

## “The Hymn of the Pearl”

*This poem/hymn is a really interesting text from the apocryphal gospel, the Acts of Thomas, which parallels the second reading of prodigal story wonderfully. It's also very cool for the way it makes Mother in Heaven a central character.*

(Excerpts)

When, a quite little child, I was dwelling  
In the House of my Father's Kingdom,

And in the wealth and the glories  
Of my Up-bringers I was delighting,

From the East, our Home, my Parents  
Forth-sent me with journey-provision.

Indeed from the wealth of our Treasure,  
They bound up for me a load.

Large was it, yet was it so light  
That all alone I could bear it.

...

My Glorious Robe they took off me  
Which in their love they had wrought me,

And my Purple Mantle [also]  
Which was woven to match with my  
stature.

And with me They [then] made a compact;  
In my heart wrote it, not to forget it:

“If thou goest down into Egypt,  
And thence thou bring'st the one Pearl —

“[The Pearl] that lies in the Sea,  
Hard by the loud-breathing Serpent —

“[Then] shalt Thou put on thy Robe  
And thy Mantle that goeth upon it,

“And with thy Brother, Our Second,  
Shalt thou be Heir in our Kingdom.”

*The hymn goes on to say how when he first gets to Egypt, where the pearl is, he heads straight for the serpent guarding it, fully intent upon obtaining the object of his quest and heading right back home. But as he gets there, he begins to feel conspicuous as a divine being among mortals, and through various accommodations to worldly culture, he becomes a citizen of “their country.” The poem continues:*

I forgot that I was a King's son,  
And became a slave to their king.

I forgot all concerning the Pearl  
For which my Parents had sent me;

And from the weight of [Egypt's] victuals  
I sank down into a deep sleep.

*The scene then switches to heaven where his Parents are worried about him, so they send him a reminder of who he is—a letter which reads:*

“From Us — King of Kings, thy Father,  
And thy Mother, Queen of the Dawn-land,

“And from Our Second, thy Brother —  
To thee, Son, down in Egypt, Our  
Greeting!

“Up an arise from thy sleep,  
Give ear to the words of Our Letter!

“Remember that thou art a King's son;

...

Bethink thyself of the Pearl  
For which thou didst journey to Egypt.

“Remember thy Glorious Robe,  
Thy Splendid Mantle remember,

...

*The son finds the letter:*

Unto me I took it and kissed it;  
I loosed its seal and I read it.

...

I remembered that I was a King's son,  
And my rank did long for its nature.

I bethought me again of the Pearl,  
For which I was sent down to Egypt.

And I began [then] to charm him,  
The terrible loud-breathing Serpent.

I lulled him to sleep and to slumber,  
Chanting o'er him the Name of my Father,

The Name of our Second, [my Brother],  
And [the Name] of my Mother, the East-  
Queen.

And [thereon] I snatched up the Pearl,  
And turned to the House of my Father.

Their filthy and unclean garments  
I stripped off and left in their country.

To the way that I came I betook me,  
To the Light of our Home, to the  
Dawn-land.

And on the road I found [there] before me,  
My Letter that had aroused me —

As with its voice it had roused me,  
So now with its light it did lead me —

With its love it was drawing me onward.

...

I went forth, [and]

My Glorious Robe that I'd stripped off,  
And my Mantle with which it was  
covered,

Down from the Heights of Hyrcania,  
Thither my Parents did send me,

...

At once, as soon as I saw it,  
The Glory looked like my own self.

I saw it in all of me,  
And saw me all in [all of] it —

*The son then returns to his heavenly home where he is welcomed with all others who had accomplished the same pearl quest, who had done the same remembering about who they really are.*

## WITHIN

I read a map once  
Saying the kingdom of God  
Was within me.  
But I never trusted  
Such unlikely ground.

I went out.  
I scoured schools  
And libraries  
And chapels and temples  
And other people's eyes  
And the skies and the rocks.  
And I found treasures  
From the kingdom's treasury  
But not the kingdom.

Finally I came in quiet  
For a rest  
And turned on the light.

And there  
Just like a surprise party  
Was all the smiling royalty—  
King, Queen, court.

People have been  
Locked up for less, I know.  
But I tell you  
Something marvelous  
Is bordered by this skin:

I am a castle  
And the kingdom of God  
Is within.

—CAROL LYNN PEARSON