

Raggedys and the Path of Descent

Context is everything. A context that is fundamental to the understanding and alleviation of human suffering, are the Paths of Ascent and Descent.

The Path of Ascent is the onward and upward journey of the first part of life. This is the bold path of accomplishment—growing stronger, faster, smarter, more capable. It is setting goals and achieving them, overcoming obstacles, pursuing excellence, striving for perfection, and acquiring greater knowledge, resources, and abilities. This is the Promethean path of the hero. The Girls Inc. motto for girls to be “strong, smart and bold” embodies this path of ascent. Almost everyone, especially those of us in the affluent Western world, tend to think that this is all there is to life. But it’s not.

Throughout the world, the great spiritual teachings from all faiths have mostly depicted the Path of Descent. The Greek myths, the Torah, New Testament, the Tibetan, Egyptian, and Celtic Books of the Dead—all of these describe the path of descent. This is when things fall apart. It is the dissembling of the ego structure we have built for ourselves during the first stage of life. It is loss, sickness, injury, disappointment, failure, humiliation—it is the humbling process that puts pressure on our small ego to stop pretending that it is in control of everything. And instead, reach to a greater Life.

The path of descent is depicted in the stories of Chiron, Joseph, Job, Jonah, and Jesus. It is also symbolized by Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy. This is the embracing of imperfection—the inclusion of the things that are threadbare, tattered, and torn, as being an essential part of the whole. Our failures then become an integral part of the fabric of our lives. Instead of rejecting our faults and trying to throw them away because we were not perfect, we see them as part of a greater whole—like a piece of broken glass that can be part of a kaleidoscope, or a torn piece of cloth that can add to the beauty of a patchwork quilt.

This is why Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy are such powerful symbols when they are used for visiting the sick. The people we visit in hospitals and nursing homes are traveling the path of descent. Their hopes and dreams have often fallen apart along with their bodies. Despite the sophistication of the modern health care environment, and sometimes because of it, they have suffered loss and humiliation. Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy embrace these imperfections as part of life. So patients don’t feel judged by them, and they can relate to these raggedy dolls because the patient is feeling a little ragged too.

It is the inclusion of our imperfections that makes us whole. It is all of our experiences that have made us who we are—the victories and the failures, the pleasant and the unpleasant. This is what gives us authenticity and integrity.

“It seems that it is the purpose of evolution now to replace an image of perfection with the concept of completeness or wholeness. Perfection suggests something all pure, with no blemishes, dark spots or questionable areas. Wholeness includes the darkness but combines it with the light elements into a totality more real and whole than any ideal. This is an awesome task, and the question before us is whether mankind is capable of this effort and growth. Ready or not, we are in that process.”

– Robert Johnson (1921-present), American Jungian Analyst, in *He*

“For the good man to realize that it is better to be whole than good is to enter on a straight and narrow path compared to which his previous rectitude was but flowery license.”

– John Middleton Murray, (1889-1957), English literary critic