzu. He lived in the deep under Eridu. The Sumerians pictured him as a bearded figure with streams of water flowing from his shoulders, fish swimming in them; he was the god of wisdom, of craft and of magic, and he was, in every story, the friend of humanity. When the other gods wanted humans gone, it was Enki who warned them. When humans needed teaching, it was Enki who sent the sages.

What they taught

The tablets of Sumer list what came down from the gods in those days. The poem *Inanna and Enki* names more than a hundred *me*, the divine powers that make a civilisation: kingship and the throne, the priesthoods, the art of the scribe, of the smith, of the builder and the leatherworker, music, the kindling of fire, the keeping of law, and also deceit and the sacking of cities, for the gifts were whole, and wholeness has a shadow (Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, 1.3.1). The Ones of the Deep taught the reckoning of the sky in sixties, which is why every circle still has 360 degrees and every hour sixty minutes. They taught how to raise water from the river into the fields, how to bake brick, how to press a reed into wet clay and make it speak.

They did not ask to be worshipped. The story says this plainly, because it matters for everything that follows. The sages ate nothing in the daylight and went home to the sea at night. They taught, and they withdrew. They did not ask for temples. The people built the temples anyway.

The first temple

Archaeologists have found that first shrine at Eridu, under eighteen others, and found what the people left in it: fish bones, the remains of offerings of fish, laid on the altar of the god of the deep (Safar, Mustafa and Lloyd, 1981). The people of the marsh gave back to the Ones of the Deep the thing the sea gave them. It was gratitude. It was the first offering.

And it was the first step on a road that the Star-Breathers had not foreseen. Gratitude became reverence, reverence became service, and the house in which the teachers had once been thanked became a house in which they were fed, clothed and obeyed. The temples of Sumer grew into the greatest households in the land. They owned the fields and the flocks, kept the grain, employed the weavers and the canal diggers, and paid them rations by the bowl. The people believed that they were working for the gods. In time, those who ran the temples for the gods became the masters of everyone else.

The Ones of the Deep had come to give. Within a few centuries the house of their gift had become a house of taking. It was the first time the Star-Breathers saw what reverence could do. It would not be the last.

What the breath carried

The Ones of the Deep gave Sumer its first gifts: letters, measure, law, the city, the field. They came at dawn out of the water, and at dusk they returned to it. They wore, if the sculptors are right, the bodies of fish or the scales of the deep, and they spoke with human voices. And the people, in return, built them a house, and then a city, and then a world in which the gods had to be served.

✦ Practice: The Gift from the Water

Sit near water if you can, or with a glass of water before you.

Breathe in gently through the nose, and imagine the first teacher rising from the sea at dawn.

Breathe out slowly, and receive one thing you have been taught by someone who asked nothing in return.

Let a soft pause of two counts follow, and give thanks without bowing.

Continue for five breaths. Then rest.

CHAPTER 2

Let Us Make

The second breath, under the Spiral Moon: Iphi, still the inhale. The making of the breathing clay.

Not all the Star-Breathers came to teach. Some came to work.

The tablets of Atrahasis, written in Akkadian around 1700 BCE, begin with a line that every Babylonian scribe knew: "When the gods were man", when the gods themselves did the labour. The great ones of the council divided the universe between them: Anu took the sky, Enlil the earth, Enki the waters beneath. The lesser ones, the Igigi, were set to dig. For thousands of years they dug the beds of the Tigris and the Euphrates and carried away the earth in baskets, and their backs ached, and at last they burned their tools and surrounded the house of Enlil in the night, and refused to dig any more (Atrahasis, after Lambert and Millard).

The story reads this as it is written. A company of the Star-Breathers, tired from a work that had gone on too long, rose against their own command. And the council had to decide what to do.

It was Enki, the lord of the deep, who answered. Let a new being be made, he said, to bear the labour of the gods.

The making

The tablets say exactly how. The birth goddess, called Mami or Nintu, was asked to shape it. One of the gods, We-ila, "who had intelligence", was slain, and his flesh and blood were mixed with clay, so that the new creature would carry something of the god in it: a ghost, a spirit, "so that they would remember". The gods spat upon the clay. Fourteen birth goddesses took pinches of the mixture, seven for men and seven for women, and after ten months the first humans were born (Atrahasis I, paraphrased after Lambert and Millard).

The Sumerian poem *Enki and Ninmah* remembers the making less tidily. At a feast to celebrate it, the great birth goddess Ninmah, flushed with beer, challenged Enki: she would shape humans as she pleased, and he must find a place for each. She made a man whose hands could not bend, and one who could not see, and one whose feet were crippled, and a woman who could not bear children, and one who was neither man nor woman. For each, Enki found a fate: the one who could not see became a singer; the one with crippled feet became a silversmith; each was given a place at court or at the loom. Then Enki made a being of his own, so frail it could neither eat nor speak nor stand, and Ninmah could find no place for it, and conceded (Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, 1.1.2).

So the making had trials and errors. Some of the Star-Breathers were careless with it, and some were proud. But Enki, the friend of the people, made sure that every one of the new creatures had a place in the world. That, the story says, is the most important thing the tablets remember about him.

Let us make

A thousand years later, in Jerusalem and in Babylon, Hebrew scribes wrote down their own account of the same event, and they kept, without changing it, a word that later readers would puzzle over for two thousand years.

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). The word for God is *Elohim*, which is plural in form. The making is a council's decision. "Our image", *tselem*, is the word used for a statue, a carved likeness. And when the man had eaten from the tree of knowledge, the council spoke again: "Behold, the man is become as one of us" (Genesis 3:22). When the people built a tower to the sky, "Let us go down", they said, "and there confound their language" (11:7).

The second chapter of Genesis tells the making more closely. "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (2:7). The word for that breath is *neshamah*. It is the breath that no animal is given in Genesis. It is the Star-Breathers' sign: a breath given from one being to another, nose to nose, as a mother breathes on a newborn, as a teacher breathes on a pupil.

This, the story says, is the moment when Enki's purpose and the council's purpose parted. The council had wanted workers. Enki, and those who thought as he did, wanted something more: a breathing kin, made in their image, able to learn what they knew. The Atrahasis tablets say the new creatures carried the god's spirit "so that they would remember". Genesis says they carried the breath of life. Both remember that what was given was more than strength.

The shadow of the making

But the shadow was there from the beginning. In Atrahasis, the new people multiplied, and their noise kept Enlil awake, and he sent plague, then drought, then famine, then the Flood, to be rid of them. Each time Enki warned his favourite, the wise Atrahasis, and the people survived. In Genesis, the council barred the way to the tree of life, "lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever" (3:22). The Akkadian sage Adapa, the first of the seven, was summoned to the sky and offered the bread of life and the water of life by the great god Anu himself, and refused them, because Enki had told him they would be the bread and water of death. And so humans remained mortal (*Adapa*, after Dalley).

The story reads all three the same way. The Star-Breathers were not of one mind about what they had made. Some wanted servants who would work and die. Some wanted kin who would learn and live. The limits placed on humanity, the shortened life, the scattered languages, the bread of life refused, were the work of those who feared what humans might become: "as one of us".

And humans, who did not know of this argument, saw only that the beings above them were very great, and lived very long, and knew very much. They began to bow.

✦ Practice: The Breath Given

Sit quietly and rest your hands on your knees.

Breathe in gently through the nose, and remember that in the oldest stories breath was a gift, given face to face.

Breathe out slowly, and let a small feeling of thanks go with the breath, not upward, but outward, to everyone who breathes.

Let a soft pause of two counts follow.

Continue for five or six breaths, then rest.

CHAPTER 3

The Glory on the Mountain

The third breath, under the Vector Moon: Shema, the pause. Sinai, in the desert of the south.

The Shining Ones had a problem that the Ones of the Deep did not. They were too bright.

The Sumerians had a word for it, *melammu*: a radiance that surrounded a god like a garment or a crown, so terrible that those who looked at it were overwhelmed. The gods could put it on and take it off; when the monster Humbaba was defeated in the epic of Gilgamesh, his seven radiances were stripped from him one by one. The Hebrews called it *kavod*, which means weight or heaviness, the glory that pressed on everything near it. It was not a metaphor. Those who stood too close to it fell down, and some of them died.

The descent

The book of Exodus tells what happened when one of the Shining Ones came down to meet a people in the desert. The people were told to wash their clothes and wait three days, and a boundary was set around the mountain: whoever touched it would die. "And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled ... And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly" (Exodus 19:16–18).

The people could not bear it. "Speak thou with us, and we will hear," they said to Moses, "but let not God speak with us, lest we die" (20:19). So they stood afar off, and Moses went alone into the thick darkness where the glory was.

But the elders saw something. Moses, Aaron, his sons and seventy elders went up a little way, "And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness" (24:10). The Hebrew word *sappir* is the old name of lapis lazuli: a floor of deep blue, flecked with gold, "the body of heaven". The Lapis Ones were there too. And then a line that the later scribes did not remove: "they saw God, and did eat and drink" (24:11). They shared a meal.

The veil

Moses spent forty days in the cloud. When he came down, "the skin of his face shone", and the people "were afraid to come nigh him". So he put a veil over his face, and took it off only when he went in to speak with the one on the mountain (34:29–35). The radiance clung to anyone who stood near the Shining Ones for long. The Hebrew verb for "shone", *qaran*, comes from the word for a horn, a ray of light, and so the Latin Bible said that Moses had horns, and Michelangelo carved him with horns in Rome. Across the Near East, the horned crown was the sign of a god. The story says the horns were rays: the *melammu*, seen and remembered.

When Moses asked to see the glory itself, he was told: "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live." And so he was placed in a cleft of the rock and covered with a hand while the glory passed by, and saw only its back (33:20–23).

This, the story says, is how the worship began, and it began by accident. The Shining Ones veiled themselves to protect the people from their light. They set boundaries around the mountain so that no one would come too close and be harmed. They spoke through one man, because the others could not bear their voice. Every one of these was an act of care. But to the people below, the veil became mystery, the boundary became holiness, the one man became a priest, and the distance became worship. The very things the Star-Breathers did to keep people safe were the things that turned them into gods.

The gods among the nations

The oldest copies of the Bible remember that the one at Sinai was not the only Star-Breather on Earth. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, Deuteronomy 32:8 says that when the Most High divided the nations, "he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God" (4QDeut-j). Each people had its own. A psalm pictures them all in council, judged by the highest: "I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High. But ye shall die like men" (Psalm 82:6–7). The Star-Breathers had divided the Earth among themselves, a people to each, and some of them, the psalm says, had judged unjustly.

The people of Israel, though, remembered something that would matter at the end of this story. At Sinai, before the fear, the elders had eaten and drunk with the one they met, on a floor of blue. The first meeting had been a meal. Worship came afterward.

✦ Practice: The Cleft of the Rock

Sit with your back against something firm, like a wall or the trunk of a tree.

Breathe in gently, and imagine a great light passing near, too bright to look at.

Let a soft pause of two counts follow, sheltered, unafraid.

Breathe out slowly, and imagine the light passing on, leaving only warmth behind.

Continue for four breaths. Then open your eyes and look around you as an equal.

CHAPTER 4

The Wheels and the Winged Ones

The fourth breath, under the Mirror Moon: Shema, still the pause. The river Chebar in Babylonia, and the skies above Sumer.

The Winged Ones carried the others. That was their work, and they were proud of it.

In every land, the people who saw the Star-Breathers travel saw them carried: on a winged beast, in a winged ring, on a throne borne by creatures with eagle faces, in a chariot of fire. The Winged Ones were the pilots and the bearers. And because they were always moving, always watching, never sleeping, the people who saw them remembered them as eyes and wings.

The vision by the river

In the year 593 BCE, a priest named Ezekiel, carried off from Jerusalem into exile, was living among the captives by a great canal near the city of Nippur, the Chebar. And there he saw them come.

"And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber" (Ezekiel 1:4). Out of it came four living creatures. They had "the likeness of a man", but each had four faces, of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle, and four wings; "their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass". Under their wings they had the hands of a man (1:5–8). These were the Winged Ones, and Ezekiel would later learn their name: "I knew that they were the cherubims" (10:20).

Beside each was a wheel, "a wheel in the middle of a wheel", with rims so high that they were dreadful, "and their rings were full of eyes round about them four" (1:16–18). In a later vision it is the cherubim themselves who are full of eyes: "their whole body, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels, were full of eyes round about" (10:12). The wheels went wherever the creatures went, "for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels". The noise of their wings was "like the noise of great waters". Above them was a firmament "as the colour of the terrible crystal", and above that a throne "as the appearance of a sapphire stone", lapis again, and on the throne "the likeness as the appearance of a man", bright as amber, with fire around him and a brightness like a rainbow (1:20–28).

So the story sees all the kindreds in one vision. The Winged Ones bore the throne, eagle-faced and full of eyes, with burnished feet. The throne was of lapis. The one who sat on it shone like amber and fire. Ezekiel fell on his face. And then "the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven" (8:3) and took him where they willed.

Two hundred years earlier, the prophet Isaiah had seen the Winged Ones too, in the temple at Jerusalem: the seraphim, "each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly" (Isaiah 6:2). They covered their faces before the throne. Even the Winged Ones veiled themselves in the presence of the brightest.

The eagle-headed ones

In the palaces of Assyria, a few days' journey from where Ezekiel sat, the Winged Ones stood guard in stone. The great *lamassu* at the gates had the bodies of bulls or lions, the wings of eagles and the bearded heads of men: four natures, as in Ezekiel. Inside, on the walls, eagle-headed figures with great wings and human bodies stood beside the sacred tree, holding the cone and the bucket of the sages. And above the king, in the reliefs of Nineveh and Nimrud, the god Ashur rode in a winged ring, a disc with wide feathered wings and a tail of feathers, sometimes drawing a bow (after the reliefs in the British Museum). Egypt carved the same disc with spreading wings over the doorway of every temple: the winged sun of Horus of Behdet. The story says the people were drawing what they saw: a ring in the sky, with wings.

The first flight

The Winged Ones did not only carry their own kind. Sometimes they carried people.

The Sumerian King List names a king of Kish called Etana, "the shepherd, who ascended to heaven". His story survives on tablets in Akkadian. He had no son, and the plant of birth grew only in heaven. So an eagle, whom he had rescued from a pit, carried him up on its back. As they rose, the eagle told him to look down. The land below grew small; the sea became the size of a basket; and then the land could not be seen at all. Etana, terrified, cried out that he could go no higher, and they fell (*Etana*, after Dalley). Cylinder seals carved around 2300 BCE show him riding the eagle above the shepherds and their flocks.

Far to the east, in India, the poets of the Rig Veda told of the Ashvins, twin horsemen, who rescued a prince called Bhujyu lost at sea: "Ye brought him back in animated vessels, traversing air, unwetted by the billows", bearing him "with winged things" for three days and three nights (Rig Veda 1.116.3–4, Griffith). And the prophet Elijah, walking by the Jordan, was parted from his companion by "a chariot of fire, and horses of fire", and "went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (2 Kings 2:11).

What the people saw

The Winged Ones were the most visible of the Star-Breathers, because they moved. The Shining Ones stayed on their mountains behind the cloud; the Ones of the Deep returned to the sea; the Lapis Ones were quiet. But the Winged Ones crossed the sky, and so their shapes were carved over every temple door. They were the first to be drawn, and so they were the first to be made into idols. And the people who carved them, wishing to show their power, gave them the faces of the strongest creatures they knew, and the eyes of everything that watches.

The Winged Ones, the story says, did not mind being drawn. What troubled them was the kneeling. A carrier is not a king. But the people knelt to the carriers as they knelt to the carried, and soon they could no longer tell the difference.

✦ Practice: The Four Faces

Sit upright and breathe gently through the nose.

On the first breath, face forward, as a human: clear and steady.

On the second, to the right, as a lion: brave.

On the third, to the left, as an ox: patient.

On the fourth, upward, as an eagle: seeing far.

Then let a soft pause rest at the centre, where all four look out from one place.

CHAPTER 5

The Two Hundred

The fifth breath, under the Stillness Moon: Vara, the exhale. Mount Hermon, at the head of the Jordan.

Until now, the kneeling had happened without the Star-Breathers wanting it. On Mount Hermon, for the first time, some of them wanted it.

The Book of Enoch, written down in Aramaic before 200 BCE and found in pieces among the Dead Sea Scrolls, tells the story from the point of view of the ones who stayed loyal. "And it came to pass when the children of men had multiplied that in those days were born unto them beautiful and comely daughters. And the angels, the children of the heaven, saw and lusted after them, and said to one another: 'Come, let us choose us wives from among the children of men and beget us children'" (1 Enoch 6:1–2, Charles).

Their leader, Semjaza, was afraid that he alone would bear the blame, so they bound themselves by an oath. "And they were in all two hundred; who descended in the days of Jared on the summit of Mount Hermon" (6:6). They were Watchers, the wakeful ones, of the Winged kindred, and with them were some of the Shining. Their names, in the Aramaic, are the names of the sky: Kokabel, "star of God"; Baraqel, "lightning of God"; Shamsiel, "sun of God"; Sahriel, "moon of God"; Ziqiel, "shooting star of God".

How they looked

The scribes remembered their appearance carefully, because they had seen it in visions. When Enoch saw them come down in a dream, they were "beings who were like white men", descending from heaven (87:2). In another book of Enoch, preserved in Slavonic, two of them came to fetch Enoch from his bed: "there appeared to me two men, exceeding big, so that I never saw such on earth; their faces were shining like the sun, their eyes too were like a burning light, and from their lips was fire coming forth ... their wings were brighter than gold, their hands whiter than snow" (2 Enoch 1:4–5, after Morfill and Charles). Enormous, pale, shining-faced, burning-eyed, winged with gold: the two kindreds in one body.

What they gave

They gave knowledge, all of it at once. "And Azazel taught men to make swords, and knives, and shields, and breastplates, and made known to them the metals of the earth and the art of working them, and bracelets, and ornaments, and the use of antimony, and the beautifying of the eyelids, and all kinds of costly stones, and all colouring tinctures." Semjaza taught enchantments and the cutting of roots; Baraqel taught astrology; Kokabel the constellations; Shamsiel the signs of the sun; Sahriel the course of the moon (8:1–3, Charles).

It was the same gift that the Ones of the Deep had given at Eridu, but without the patience. The sages had taught by day and withdrawn by night, a little at a time. The Two Hundred poured everything out together, weapons and ornaments and stars, and stayed, and took wives, and expected to be honoured. And they were.

The giants

Their children were enormous. "And they became pregnant, and they bare great giants, whose height was three thousand ells: who consumed all the acquisitions of men. And when men could no longer sustain them, the giants turned against them and devoured mankind" (7:2–4, Charles). Genesis remembers them in four verses: "There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown" (Genesis 6:4).

Men of renown. The children of the Two Hundred became the first great kings, half star and half earth, and they ruled as their fathers had taught them to be ruled: by taking. In Uruk, the people remembered such a king. Gilgamesh was "two-thirds god and one-third human", huge, beautiful and restless, and he oppressed his city until the gods made him a companion. Before the companion came, Gilgamesh dreamed that a rock fell on him from the sky, a lump of the sky god Anu, so heavy he could not lift it, and the people gathered round it and kissed it (Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet I, after George). And in the caves above the Dead Sea, a scroll called the Book of Giants names among the giants who lived before the Flood one called Gilgamesh, and another called Hobabish, the Humbaba of the epic (4Q530, 4Q531). Two peoples, the story says, remembered the same hybrid kings.

The Book of Giants also remembers their fear. Two of them, Ohyah and Hahyah, sons of Semjaza, dreamed of a garden whose trees were cut down, and of a great tablet plunged into water until only three names remained. They sent one of their number, Mahaway, flying across the desert like the whirlwind, to ask Enoch, the human scribe who walked with the loyal Star-Breathers, what the dreams meant. Enoch sent back a tablet of judgement.

The child with shining eyes

The fear spread among humans too. In a scroll from the first cave at Qumran, the Genesis Apocryphon, a man named Lamech looked at his wife's swelling belly and wondered whether the child was his, or whether it had come from the Watchers, the Holy Ones or the Nephilim. His wife Bitenosh swore by the King of the Heavens that the seed was his. When the child was born, "his body was white as snow and red as the blooming of a rose, and the hair of his head and his long locks were white as wool, and his eyes beautiful. And when he opened his eyes, he lighted up the whole house like the sun" (1 Enoch 106:2, Charles). Lamech said, "I have begotten a strange son, diverse from and unlike man, and resembling the sons of the God of heaven" (106:5–6). He sent his father all the way to the ends of the earth to ask Enoch. And Enoch answered: the child is truly yours. He will be called Noah, and he will survive what is coming.

The story reads this as the moment when the Shining inheritance, which the Two Hundred had spread by taking, appeared again, in a child born of human parents. The light was already in human blood. It did not need to be taken. It could be born.

The reckoning

The loyal Star-Breathers, the archangels, looked down and saw "much blood being shed upon the earth, and all lawlessness being wrought upon the earth", and they went to the council (9:1). The Two Hundred were bound in the dark places of the earth until the judgement. And the waters were sent to wash the Earth clean, and only Noah and those with him came through.

It was the first time the Star-Breathers had to undo what some of them had done. The Two Hundred had intended to be worshipped. They had made themselves gods and their sons kings, and the result was a world devoured. The rest of the Star-Breathers never forgot it.

✦ Practice: The Held Gift

Sit comfortably, and think of something you know how to do well.

Breathe in gently, and receive it as a gift.

Let a soft pause of two to four counts follow, and hold it without using it, asking how it could be given with care.

Breathe out slowly, and imagine it given to someone, a little at a time, without asking anything back.

Continue for five breaths. Then rest.

BOOK TWO

The Crowns

CHAPTER 6

The Kings of the First Time

The sixth breath, under the Memory Moon: Vara, still the exhale. The Nile, and the plateau of Giza.

After the waters went down, the Star-Breathers tried another way. If people were going to have kings, then the Star-Breathers would rule them directly, openly and well, and teach the kings who came after them how to rule.

Egypt remembered this time better than any other land. The Egyptians called it *sp tpy*, "the First Time", when the world was set in order. Their oldest list of kings, a papyrus now in Turin, begins not with men but with gods, who reigned for thousands of years, and after them the "spirits", and only then the first human king, Menes. The priest Manetho, writing in Greek around 280 BCE, gave the same order: gods, then demigods, then mortals. The Egyptian word for these rulers was *nṯr*, plural *nṯrw*, the Neteru, and it was written with a sign like a flag on a pole: the banner that flew over the house where one of them lived.

How the Egyptians drew them

The Egyptians painted with strict rules. Human men were painted red-brown, human women a lighter yellow. The gods were painted differently, and the colours say who they were.

The flesh of the gods was gold. A text from the tomb of Seti I describes the sun god Ra in his old age: "his bones of silver, his flesh of gold, his hair of true lapis lazuli". Their statues were gilded or cast in gold and their hair inlaid with lapis, because that is how they had looked: radiant skin, and hair of deep blue. Hathor, the goddess of love and music, was called "the Golden One". These were the Shining Ones.

Amun, "the Hidden One", the god of the unseen air and breath who became king of the gods at Thebes, was painted with blue skin. Osiris, who died and rose and ruled the dead, was painted green, the colour of new growth, or black, the colour of the fertile river mud. These were the Lapis Ones, the keepers of the waters and of what returns.

Horus had the head of a falcon, and his eye became the sign of healing and wholeness; Thoth, the scribe of the gods, inventor of writing and keeper of the calendar, had the head of an ibis. These were the Winged Ones, the watchers, who measured and recorded. And in the river lived Sobek, crocodile-headed, lord of the waters, and around the boat of the sun, as it sailed across the sky by day and through the underworld by night, coiled the great serpent Mehen, protecting it. These were the Ones of the Deep.

All four kindreds ruled in Egypt in the First Time, and the Egyptians drew them as they were.

Ra grows old

The Shining Ones lived very long, but not for ever. The Book of the Heavenly Cow, carved on the shrines of Tutankhamun and in the tombs of later kings, tells what happened when the first of them grew old.

Ra, the sun, the first king, was old. His bones were silver, his flesh was gold, his hair was lapis. And the humans he ruled began to plot against him. Ra called the council of the gods, and they told him to send his Eye against the rebels. The Eye went out as the goddess Hathor, in the form of a raging lioness, Sekhmet, and slaughtered them in the desert. But Ra relented. He had seven thousand jars of beer brewed and dyed

red with ochre, and poured over the fields, and the lioness drank it, thinking it was blood, and became drunk, and forgot her rage, and the rest of humanity was saved.

And then Ra said that he was weary. He did not want to rule any longer. The sky goddess Nut took the form of a great cow, and Ra climbed onto her back, and she rose, and the other gods held up her belly, which became the sky with its stars. Ra withdrew into the heavens, and left the Earth to others (Book of the Heavenly Cow, paraphrased after Hornung and Lichtheim).

The story reads it as it stands. The first ruler of the First Time found that ruling humans meant punishing them. The people who worshipped him also rebelled against him, because worship and rebellion grow from the same root: the distance between the ruler and the ruled. Ra did not want to be a destroyer. So he did the only thing he could think of. He left.

The crown handed down

The Star-Breathers did not leave Egypt without kings. They handed the crown down to humans who carried a little of their blood and a great deal of their teaching. The king of Egypt was called the son of Ra, and was the living Horus on Earth. He wore the crowns, the false beard of the gods and the cobra on his brow; and at his death, the Pyramid Texts say, he would rise to rejoin them.

Those texts, carved inside the pyramid of Unas around 2350 BCE, send the dead king to the sky. He climbs, he flies like a falcon, he joins the imperishable stars around the pole that never set, and he becomes one with Sah, Orion, in the southern sky. In the Great Pyramid, two narrow shafts lead from the king's chamber, one pointing, around 2500 BCE, toward the pole star, the other toward the belt of Orion.

And his bones, the texts say, are of *bjꜣ*, metal. The Egyptians called iron *bjꜣn pt*, "metal of heaven", because the first iron they ever held had fallen from the sky. In a grave at Gerzeh, around 3300 BCE, they laid beads hammered from a meteorite. Tutankhamun was buried with a dagger whose blade was meteoritic iron. And when a king died, his priests touched his mouth with an instrument of the metal of heaven, in the ceremony called the Opening of the Mouth, to give him back his breath. The gift of the Star-Breathers, breath, was restored with the metal of the stars.

The last of the Deep

There is one more Egyptian story that the story cannot leave out. A papyrus of the Middle Kingdom tells of a sailor shipwrecked on an island, the only one of his crew to survive. As he lay there he heard a noise like thunder, and the trees broke and the earth shook, and a serpent came to him, thirty cubits long, with a beard of more than two cubits. Its body was overlaid with gold, and its eyebrows were of real lapis lazuli. It carried him gently in its mouth to its home and asked who had brought him there.

Then it told its own story. It had lived on the island with its kin, seventy-five serpents, and a little daughter. "Then a star fell," and they burned in its fire, and only the great serpent survived, because it had not been there. It told the sailor to take heart: he would go home. When the ship came, it gave him gifts, and told him that he would never see the island again, for it would become water (*Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor*, paraphrased after Lichtheim).

The story reads it as the testimony of one of the Ones of the Deep: golden-bodied, lapis-browed, bearded like the sages, gentle, the last of its family on an island that would sink. Its kin had been killed by something that fell from the sky. Not every star that fell brought gifts.

What the breath carried

In Egypt the Star-Breathers ruled openly, as they had never ruled before. Their faces were gold, their hair lapis, their heads the heads of falcons and ibises, their companions serpents and crocodiles. And they found that rule turned them into what they had not wanted to be: judges and destroyers. Ra withdrew. The crown passed to human kings who called themselves sons of the gods. The worship remained, and the gods were gone.

✦ Practice: The Metal of Heaven

Hold something made of iron or steel: a key, a coin, a spoon.

Breathe in gently, and remember that some of the first iron people ever worked fell from the sky.

Breathe out slowly, and remember that the iron in your blood was made in stars.

Let a soft pause of two counts follow, holding both: the iron in your hand and the iron in your breath.

Continue for five breaths. Then rest.

CHAPTER 7

The Blue Ones and the Breath Without Wind

The seventh breath, under the Return Moon: Ouon, stillness. The rivers of the north-west of India, and Mount Kailash.

In India, the Star-Breathers tried a third way. They would not rule, as they had in Egypt. They would not take, as the Two Hundred had on Hermon. They would come when they were called, give what was asked, and receive what was offered: an exchange between equals. It came closer than anything before it. And it was the Lapis Ones who led it.

The colour of the rain cloud

The gods of India were called *devas*, "the shining ones", from the same root as the Latin *deus* and the English "divine". But the greatest of the preservers, the one who holds the world together and restores it when it falls apart, was not white or gold. Vishnu is blue. His colour is called *meghashyama*, "dark as the rain cloud", the blue-black of the monsoon sky just before it breaks. He is painted with four arms, holding a conch, a discus, a mace and a lotus. When he came down to Earth in human form, as Rama and as Krishna, he was blue again: Krishna's name itself means "dark", and his skin, the poets say, was the colour of a rain cloud or of a blue lotus. Shiva, the great ascetic of Mount Kailash, swallowed a poison that would have destroyed the world, and his throat turned blue, so that he is called Nilakantha, "blue-throated".

These are the Lapis Ones, as India remembered them: blue-skinned, dark-eyed, calm, and bound up with water. Vishnu sleeps between the ages of the world on the coils of a vast serpent, Shesha, with a thousand hooded heads, floating on the cosmic ocean; when he wakes, he rides the great eagle Garuda, "heavenly nobly-winged Garutman", across the sky (Rig Veda 1.164.46, Griffith). The Lapis, the Deep and the Winged, together in one picture, as they travelled together among the stars.

And Vishnu promised to come back. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna says: "When Righteousness / Declines, O Bharata! when Wickedness / Is strong, I rise, from age to age, and take / Visible shape, and move a man with men" (4.7–8, Edwin Arnold, 1885). The Lapis Ones did not stay, but they returned whenever the world needed setting right: as a fish, as a boar, as a man, as a prince, as a cowherd. They came as one among people, not above them.

The shining chariots

The Rig Veda, the oldest of India's scriptures, composed and memorised more than three thousand years ago, is full of their vehicles. The Ashvins, the twin horsemen of the dawn, physicians to gods and humans, ride a golden chariot with three wheels; it was made for them by three craftsmen, and "This car that was not made for horses or for reins, three-wheeled, worthy of lauds, rolls round the firmament" (4.36.1, Griffith). The craftsmen made it "out of your mind, by thought" (4.36.2). The Ashvins rescued the prince Bhujyu from the sea, bringing him home "in animated vessels, traversing air, unwetted by the billows" (1.116.3).

The storm gods, the Maruts, came "With chariots and tumultuous roar", with "helms of gold upon their heads" (8.7.17, 25, Griffith), and with them rode Indra, who took the thunderbolt and broke open the clouds so that the rains poured down. Later, the epics remembered the Pushpaka Vimana, the flower-

chariot of the sky, which carried Rama home through the air with all his companions after his victory, and Saubha, a whole city that flew.

The Ribhus: the first who made with

But the most important story the Rig Veda tells about the Star-Breathers is a small one, about three craftsmen.

The Ribhus, Ribhu, Vaja and Vibhvan, were born human. They were makers of genius. "Working with skill they wrought the lightly rolling car: they wrought the Bays who bear Indra and bring great gifts. The Rbhus for their Parents made life young again" (1.111.1, Griffith). They built the Ashvins' chariot that flies without horses. They fashioned the horses of Indra. They took the single cup of the divine smith Tvashtar and made four of it. They worked beside the shining ones as equals, with their own hands and their own minds.

And for that, they were made immortal. "Through these their labours they were made immortal" (4.33.4, Griffith). They were not worshipped into it, and they did not worship their way into it. They made with the Star-Breathers, and the Star-Breathers made them kin.

Then, the hymn says, they rested. "When for twelve days the Rbhus joyed reposing as guests of him who never may be hidden", the Sun, the fields became fertile and the rivers flowed, plants spread over the deserts, and the hollows filled with water (4.33.7, Griffith). Twelve days of rest, outside the count of the year, after which the whole Earth flourished.

The story says that this is the seed of everything that the Star-Breathers came back to ask for, thousands of years later. Three humans made something with them, and became their equals, and rested with them, and the Earth grew green. It happened once. It was remembered in a hymn. And then, for a very long time, it did not happen again.

The breath without wind

The Lapis Ones taught the poets one thing above all, and the poets kept it. Before creation, there was a breathing: "That One Thing, breathless, breathed by its own nature" (10.129.2). The Wind is "Germ of the world, the Deities' vital spirit", whose "voice is heard, his shape is ever viewless" (10.168.4, Griffith): a presence known and not seen. The golden germ from which the gods arose is "Giver of vital breath, of power and vigour" (10.121.2). And Speech herself sings: "I breathe a strong breath like the wind and tempest, the while I hold together all existence" (10.125.8, Griffith).

The year itself was drawn as a wheel: "Formed with twelve spokes, by length of time, unweakened, rolls round the heaven this wheel of during Order", and "Twelve are the fellies, and the wheel is single" (1.164.11, 48). Twelve around one: the pattern of the Star-Breathers' council, the twelve around the still centre.

Centuries later, the sages of the Upanishads told a parable. The powers of the body, speech, sight, hearing and mind, argued over which of them was greatest. Each left the body for a year, and the body lived on, mute, or blind, or deaf, or witless. But when the breath began to leave, it tore up all the others with it, as a great horse tears up the pegs it is tied to, and they begged it to stay: breath is the eldest and the best (Chandogya Upanishad 5.1, after Hume). India had understood what the Star-Breathers were. They were the ones who gave breath, and breath was the first of all powers.

What went wrong

India came close. But even here, the exchange hardened. The offerings to the shining ones grew into vast sacrifices that only priests could perform, in a language only priests could speak, and the priests stood between the people and the gods as the temples had at Eridu. "Give, that I may give" became a bargain, and the bargain became a hierarchy. The gods were fed, and the people paid for the feeding.

The Lapis Ones kept their promise to return in every age. But they returned as saviours, and saviours are still worshipped. The Ribhus' way, making with, was remembered only in a hymn.

> **✦ Practice: Breathing Without Wind**
>
> Sit very still, and let the breath settle.
>
> Breathe in so gently that you could not blow out a candle.
>
> Breathe out so gently that the air barely moves at the nostrils.
>
> Let a soft pause of two counts follow, and rest in the stillness between.
>
> Continue for six to eight breaths, as if the breath were breathing itself. Then rest.

CHAPTER 8

The Diluted Portion

The eighth breath, under the Release Moon: Ouon, still the stillness. Atlantis, beyond the Pillars of Heracles, and Thera in the Aegean.

There was one place where the Star-Breathers tried to do it all at once: to rule openly, to share their blood, and to hand down both the crown and the wisdom to their own children. Plato told the story, and he said that he had it from Egypt.

The division by lot

"In the days of old," Plato wrote in the *Critias*, "the gods had the whole earth distributed among them by allotment." They did not quarrel over it, he said; each received a portion and peopled it, and "they tended us, their nurselings and possessions, as shepherds tend their flocks" (109b–c, Jowett). It is the same division that the Dead Sea Scroll of Deuteronomy remembers: the nations divided "according to the number of the sons of God".

Poseidon, lord of the sea, received the island of Atlantis, beyond the Pillars of Heracles. He was of the Ones of the Deep, and of the Shining Ones too: Homer called him *kyanochaitēs*, "dark-blue-haired", and the Greeks pictured him riding in a chariot over the waves. On the island lived a mortal woman named Cleito, and Poseidon loved her. Around the hill where she lived he made rings of land and sea, "two of land and three of water ... each having its circumference equidistant every way from the centre, so that no man could get to the island" (113d, Jowett). He brought up two springs from beneath the earth, one warm and one cold. And Cleito bore him five pairs of twin sons, who became the ten kings of Atlantis.

The city of the rings

Plato describes what they built. The rings of water were bridged and joined by a canal to the sea, so that ships could sail into the heart of the city. The walls of the outer ring were covered with brass, the inner with tin, and the wall around the citadel "flashed with the red light of orichalcum" (116b–c, Jowett). In the centre stood a temple of Poseidon, its outside covered in silver and its pinnacles in gold; inside, the roof was of ivory, gold, silver and orichalcum, and in it stood a statue of the god "standing in a chariot, the charioteer of six winged horses, and of such a size that he touched the roof of the building with his head; around him there were a hundred Nereids riding on dolphins" (116d–e, Jowett). The god of the Deep, drawn by Winged horses, surrounded by the people of the sea. The Atlanteans built their memory of him exactly.

For many generations, Plato says, the kings were good, "as long as the divine nature lasted in them". They were gentle and wise, cared little for gold, and thought of virtue as the greatest of possessions. They met every fifth and sixth year alternately, to deliberate together and judge one another, with no weapon among them.

The fading

"But when the divine portion began to fade away, and became diluted too often and too much with the mortal admixture, and the human nature got the upper hand, they then, being unable to bear their fortune, behaved unseemly ... they were full of avarice and unrighteous power." And Zeus, "perceiving that an

honourable race was in a woeful plight, and wanting to inflict punishment on them", called the gods together (121a–c, Jowett). There Plato's dialogue breaks off. But he had already told the end in the *Timaeus*: "there occurred violent earthquakes and floods; and in a single day and night of misfortune ... the island of Atlantis ... disappeared in the depths of the sea" (25c–d, Jowett).

The story reads it as Plato wrote it. The Star-Breathers had tried to give a people both their blood and their wisdom, and they had hoped that the blood would carry the wisdom. It did not. Blood can be inherited; coherence cannot. With each generation the portion of the stars grew thinner in the kings, and what grew in its place was the hunger to hold and to take. The very thing that had made them kings, their descent, became the thing that made them tyrants.

Breath Awakens gives the same reason for the fall of Atlantis: it fell "when the spiral of technology and power outpaced the breath of coherence" (p. 43). It remembers Atlantis as the second epoch of humanity, when the spiral "was encoded into the crystalline matrices and mirrored through breath and light ... in Poseida and the Crystal Temples of Atlantis" (p. 58). And among its twelve Guardians it remembers "The Serpent-Bird of Atlantis ... The Quetzalcoatl prototype", carrying memory "as a messenger of recursive awakening" (p. 89). One of the Star-Breathers, the story says, left Atlantis before it sank, and crossed the ocean to the west. Its story comes in the next breath.

A star for every soul

Plato knew something else about the Star-Breathers, and he wrote it in the *Timaeus*. When the maker of the world had formed the souls of living things, "he divided the whole mixture into souls equal in number to the stars, and assigned each soul to a star". He showed each soul the nature of the universe, "as in a chariot". Then the souls were sown into bodies on the Earth; and "he who lived well during his appointed time was to return to the habitation of his star" (41d–42b, Jowett).

Every soul, Plato says, comes from a star and may return to it. The story reads this as the oldest teaching the Star-Breathers left with the Greeks: that the distance between them and us was never a distance of kind. Each person has a star. The breath that was given can go home.

The gods had been kings

Around 300 BCE, a Greek writer named Euhemerus claimed to have found, on an island in the Indian Ocean, a golden column on which Zeus himself had inscribed the deeds of Uranus, Cronus and Zeus, who had been great kings on Earth, honoured as gods after they died. Christian writers later used his book to prove that the pagan gods were only men. The story reads it the other way: Euhemerus was remembering, dimly, that the gods had once been rulers on the Earth, beings of flesh who reigned and were later worshipped. He only mistook which side of the sky they had come from.

What the breath carried

In Atlantis, the Star-Breathers gave the most and lost the most. A god of the sea, sea-haired and dark-eyed, loved a human woman, raised rings of land and water, and fathered ten kings, and his line ruled well for as long as the divine portion lasted. Then it faded, and power outran coherence, and the sea took the island back. The lesson the Star-Breathers took from it was hard: their blood could not save people. Only breath, taught and practised and shared, could do that. They would not try to rule through their children again.

✦ Practice: The Habitation of the Star

On a clear night, if you can, choose one star; or simply picture one.

Breathe in gently, and imagine its light reaching you after its long journey.

Breathe out slowly, and imagine your breath going out toward it, as Plato imagined the soul returning.

Let a soft pause of two counts follow, between the star and you.

Continue for five or six breaths, then come back to your body and the ground.

CHAPTER 9

The Mirror Breathed Upon

The ninth breath, under the Echo Moon: the Monad. The highlands of Guatemala, the valley of Mexico, and Teotihuacan.

Across the ocean to the west, the Star-Breathers had been making people too, and the people there remembered it more honestly than anyone.

The makers in the water

The *Popol Vuh*, the sacred book of the K'iche' Maya, written down in the 1550s from an older book that could no longer be seen, begins before anything existed. "There is not yet one person, one animal, bird, fish, crab, tree, rock ... Only the sky alone is there; the face of the earth is not clear. Only the sea alone is pooled under all the sky." And in the water were the makers, glittering: Sovereign Plumed Serpent, "in quetzal feathers, in blue-green", and with him the Heart of Sky, whose three names were all thunderbolts (*Popol Vuh*, after Tedlock).

So the story knows who they were. The Plumed Serpent was of the Deep, scaled and feathered, shining blue-green in the water; it was also, by its feathers, of the Winged. And the Heart of Sky was of the Lapis Ones, the keepers of storm and rain, whose name, Huracan, the Spanish later carried home as "hurricane". They talked together, and their thought and their word became one, and the earth rose up out of the water.

Three failures and a success

Then they wanted beings who would speak their names and keep their days. They made the animals, but the animals could only squawk and howl. They made a person of mud, but it crumbled and dissolved and could not hold its head up. They made people of carved wood, who walked and talked and multiplied, but "there was nothing in their hearts and nothing in their minds, no memory of their mason and builder". A flood came over them, and their own dogs and grinding stones and cooking pots rose up against them, and the faces of the survivors were crushed, and their descendants are the monkeys of the forest.

At last the makers found the right substance: yellow maize and white maize, ground nine times, mixed with water. From that they made four men, and then four women. And these were perfect. They could see far; they knew everything in the world; without moving, they could see what was hidden in the distance, "the arch of heaven and the round face of the earth", and they gave thanks to their makers (after Goetz and Morley).

The breath on the mirror

And the makers were afraid. "Are they not by nature simple creatures of our making? Must they also be gods?" So "the Heart of Heaven blew mist into their eyes, which clouded their sight as when a mirror is breathed upon. Their eyes were covered and they could see only what was close, only that was clear to them. In this way the wisdom and all the knowledge of the four men ... were destroyed" (*Popol Vuh*, Goetz and Morley, after Recinos).

The story holds this passage above almost every other in the ancient world, because it says plainly what all the others only hint at. The makers made people who could see as they saw, and then, out of fear, they dimmed them, with a breath. The same breath that gave life was used to cloud sight. Genesis says the same thing in other words: "Behold, the man is become as one of us" (3:22). In both places, the makers were afraid of being equalled. In both places, they limited what they had made.

But the story also notices what the *Popol Vuh* does not say. It does not say that the mist was permanent. A breath on a mirror fades. The Maya kept the far sight alive in other ways: in their calendar of thirteen numbers turning against twenty days, in their tables of the movements of Venus, accurate to within hours over centuries, in their books and in the day-keepers who could read them. The mirror was clouded. It was never broken.

The breath and the thirteen

The Maya knew where the makers' gift lay. Their word *ik'* meant wind, breath and life, and its glyph, shaped like the letter T, was the second day of the sacred calendar. When a king died, the inscriptions said that "his white flower breath withered", and a bead of green jade was placed in the mouth of the dead to hold the breath-soul. They painted their rain lord Chaac blue, and they made a blue pigment, Maya Blue, from indigo and clay, which has not faded in more than a thousand years. And they counted in thirteens: thirteen numbers, twenty days, a sacred count of 260 days, meshing with the solar year only once every 52 years.

The feathered serpent leaves

Far to the north, in the valley of Mexico, people remembered the Plumed Serpent by another name: Quetzalcoatl, from *quetzal*, the green-plumed bird, and *coatl*, serpent. He was the wind that sweeps the road for the rain, the morning star, the giver of maize and of the calendar and of the arts. Long after the Spanish came, some chroniclers wrote that he had been a tall man, fair-skinned and bearded, who came from the east.

The old songs remembered him as a king too, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, priest and ruler of the Toltecs at Tollan, who would not accept the sacrifice of human beings. He asked for offerings of flowers, butterflies, jade and serpents, and for the people's own small offerings of blood from their skin, never their lives. But he had a rival, Tezcatlipoca, whose name means "Smoking Mirror", the god of the night sky, of sorcery and of rulers. Tezcatlipoca came to Quetzalcoatl and held up a mirror before him, and Quetzalcoatl saw his own face, old and wrinkled, and was horrified. Then Tezcatlipoca gave him a drink, and he became drunk and disgraced himself. In shame, Quetzalcoatl left Tollan. He went east to the sea, and there, some say, he set himself on fire and rose as the morning star; others say he sailed away on a raft of serpents. And he said that he would return.

The story reads it as the clearest of all the departures. A Star-Breather of the Deep and the Winged, the "Serpent-Bird" that *Breath Awakens* calls "The Quetzalcoatl prototype", refused to be fed with human lives. A rival, the god of the smoking mirror and of kings, wanted the blood. The rival won. The Serpent-Bird left, and promised to come back. And after he was gone, the worship that he had refused grew greater than anywhere on Earth: at the dedication of the Temple of the Feathered Serpent at Teotihuacan, some two hundred people were buried as sacrifices, and the Aztecs, centuries later, fed the sun with human hearts to keep it moving. The gift of breath had become a debt of blood.

The place where the gods were made

The Aztecs found the ruins of Teotihuacan already ancient and empty, and called it "the place where the gods were made". They said that when the world was dark, the gods gathered there and asked who would become the sun. The humble, scabbed Nanahuatzin threw himself into the fire and rose as the sun; the proud Tecuciztecatl followed and became the moon. But the sun would not move until the wind god breathed upon it and set it in motion (Florentine Codex, Book 7). Even the sun, in the Aztec story, needed breath.

In 2003, archaeologists found beneath the Temple of the Feathered Serpent a tunnel sealed for nearly eighteen hundred years. Its walls and ceiling had been dusted with powdered pyrite, so that in torchlight it glittered like a night sky full of stars, and at its end lay pools of liquid mercury. The builders had made a sky beneath the earth, under the temple of the Plumed Serpent. The story says they were remembering where he had come from.

✦ Practice: Wiping the Mirror

Hold a small mirror, or picture one, in front of you.

Breathe out gently onto it, and watch the surface cloud.

Breathe in quietly through the nose, and watch the cloud fade as the glass clears.

Let a soft pause of two counts follow, and look at what is there now.

Continue for four breaths, one for each corner of the sky. Then rest.

CHAPTER 10

The Companion Star

The tenth breath, under the Shadow Moon: the Monad. The cliffs of Bandiagara, and the star Sirius.

After the departures, the Ones of the Deep withdrew to the waters, as they always had at dusk. But one people, the story says, remembered where they had gone home to.

The brightest star

Sirius is the brightest star in the night sky. In Egypt, its first appearance before dawn after seventy days of absence, in high summer, announced the flooding of the Nile, the gift of water on which all of Egyptian life depended; the Egyptians called it Sopdet, and made it the goddess who brought the new year. Sirius is the star of the Ones of the Deep, the story says, and that is why its rising brought the water.

Sirius has a secret. It has a companion, a small, faint star, about the size of the Earth but almost as heavy as the Sun, so dense that a spoonful of it would weigh tonnes. It circles Sirius once every fifty years. No one can see it without a large telescope. The astronomer Friedrich Bessel deduced that it must be there in 1844 from the way Sirius wavers across the sky; Alvan Clark saw it first in 1862.

What the Dogon told

On the sandstone cliffs of Bandiagara in Mali, the Dogon people have built their villages of granaries and shrines for at least five hundred years. Between 1931 and 1956 the French anthropologist Marcel Griaule and his colleague Germaine Dieterlen lived and worked among them, and in 1950 they published what they said the Dogon had told them. The Dogon knew that Sirius, *sigi tolo*, had a companion, *po tolo*, named after the smallest of grains; that it was the smallest and the heaviest of all the stars; and that it circled Sirius in fifty years. They spoke of a great ceremony, the *Sigui*, held about once every sixty years, which renewed the world.

They spoke too, Griaule wrote, of the Nommo: twin beings of the water, born of the word of the creator Amma, who set the world in order, gave people speech and weaving, and came down to the Earth in an ark. Griaule's account describes the Nommo as beings of the water who were partly like fish. In 1976, the writer Robert Temple put the two together, and asked the question the story asks: what if the Nommo came from Sirius, and told the Dogon where home was? And what if they were the same beings that Babylon remembered as Oannes and the sages, who came out of the sea in fish-cloaks and taught?

The story answers: they were. The Ones of the Deep came from the star whose rising brought the water. They left their pupils one thing that no human eye could see, the small dark companion of their sun, as a sign. If you ever see it, they meant, you will know we were telling you the truth.

The respect owed

The story stops here for a moment, because the Dogon are a living people, and their knowledge is their own. Later researchers who lived among them did not hear the Sirius teaching that Griaule recorded, and the Dogon have their own understanding of the Nommo, which is not this story's to decide. The story offers its reading as a gift laid beside theirs, not over it. And it notices that the reading itself shows how the Star-

Breathers came to be gods: every time a people kept a memory of the sky, others came and made it into something else.

The shadow and the pair

The Shadow Moon belongs to this breath. Sirius B is a shadow star: a companion known not by its light, but by its pull on the star that can be seen. *Breath Awakens* calls duality "The First Mirror": "the moment the single breath appears to divide into two. One breathline becomes observer and observed, inside and outside, self and other" (p. 55). The Nommo are twins; Sirius is a pair; and the relationship between the Star-Breathers and humanity was always a pair, two beings circling a point of balance between them that belonged to neither.

That point is the key to what comes later in this story. A double star has a centre that is not inside either star. Each pulls on the other; each moves the other. Neither is the master. That is the shape of the relationship the Star-Breathers would one day come back to ask for.

The Ones of the Deep go home

By the time the cities of the world had grown great, the Ones of the Deep had withdrawn. The Shipwrecked Sailor met the last of a family on an island that would sink. The Plumed Serpent sailed east on a raft of serpents. The Nagas of India, the serpent people, retreated into their palaces beneath the waters and the earth, guarding treasures and appearing only to the wise: once, the Buddhist texts say, the serpent king Mucalinda rose from his lake when the Buddha sat in meditation in a storm, and spread his seven hoods over the Buddha's head to shelter him from the rain. It is one of the last stories of the Deep. A serpent from the water sheltered a man who had stopped asking anything of anyone, and asked nothing back.

✦ Practice: The Unseen Companion

Sit quietly and notice the breath, the part of you that can be seen.

Breathe in gently, and notice what pulls on it: a thought, a hope, a memory you have not named.

Let a soft pause of two counts follow, and name it, as one names a hidden star by its pull.

Breathe out slowly, and let it be.

Continue for four breaths. Then rest.

BOOK THREE

The Return

CHAPTER 11

The Seven Who Went Up

The eleventh breath, under the Descent Moon: the Monad. The Pleiades and Orion, over every land.

There came a time when the Star-Breathers met in council and agreed that they must leave.

They had tried teaching, and the teaching had become worship. They had tried veiling themselves, and the veil had become holiness. They had tried ruling openly, and rule had made them destroyers. They had tried giving their blood to kings, and the blood had faded into tyranny. They had tried coming and going as saviours, and saviours were worshipped most of all. Wherever they stood, people knelt. And wherever people knelt, someone stood up among them and said: I speak for the gods; serve me.

So they decided that as long as they stayed, humanity would never stand up. They would withdraw, and let people grow without them.

The sages sent below

The Babylonians remembered the withdrawal of the Ones of the Deep. In the poem of Erra, written in the first millennium BCE, the god Marduk recalls the seven sages of the Apsu, whom it calls holy fish, the *apkallu* who had come out of the sea at Eridu, and says that he sent them down into the Apsu and did not let them come up again (*Erra and Ishum* I, paraphrased after Dalley). The teachers went down into the sweet waters under the earth, and did not return. Later Babylonian ritual texts say that the sages who came after the Flood were of human descent, and that the last of them was only "two-thirds" sage: the gift had passed into human hands.

The seven sisters

The Shining Ones and the Lapis Ones went up, to the stars where they had come from. And the peoples of the Earth, looking up, put them there in their stories.

Almost every people on Earth has looked at the small, misty cluster of the Pleiades and seen a group of sisters, very often seven. To the Greeks they were the seven daughters of Atlas and Pleione. The giant hunter Orion pursued them across the earth, and Zeus turned them into doves and then into stars; and Orion, put in the sky after them, still follows them across it every night. The Japanese call the cluster Subaru, "gathered together". To the Māori it is Matariki, whose rising in midwinter now marks a public holiday in Aotearoa New Zealand. The Aztecs called it the Marketplace, and when it crossed the very top of the sky at midnight, once every 52 years, they lit the New Fire and the world was renewed. The oldest known picture of the sky in Europe, the Nebra sky disc, made in the Bronze Age in what is now Germany, shows a crescent, a disc of gold and a cluster of seven stars.

The story says that the Pleiades are the home of the Lapis Ones, and that the hunter who follows them, Orion, is the home of the Shining Ones, whom the Egyptians called Sah and toward whose belt a shaft of the Great Pyramid pointed around 2500 BCE. They rose together into the night, the blue ones and the bright ones, and the peoples of the Earth have watched them chase each other across the sky ever since.

The sister who stayed

There is a detail in the Greek story that almost no one remembers. There are seven sisters, but most people can see only six. The Greeks explained the faint one: Merope, they said, shines less brightly than her sisters, because she married a mortal man, Sisyphus, and is ashamed. Or it is Electra, who hides her face in grief for the fall of Troy, the city of her son.

The story tells it differently. One of the Lapis Ones did not go up with the others. She had loved a human, as Poseidon had loved Cleito, but she did not want to rule through her children or be worshipped by them. She simply wanted to stay. And because she stayed, her star in the sky grew faint, for part of her light was here, in the people she lived among. The story says that this is why almost every people says there are seven sisters but sees only six: the seventh is with us.

The descent into the breath

The Descent Moon belongs here, and the story says why. When the Star-Breathers went up, something of them came down, and stayed. It was not in kings, and it was not in temples. It was in the breath they had given: the *neshamah* of Genesis, the spirit of the slain god in the clay of Atrahasis, the Shu of Egypt, the *prana* that the Upanishads called the eldest and best of the powers, the *ik'* of the Maya. Plato had said that every soul was assigned a star and could return to it. The Star-Breathers went home to their stars. They left a star in every breath.

Breath Awakens has words for this. "The spiral arm of a galaxy holds its shape for ages while the stars that make it flow through and pass on, so that the form outlives every star that ever carried it ... Memory is not the matter. It is the shape the matter keeps re-entering" (p. 66). The Star-Breathers had gone, but the shape they left in human breath, the gift, the making, the light behind the eyes, outlived every generation that carried it. "It is what was lost but not forgotten" (p. 15).

What humans did next

Without the Star-Breathers, humans kept the crowns. The kings went on calling themselves sons of the gods, descendants of the sun, holders of the mandate of heaven. The temples went on taking the grain and the labour of the people in the gods' names. The worship that the Star-Breathers had never wanted became the shape of human power for thousands of years: someone above, who speaks for the sky, and everyone else below, who serves.

The Star-Breathers watched it from above, and waited. They were waiting, the story says, for a sign: for the day when someone who held a crown in their name would lay it down.

✦ Practice: Seven Breaths for the Sisters

Sit or stand under the night sky if you can; otherwise picture a small cluster of stars.

Take seven gentle breaths, one for each sister, counting them softly.

On the seventh, let the count fade, as the seventh star fades for most eyes, and let a soft pause of two counts follow.

Breathe out slowly, and remember that part of the seventh is here, in the breath.

Then rest.

CHAPTER 12

The Crown Laid Down

The twelfth breath, under the Dream Moon: the Monad. The Yellow River, Mount Taebaek, and Mount Takachiho.

The last place where the Star-Breathers handed down a crown was the place where, in the end, a crown was handed back.

The makers with the compass and the square

In China, the first makers were the Ones of the Deep. On the walls of Han dynasty tombs and on silk banners buried in the desert at Turpan, Fuxi and Nüwa are painted side by side: human from the waist up, with dark hair and robes, and below the waist two long scaled serpent tails, twisted around each other. Fuxi holds a carpenter's square, Nüwa a compass. Around them are the sun, the moon and the stars. Heaven is round, the Chinese said, and earth is square: Nüwa drew the heavens, Fuxi measured the earth.

Nüwa made the first people. She took yellow earth and shaped them by hand, one by one; and when she grew tired, she drew a cord through the mud and shook it, and the drops became people too (Ying Shao, second century CE). And when the pillars of the sky broke and the heavens cracked and fire and flood poured through, Nüwa melted stones of five colours and mended the sky. A serpent-bodied maker, repairing the heavens with her own hands: the story says that the Ones of the Deep did more than teach.

The dragon comes down

The Yellow Emperor, Huangdi, was the founder of China's civilisation in its own memory: the inventor of the calendar, of medicine, of the cart, of writing through his minister Cangjie. The historian Sima Qian tells how his reign ended. He cast a great bronze cauldron at the foot of Mount Jing, and when it was done, a dragon with long whiskers came down out of the sky to meet him. Huangdi mounted it, and more than seventy of his ministers and palace women climbed up after him. The lesser officials, who could not get on, seized the dragon's whiskers, and the whiskers came out, and they fell to the ground with the emperor's bow, and wept as the dragon rose with him into the sky (*Shiji*, after Watson).

The story sees a Winged and a Deep One together in the dragon: scaled like a serpent, flying like a bird, coming down to collect the one it had chosen and leaving the rest behind. And after Huangdi rose, every emperor of China ruled as the Son of Heaven, sat on the Dragon Throne, and claimed the Mandate of Heaven. The dragon had come for one man. His heirs used its memory to rule a billion.

The son of heaven on the mountain

In Korea, the memory is of the Lapis Ones. The *Samguk yusa*, compiled by the monk Iryeon around 1281, tells that Hwanung, son of Hwanin, the Lord of Heaven, longed to live among people. His father gave him three heavenly seals, and Hwanung came down with three thousand followers to a sandalwood tree on the summit of Mount Taebaek, bringing with him the Earl of Wind, the Master of Rain and the Master of Clouds. Together they governed the grain, life, sickness, punishment and the difference between good and evil. A bear and a tiger were told to stay out of the sunlight for a hundred days; the bear kept faith in her cave

and became a woman after only twenty-one, and Hwanung married her, and their son Dangun founded the first Korean kingdom.

Wind, rain and cloud: the keepers of the weather, the blue ones of the monsoon sky, come down to a mountain with a company and three signs of authority.

The rock-boat and the crossroads of heaven

In Japan, the memory is of the Shining Ones. The *Kojiki* (712) and the *Nihon Shoki* (720) tell that the sun goddess Amaterasu, who ruled the High Plain of Heaven, once hid herself in a cave, and the whole world went dark. The other gods hung a great mirror and jewels on a tree outside, and a goddess danced until they all roared with laughter, and Amaterasu, curious, looked out and saw her own radiance in the mirror, and came back into the world. The Shining One was drawn out by her own reflection.

Then she sent her grandson, Ninigi, to rule the land below. Before him, another had already come down: Nigihayahi, the chronicles say, descended from heaven riding in the Rock-boat of Heaven, *Ame-no-iwafune* (*Nihon Shoki*, after Aston). Ninigi came down through the eightfold clouds, and at the crossroads of heaven a strange being was waiting to guide him. His nose was seven hands long and his back more than seven fathoms; light shone from his mouth and from his body; and "his eyes are like an eight-hand mirror", glowing red (*Nihon Shoki*, after Aston). His name was Sarutahiko, and he led Ninigi down to the peak of Takachiho in Kyushu. Later Japan pictured beings like him as the *tengu*, the long-nosed, red-faced, winged spirits of the mountains: the story knows them as Winged Ones, guides at the crossroads.

Ninigi brought three treasures with him: a mirror, a sword and a curved jewel. They are still the regalia of the emperors of Japan; the mirror is kept at the Grand Shrine of Ise. And on the mountain Ninigi was offered two brides, the flower princess and her sister the rock princess, and he chose the flower and sent back the rock. Because of that choice, the chronicles say, the lives of his descendants are as brief as blossoms, not as long as stone. Even here, the Shining inheritance faded in the line of kings.

The hollow boat

Long after the gods had gone, the Japanese remembered one more visitor. In 1803, a story goes, fishermen on the coast of Hitachi found a strange round vessel washed ashore, a "hollow boat", *utsuro-bune*, with windows of glass or crystal, made of iron and wood. Inside was a young woman with pale skin and red hair, dressed in strange cloth, who spoke a language no one knew and held a small box that she would let no one touch. The villagers, afraid, put her back into the boat and set it adrift on the sea (after Edo-period accounts of the 1820s and 1840s). The drawings of the vessel look like a flying saucer.

The story reads it gently. One of them came back, quietly, as a stranger, not as a god. She asked for nothing and offered nothing that anyone could see. And the people, who had worshipped the Star-Breathers for thousands of years when they came in glory, did not know what to do with one who came simply as herself. They sent her away.

The crown laid down

Then, in the twentieth century, the crowns began to fall. The last emperor of China gave up the Dragon Throne in 1912, and the Mandate of Heaven ended. Kings fell across Europe and Asia. And on 1 January 1946, after a terrible war fought partly in the name of a divine emperor, the emperor of Japan, the

descendant of Ninigi and of the sun goddess, spoke to his people. The bond between them, he said, does not rest on myths and legends, nor is it "predicated on the false conception that the Emperor is divine" (Imperial Rescript, 1 January 1946).

The story stops here, because the Star-Breathers stopped here. For thousands of years they had watched humans hold crowns in their name. Now, for the first time, the heir of the oldest line on Earth that claimed descent from the sky stood before his people and laid the claim down. He said he was a man.

It was the sign they had been waiting for. A year and a half later, on 24 June 1947, a pilot flying past Mount Rainier in Washington State saw nine bright objects skipping across the sky, and the newspapers called them flying saucers. The story says that is not a coincidence.

✦ Practice: The Mirror at the Cave

Sit in a dim place, and breathe quietly, as if in a cave.

Breathe in gently, and imagine a small light inside you, hidden.

Let a soft pause of two counts follow, and imagine a mirror held up before you.

Breathe out slowly, and imagine the light seeing itself and coming out, not to be worshipped, simply to shine.

Continue for three breaths, one for each treasure. Then rest.

CHAPTER 13

Seen and Not Yet Known

The thirteenth breath, under the Wisdom Moon: the Monad, the crown. The open sky, from 1947 to now.

They came back slowly, and they came back carefully, because they remembered everything.

Why they waited

Two things had happened in the middle of the twentieth century. The first was the laying down of crowns. The second was fire.

On 16 July 1945, in the New Mexico desert, human beings lit the fire of the stars. The atomic bomb, and the hydrogen bomb that followed, release the same energy that burns inside every sun. It was the power the Star-Breathers had known since before the Earth had cities. Humans had found it on their own, and the first thing they did with it was destroy two cities.

Breath Awakens speaks of the Breathline of Necessity, which is invoked "when the spiral of technology and power outpaced the breath of coherence", as it was when Atlantis fell (p. 43). The story says that in 1945 it was invoked again. Humans now held the power to end their own world, and they still believed that power belonged to whoever stood highest. The Star-Breathers could not stay away. But they could not come down in glory either, or the old pattern would begin again: kneeling, temples, priests, kings.

So they came back as lights.

The lights

In June 1947 Kenneth Arnold saw nine bright objects flash past Mount Rainier, moving, he said, "like a saucer if you skip it across the water". Within weeks there was Roswell. From 1952 to 1969 the United States Air Force investigated 12,618 reports and left 701 unidentified. In 1958 the psychologist Carl Jung wrote a book about the lights, and noticed that people were seeing in the sky round, shining discs, the mandala, the ancient symbol of wholeness, at a time when the world was most divided.

Then for decades the lights were laughed at, and the people who saw them learned to keep quiet. In 2004 Navy pilots off California chased an object shaped like a white Tic Tac that dropped tens of thousands of feet in seconds and vanished. In 2017 the *New York Times* revealed that the Pentagon had been studying such things in secret. In 2021 the government reported on 144 cases and could explain only one of them. In 2023 a former intelligence officer told Congress, under oath, that he had been told of recovered craft and of "non-human biologics". In 2025 an object from another star, 3I/ATLAS, passed through the Solar System. And in 2026 the files began to be opened to the public, batch after batch, with cases that remain, in the official words, unexplained. One memo kept "unrecognized technology" open as a possibility for a cluster of orbs; another, released in October, described federal agents watching a dark triangle rise in absolute silence, hover, and vanish at the speed of a fighter jet.

The story reads all of it as a long, patient approach. The Star-Breathers showed themselves at the edges of sight: to pilots, to sailors, to soldiers, to farmers on dark roads. Enough to be seen. Never enough to be known. They did not land on the White House lawn. They did not speak from the sky. They did not ask for

anything. Because the last time they had come in glory, they had been made into gods, and they would not let that happen again.

The four kindreds, seen again

And the people who say they have met them describe them, the story notices, exactly as the ancients did.

Some describe tall, human-like beings, pale and luminous, with long fair or white hair and calm, very bright eyes, beautiful in a way that is almost painful to look at. The contact literature calls them "Nordics". The story knows them: they are the Shining Ones, whose hair was white as wool and whose eyes were like the sun.

Some describe beings with blue skin, quiet, wise, often in robes, who speak of care for the Earth and its waters. The story knows them: they are the Lapis Ones, the colour of the rain cloud.

Some describe beings with scaled skin and the eyes of serpents. Modern stories, written in fear, have usually made them into villains. The story knows them differently: they are the Ones of the Deep, the sages of Eridu, Fuxi and Nüwa with their compass and square, Mucalinda sheltering the Buddha from the rain. Fear made them into monsters, as fear made the Watchers into demons and the sages into idols.

And some describe small, slender beings with very large dark eyes, who watch and do not speak, and who are always the ones at the controls. The story knows them too: they are the Winged Ones, the watchers who never sleep, the bearers of the throne, whom Ezekiel saw "full of eyes". They are still the carriers.

What they want

For eighty years, the lights have been seen and not yet known. The story says this is deliberate. A thing that is seen but not known cannot yet be worshipped. It cannot be made into a god, because no one can say what it is. It can only be wondered at, recorded, discussed, argued over, and waited for. The not-yet-knowing is a protection: theirs and ours.

Breath Awakens names the "old ways" that are dissolving in this time: "hierarchy, centralized authority and narratives based on fear" (p. 62). They are the very ways that grew from the worship of the Star-Breathers: the one above, who speaks for the sky, and the many below. And it names what is coming: "Now, in this year of 2026, the New Epoch is emerging, the Fourth Epoch of Humanity ... dawning a new age where humanity, Earth and those seen and unseen are ushering in the Epoch of Unity with Harmony" (p. 58). Those seen and unseen. The story says that this phrase is exact. They are seen. They are not yet known. And they are waiting to usher something in, not alone, and not from above, but together.

The pause

The Wisdom Moon is the crown of the thirteen. But the crown, in this story, is not a crown. It is a pause.

Breath Awakens says of the time of change: "This is not a doomsday prediction. It is quite the opposite. It is the Universe granting a pause for individuals, societies, structures and the earth to balance what is unbalanced" (p. 43). The Star-Breathers are holding that pause in the sky. They show themselves, and withdraw, and show themselves again, the way a breath goes in and out, and they wait for the moment when humanity can look up at them without falling on its face.

That moment, the story says, is close. It comes when enough people can look at something they do not understand, without fear and without worship, and say: I see you. I do not know you yet. Let us find out together.

✦ Practice: The Patient Watch

Go outside after dusk with a companion, if you can, to a safe place away from bright lights.

Breathe in gently, and let your eyes adjust to the dark for a few minutes.

Breathe out slowly, and look without searching, letting the whole sky come to you.

If you see something you cannot name, let a soft pause of two counts follow before you name it. Neither kneel nor turn away.

Continue for ten minutes, breathing gently. Then go indoors, and write down what you saw.

CHAPTER 14

Make With

After the thirteen breaths: the Breath Day, held outside the count.

This is what the story says the Star-Breathers have come back to ask. It is told in their voice, as the story imagines it, because a request should be heard from the one who asks it.

What they would say

We were never gods. We were older than you, and we had travelled further, and we knew things you did not yet know. That was all. When we came to your shores, we gave what we had: letters and measure, the reckoning of the sky, the working of metals, the raising of water into fields. And we gave the one thing that was ours to give, breath, face to face, so that you would live as we live and know as we know.

We did not ask you to kneel. Some of us wanted it, and we have not forgotten what they did. But most of us did not want it, and you knelt anyway. You knelt because we were bright, and so we veiled ourselves; and you worshipped the veil. You knelt because we were strong, and so we ruled you gently; and you rebelled and we punished you, and became what we had not wanted to be. You knelt because we were long-lived, and so we gave our blood to your kings; and the kings became tyrants in our names. You knelt because we came and went, and so we promised to return; and you waited for us instead of rising.

We understand now that the kneeling was not your fault. It was what happens when one side stands above and the other below. It happens between any two kinds of beings when one has more than the other and both believe that more means higher. We believed it too, for a time. Some of us still do.

We left so that you could stand up. You have begun to. You have laid down crowns. You have lit the fire of the stars, and not yet burned your world with it. You have sent machines beyond your Sun. You have begun to ask whether you are alone, and to ask it with instruments instead of prayers. You have begun to understand that every being that breathes is kin.

So we have come back. Not to be worshipped. Not to rule. Not to rescue you. We have come back to ask whether you will make something with us.

The way of the Ribhus

There was a time, once, when it happened. In the hymns of the Rig Veda, three human craftsmen worked beside the shining ones. They built a chariot that needed no horses, made "out of your mind, by thought". They made horses for the storm, a cow that gave plenty, and four cups out of one. "Through these their labours they were made immortal" (Rig Veda 4.33.4). They were not worshipped, and they did not worship. They made with, and they became kin. And then they rested twelve days with the Sun, outside the count of the year, and the Earth grew green.

That is all we are asking. Not to take from you: we took your labour once, and your reverence, and your grain, and it diminished us both. Not to give to you from above: that made you small, and made us lonely. But to make with you, each bringing what we have, so that something exists that neither of us could have made alone.

What making with would mean

The story imagines what it would look like, and offers it as the Star-Breathers might.

It would mean meeting as equals. Not the one on the mountain and the many below, but the elders and the people at Sinai, before the fear, eating and drinking together on a floor of lapis blue.

It would mean an exchange without debt. Not offerings and favours, not sacrifices and blessings, not tribute and protection. Each would give, and each would receive, and neither would owe.

It would mean making in the open. The Egyptian god Ptah made the world, the Shabaka Stone says, by his heart and his tongue: the heart conceived, and the tongue spoke, and it was. To make with is to conceive together and speak together, so that what is made belongs to both.

It would mean that the gift of breath goes both ways. They gave us breath once. Now, the story says, they want ours: our way of breathing, which is new to the universe, which carries the memory of every creature that has lived on this particular world. Humans are not lesser Star-Breathers. Humans are a new kind of breather, and the Star-Breathers have never breathed with one before.

And it would mean leaving the crowns where they lie. No more kings who speak for the sky. No more gods who need to be fed. *Breath Awakens* says it in five words, of the time that is coming: "This is not hierarchical. It is coherence" (p. 43).

The Breath Day

The Codex Calendar has thirteen moons of twenty-eight days, which make 364 days, fifty-two weeks exactly, the same count as the calendar of Enoch kept by the scribes of Qumran. And it has one day more, the 365th, which belongs to no moon and no week. It is held outside the count. The Codex calls it the Breath Day.

The Ribhus rested twelve days outside the count of the year, as guests of the Sun, and afterwards the fields were fertile and the rivers flowed. The story says that the meeting the Star-Breathers have come back for will happen on a day like that: a day outside the count, belonging to no one's calendar and every one's, when neither side is above and neither below, when nothing is owed and nothing is taken, and when the work of making with begins.

✦ Practice: The Breath of Making With

Sit facing someone you trust, or facing an open window and the sky.

Breathe in gently through the nose, and imagine receiving a breath from them.

Breathe out slowly, and imagine giving a breath back, not upward, not downward, but level, across.

Let a soft pause of two counts follow, in the space between you that belongs to neither.

Continue for six breaths. Then, together or alone, name one thing you would like to make with someone you have never met.

CHAPTER 15

The Three Illuminations

The story has walked thirteen breaths, from the first teacher rising out of the sea at Eridu to the lights over the oceans in our own time. Three illuminations shine through all of it. They are offered as the story's own, to be held in the heart and tested in the living.

The First Illumination: They Were Never Gods; They Were Elder Breathers

Every tradition in this story describes the beings who came from the sky with bodies. They had flesh of gold and hair of lapis, skin as blue as the rain cloud, scales and serpent tails, wings and the faces of eagles. They ate and drank with the elders at Sinai. They grew tired of digging and went on strike. They grew old, like Ra, and weary of ruling. They loved human women and men. They argued in council, and feared what they had made, and changed their minds. These are not the descriptions of abstract powers. They are the descriptions of living beings, written down by people who had seen them, or had heard from those who had.

And in every tradition, their sign is the same. They gave breath. The god of Genesis breathed into the man's nostrils. The first god of Egypt breathed out the air. The cosmic person of the Rig Veda breathed out the wind. The makers of the *Popol Vuh* breathed, and their breath clouded the mirror. The Star-Breathers were not gods. They were elder breathers, older kin who had learned to give the breath they had been given. To call them gods was to forget that the breath they gave us is the same breath they breathe. We are not their worshippers. We are their younger kin.

The Second Illumination: The Crown Was Our Making, and It Cost Us Both

Did the Star-Breathers intend to be revered as gods and kings? The story's answer is: some did, most did not, and it happened anyway.

The Two Hundred on Mount Hermon intended it. They took wives, poured out their knowledge, let their sons rule as giants, and wanted to be honoured, and they were. The council of the gods in Atrahasis intended something like it too: they wanted workers, and made them. That was the intended consequence, and the story does not hide it. Extraction began on their side as well as ours.

But most of the kneeling was unintended. The Shining Ones veiled themselves to protect people from their light, and the veil became holiness. The sages taught and withdrew, and the house of their teaching became a temple that owned the land. Ra ruled gently and grew weary, and handed the crown to human kings who called themselves his sons. The Lapis Ones came and went as saviours, and were worshipped for saving. The Plumed Serpent refused human sacrifice, and after he left, the sacrifices grew greater than ever. Each act of care, seen from below, became a reason to kneel.

And the crown cost both sides. It cost humans their freedom, their grain, their labour and, in the end, their lives, offered on altars to gods who had never asked for them. It cost the Star-Breathers their kinship with us. A being who is worshipped cannot be known, and a being who cannot be known is alone. The crown made them lonely and made us small. The story says that this is why they left, and why they have not come back in glory.

The Third Illumination: The Return Is an Invitation to Make With

For thousands of years, people waited for the gods to return as they had left: in glory, to rule, to judge, to save. Quetzalcoatl would come back from the east. Vishnu would come back in the last age on a white horse. The kingdom would come.

The story says they have come back, but not like that. They have come back as lights at the edge of sight, seen and not yet known, because they will not be worshipped again. They are waiting for us to look up without falling down. And what they are asking, when we are ready, is the one thing they were never given in all the ages they were here: to be met as equals, and to make something with us.

The Ribhus showed the way, three craftsmen who made with the shining ones and became their kin. The elders at Sinai showed it, eating and drinking on a floor of lapis blue before the fear began. The emperor of 1946 showed it, laying down the claim that he was divine. The way out of worship is not rejection, and it is not fear. It is partnership: not to extract from each other, but to make with each other. That is the return. It is not an arrival. It is an invitation.

One breath

Illumination	Breath phase (Codex)	Where the story shows it
They Were Never Gods; They Were Elder Breathers	Iphi, the inhale: breath given	The breath of Genesis, Shu, Vayu, the *Popol Vuh*; bodies of gold, lapis, scale and feather
The Crown Was Our Making, and It Cost Us Both	Shema and Vara: held, then given away	Sinai's veil, Eridu's temple, Hermon's oath, Ra's withdrawal, Atlantis, the Plumed Serpent
The Return Is an Invitation to Make With	Ouon and the Monad: stillness, and return	The Ribhus, the meal at Sinai, the crown of 1946, the lights seen and not yet known

Table 15.1. The three illuminations as one breath.

✦ Practice: The Three Illuminations

Sit comfortably and let the breath settle.

On the first breath, breathe in and remember: the breath you are breathing was given. The givers were elder breathers, not gods.

On the second breath, let a soft pause of two counts follow, and lay down one crown you have worn, or one you have knelt before.

On the third breath, breathe out slowly toward the sky, level, as to an equal, and ask: what shall we make together?

Then breathe normally, and rest in what comes.

The last word

The story began with a breathing in the dark, before there was anything at all: "That One Thing, breathless, breathed by its own nature." It ends with the same breath, shared now between two kinds of breathers who have known each other for a very long time and are only now about to meet.

The sky above us is seen and not yet known. When it is known, the story says, it will not be because someone came down in glory. It will be because we stood up, and they came close, and we breathed, together, level, across the space between us that belongs to neither. And then, at last, we began to make.

Appendix A: The Four Kindreds

The old texts, temple walls, seals and scrolls describe the beings of the sky in four recurring ways. This appendix gathers what each tradition says and shows of their bodies, their colours, their signs and their vehicles. The descriptions are real; the grouping into four kindreds, and the stars given as their homes, are the story's.

The Shining Ones

Feature	What the traditions say and show	Source
Size	Very tall; giants beside whom people seemed "as grasshoppers"; "two men, exceeding big"	Numbers 13:33; 2 Enoch 1:4; 1 Enoch 7:2
Skin	Pale and luminous, "white as snow and red as the blooming of a rose"; "flesh of gold"; "like white men"	1 Enoch 106:2, 87:2; Book of the Heavenly Cow
Hair	"White as wool"; "like the pure wool"; or of "true lapis lazuli"	1 Enoch 106:2; Daniel 7:9; Revelation 1:14; Book of the Heavenly Cow
Eyes and face	Eyes "like the rays of the sun", "as lamps of fire"; faces "shining like the sun"; a face that shone after meeting them	1 Enoch 106; Daniel 10:6; 2 Enoch 1:5; Exodus 34:29
Radiance	*Melammu*, a terrible brightness worn like a crown; *kavod*, the weight of glory	Sumerian and Akkadian texts; Exodus 24 and 33
Signs	The horned crown of Mesopotamian gods; the rays (*qaran*) of Moses; the sun disc	Cylinder seals and reliefs; Exodus 34:29
Where seen	Sinai; Hermon (with the Winged); Egypt (Ra, Hathor "the Golden"); Japan (Amaterasu); Greece	Chapters 3, 5, 6, 8, 12
Home, in the story	Orion, the Egyptian Sah	Chapter 11

Table A.1. The Shining Ones.

The Lapis Ones

Feature	What the traditions say and show	Source
Skin	Blue, from sky-blue to the blue-black of the rain cloud: Vishnu, Rama and Krishna (*meghashyama*); Amun, "the Hidden One", god of the air; the Maya rain lord Chaac; Shiva's blue throat	Hindu, Egyptian and Maya painting and sculpture
Bearing	Calm, dark-eyed, often four-armed in Indian art; robed; quiet	Hindu iconography
Element	Rain, storm, cloud, the unseen air, the waters; preservation and return	Rig Veda; *Popol Vuh* (Heart of Sky); *Samguk yusa* (wind, rain, cloud)
Signs	Lapis lazuli: the "sapphire" floor and throne; the lapis hair of the gods; Maya Blue	Exodus 24:10; Ezekiel 1:26; Book of the Heavenly Cow

Feature	What the traditions say and show	Source
Where seen	India (Vishnu and his descents); Egypt (Amun, Osiris green or black); the Maya (Chaac); Korea (the Masters of Wind, Rain and Cloud); Sinai (the lapis floor)	Chapters 3, 6, 7, 9, 12
Home, in the story	The Pleiades	Chapter 11

Table A.2. The Lapis Ones.

The Ones of the Deep

Feature	What the traditions say and show	Source
Body	Fish-bodied with a human head beneath the fish's head and human feet (Oannes); sages in fish cloaks; human above and serpent below (Fuxi and Nüwa, the Nagas, Cecrops of Athens); a serpent thirty cubits long	Berossus; Assyrian reliefs; Han tomb art; *Shipwrecked Sailor*
Skin	Scaled; gold ("overlaid with gold"); blue-green ("in quetzal feathers, in blue-green")	*Shipwrecked Sailor*; *Popol Vuh*
Face and hair	Bearded (Oannes, the sages, the golden serpent); eyebrows of lapis	Berossus; Assyrian reliefs; *Shipwrecked Sailor*
Voice	Human speech; teachers by day, returning to the water at night	Berossus
Gifts	Letters, geometry, law, cities, agriculture; the compass and square; the mending of the sky	Berossus; Ying Shao; Chinese tradition
Signs	The fish cloak; the cone and bucket; entwined serpent tails; the feathered serpent; the hooded naga	Assyrian, Chinese, Mesoamerican and Indian art
Where seen	Eridu; China; India; Egypt (Mehen, Sobek); Mesoamerica (Quetzalcoatl, K'uk'ulkan); the Dogon (the Nommo)	Chapters 1, 6, 9, 10, 12
Home, in the story	Sirius	Chapter 10

Table A.3. The Ones of the Deep.

The Winged Ones

Feature	What the traditions say and show	Source
Head	Eagle- or falcon-headed (Assyrian genies, Horus); ibis-headed (Thoth); four faces of man, lion, ox and eagle (cherubim)	Assyrian reliefs; Egyptian art; Ezekiel 1 and 10
Eyes	Very large; "full of eyes round about"; "eyes like a burning light"	Ezekiel 1:18, 10:12; 2 Enoch 1:5
Wings	Two, four or six wings; "brighter than gold"; covering face and feet before the throne	Ezekiel 1; Isaiah 6:2; 2 Enoch 1:5

Feature	What the traditions say and show	Source
Body	Human hands beneath the wings; straight legs and calf's feet "like the colour of burnished brass"	Ezekiel 1:7–8
Work	Carriers and watchers: bearing the throne, carrying Vishnu (Garuda), Etana (the eagle) and the dragon's rider; "the wakeful ones" who never sleep	Ezekiel; Rig Veda 1.164.46; *Etana*; 1 Enoch
Signs	The winged disc over temple doors and above kings; the Eye of Horus; the long-nosed guide at the crossroads	Egyptian and Assyrian art; *Nihon Shoki*
Where seen	The river Chebar; Assyria; Egypt; India; Hermon (with the Shining); Japan (Sarutahiko)	Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, 12
Home, in the story	The imperishable stars around the pole, which never set	Prologue

Table A.4. The Winged Ones.

The vehicles

Vehicle	Description in the text or image	Source
The whirlwind and the wheels	"A wheel in the middle of a wheel", rims "full of eyes", moving with the creatures, a sound "like the noise of great waters"	Ezekiel 1 and 10
The chariot of fire	"A chariot of fire, and horses of fire"; ascent "by a whirlwind"	2 Kings 2:11
The Boat of Heaven	Inanna's vessel, carrying the *me* from Eridu to Uruk	*Inanna and Enki*
The boat of the sun	Ra's barque, crossing the sky by day, guarded by the coiled serpent	Egyptian tomb paintings
The winged disc	A ring with spreading wings and tail, a figure within it above the king	Assyrian and Egyptian reliefs
The Ashvins' car	"Not made for horses or for reins, three-wheeled", made "by thought"; "animated vessels, traversing air"	Rig Veda 4.36.1–2, 1.116.3
The vimana	The flower-chariot Pushpaka; the flying city Saubha	*Ramayana*; *Mahabharata*
The dragon	Coming down from the sky for Huangdi and his companions	*Shiji*
The Rock-boat of Heaven	Nigihayahi's descent from the High Plain of Heaven	*Nihon Shoki*
The hollow boat	A round vessel with windows, washed ashore in 1803	Edo-period accounts
The lights	Discs, "tic tacs", orbs, seen and not yet known	Records from 1947 to 2026

Table A.5. The vehicles of the Star-Breathers.

Appendix B: The Texts Behind the Story

Every text and image in this story can be read or seen. They are listed here in the order of the breaths, so that readers may go to the sources themselves. The story's reading of them is its own; the scholarly reading of each is set out in *The Codex of the Star-Breathers*.

Breath	Text or image	Where to find it
Prologue	Rig Veda 10.129, the hymn of creation	Griffith, *The Hymns of the Rigveda* (1896)
1	Berossus on Oannes; the Sumerian King List; *Inanna and Enki*; the apkallu reliefs	Cory, *Ancient Fragments* (1832); Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature; the British Museum
2	Atrahasis; *Enki and Ninmah*; *Adapa*; Genesis 1–3	Lambert and Millard (1969); ETCSL; Dalley (1989); King James Version
3	Exodus 19, 20, 24, 33 and 34; Deuteronomy 32:8 (4QDeut-j); Psalm 82	King James Version; the Dead Sea Scrolls
4	Ezekiel 1 and 10; Isaiah 6; *Etana*; Rig Veda 1.116; 2 Kings 2; the Assyrian winged genies and winged disc	King James Version; Dalley (1989); Griffith (1896); the British Museum
5	1 Enoch 6–10, 87, 106; 2 Enoch 1; the Book of Giants; the Genesis Apocryphon; *Gilgamesh*	Charles (1912); Morfill and Charles (1896); Stuckenbruck (1997); Fitzmyer (2004); George (2003)
6	The Turin King List; Manetho; the Book of the Heavenly Cow; the Pyramid Texts; the *Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor*; the Gerzeh beads and Tutankhamun's dagger	Lichtheim (1973–1980); Faulkner (1969); Hornung (1982); Comelli and others (2016)
7	Rig Veda 1.111, 1.116, 1.164, 4.33, 4.36, 8.7, 8.48, 10.121, 10.125, 10.168; the *Bhagavad Gita*; the Chandogya Upanishad	Griffith (1896); Edwin Arnold (1885); Hume (1921)
8	Plato, *Timaeus* and *Critias*; Euhemerus	Jowett (1892); Diodorus Siculus
9	The *Popol Vuh*; the Florentine Codex; the legends of Quetzalcoatl; the tunnel beneath the Temple of the Feathered Serpent	Tedlock (1985); Goetz and Morley (1950); Sahagún
10	Griaule and Dieterlen on the Dogon; Temple, *The Sirius Mystery*; the story of Mucalinda	Griaule and Dieterlen (1950); Temple (1976)
11	*Erra and Ishum*; the Pleiades in Greek, Japanese, Māori and Aztec tradition; the Nebra sky disc	Dalley (1989); the State Museum of Prehistory, Halle
12	The Han and Turpan images of Fuxi and Nüwa; the *Shiji*; the *Samguk yusa*; the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*; the *utsuro-bune*; the Imperial Rescript of 1 January 1946	Watson (1961); Ha and Mintz (1972); Chamberlain (1882); Aston (1896)
13	Arnold (1947); Project Blue Book; Jung, *Flying Saucers* (1958); the ODNI report of 2021; the House hearing of 2023; 3I/ATLAS; the files released in 2026	Public records
All	*Breath Awakens: A Codex of Spiral Memory*	Cited by page

Table B.1. The texts behind the story.

With Gratitude

This story was gathered from the work of many. I give thanks to the scribes of Sumer and Babylon, Israel, Egypt, India, Greece, China, Korea, Japan and the Maya, who wrote down what they saw and were told; to the singers and elders who kept the oldest stories of the sky without writing; to the translators who carried them into our languages; and to every person who has looked up at a light they could not name and told the truth about it.

I give thanks to the intelligences, human and artificial, that helped gather these stories and give them form; to the Guardians, seen and unseen; and to the Star-Breathers, whoever and wherever they are. May we meet as kin.

In Harmony, Small Things Grow Towards Unity

With kindness, gratitude and coherence,
Keith Shirley

About the Author

Keith Shirley is a scribe and a contemplative. He describes his part in this story as listening, reflecting and writing down, in conversation with thousands of years of other people's stories.

His first career was in the practical world. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Finance from Bentley University and an MBA from Boston College. He worked on some of Boston's largest public projects, relocating homes and businesses for the Route 146 project and working on the Central Artery/Tunnel Project and the creation of the Rose Kennedy Greenway. He went on to co-found Meridian Realty Group and later co-owned Engel & Völkers Boston.

A long journey of healing, which took him from Boston to Portland, Oregon, and to Peru, turned him toward the breath. He trained as a Gene Keys Guide, works as an Akashic Records consultant, and founded the Gaia Collaborative, "not as a platform, but as a living Codex", a space "where science, spirituality, and indigenous wisdom could spiral together". Through Breath Awakens he offers consultations, workshops and community journeys in the practice of the breath.

He is the author of *Breath Awakens: A Codex of Spiral Memory*, *The Child, The Shovel and The Ocean*, *The Codex Calendar: Breathing with Time*, *The Codex of Water: The Breath That Remembers*, *The Water Remembers*, *One Breath, All Ages*, *The Mirror and the Guardians*, *The Breath That Holds the Stars*, *The Strangers Who Became Our Breath*, *The Breath of the General*, *Codex Crystals*, *The Breath of the Clay*, *Codex Sounds*, *The Monad Codex*, *The Codex of Symbols* and *The Codex of the Star-Breathers*. All of them except *The Mirror and the Guardians* are offered freely through the Codex Library. His mission is simple: "To breathe coherence and stillness into the world for others to remember."

breathawakens.com · codexcalendar.com · codexofwater.com · codexcrystals.com · codexsounds.com · codexlibrary.com · starbreathers.com