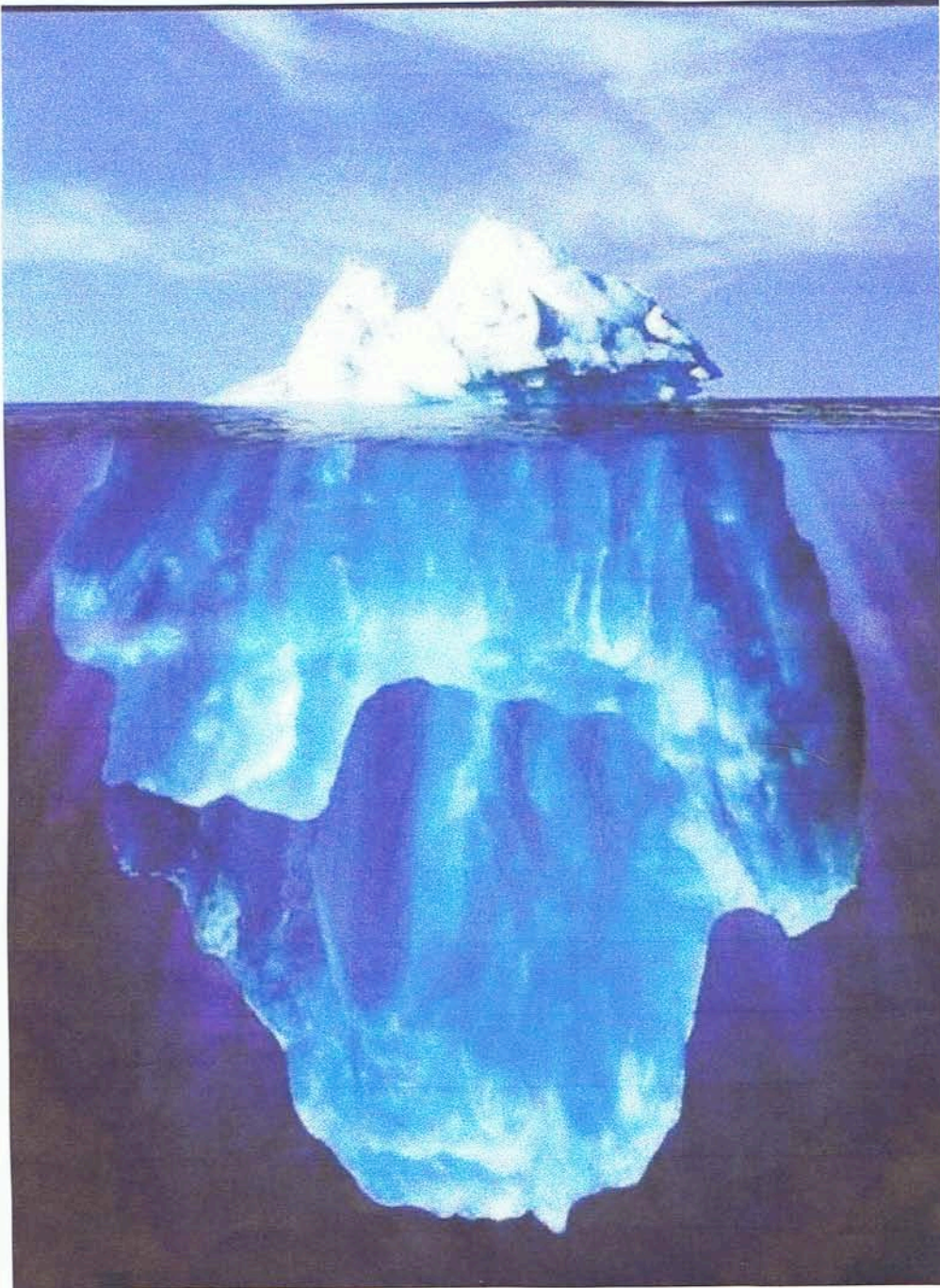


Icebergs: Numinosity and Transcendence





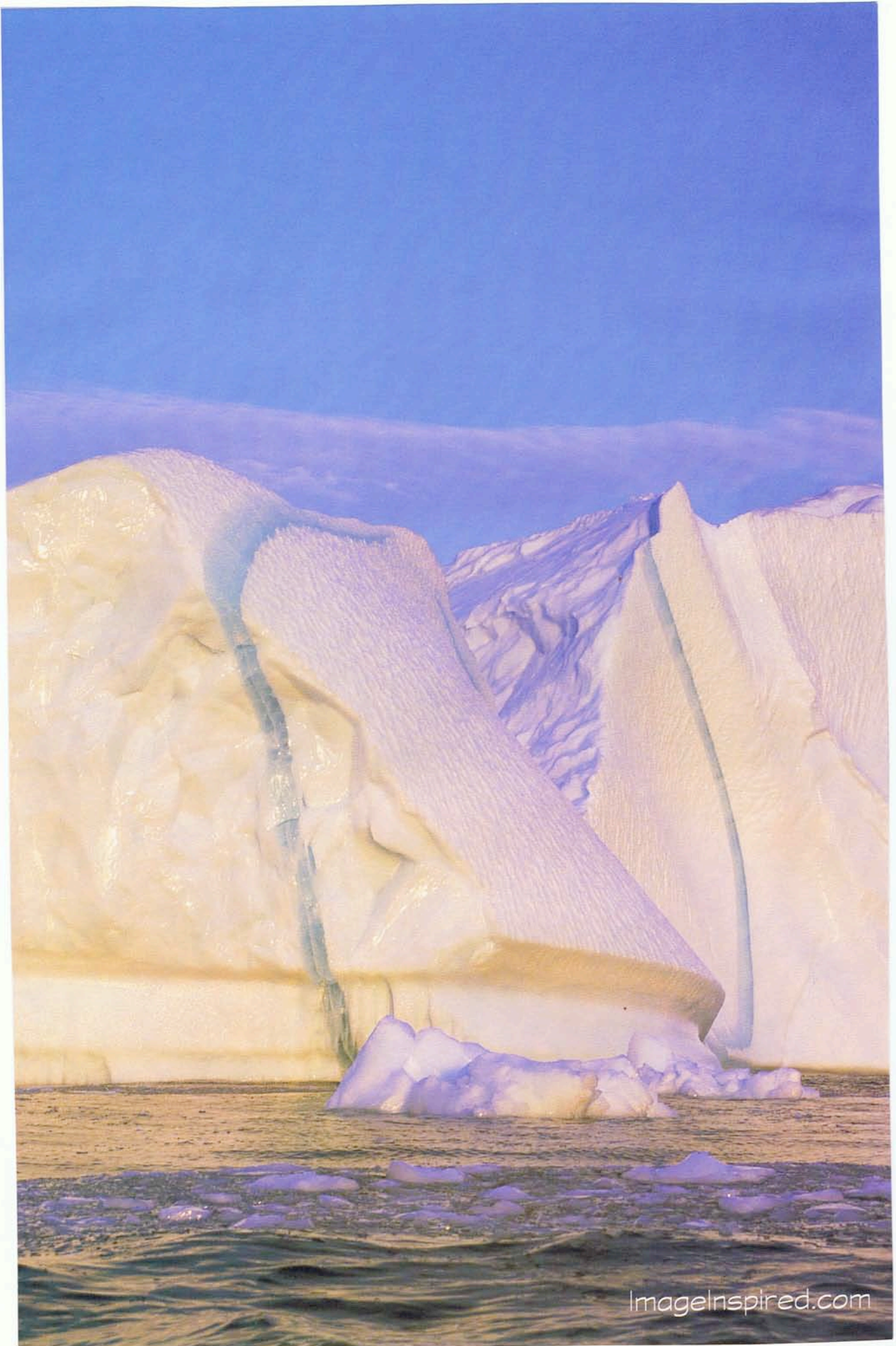
Icebergs: A Paper on the Symbols

The vision of my first iceberg became embedded in my memory as I was getting closer to it with the boat and it seems that it will be with me until I die. Just thinking about it brings tears to my eyes and I am only interested in working on material that will get my heart involved; I agree with Jack Kornfield when he says: "In undertaking a spiritual life, what matters is simple: *"We must make certain that our path is connected with our heart."* (Kornfield, p.10) As Carlos Castaneda says: The most important question is whether the path that we are travelling along has a heart (Kornfield, p.12). The iceberg definitely has a relation to my heart.

The experience itself was also synchronistic. In the middle of August, it is extremely rare to see icebergs, people told me. Was it meant to happen so that I would experience the presence of spirit, that I would live a reality rather than only read about it? I had read about the numinous and understood it intellectually, but seeing the iceberg, one early morning off the shore of Twillingate, Newfoundland, I *encountered* the numinous; the beauty, the awe, and majesty of that tower of ice overwhelmed me. I felt I had contacted something beyond this realm; words were useless, and tears flowed. I was glad that the stormy weather allowed only the brave (or crazy!) out on the deck; there was nobody to talk to, no small talk necessary, and my only connection was with that giant. The tears that ran along my face were of the same element as the iceberg: water. My tears contrasted by their warmth with the fierceness of the elements: the rain, sharp winds, and the cold and turbulent seawater. My tears were soft, maternal fluidity compared to the masculine monolithic iceberg.

The story of the iceberg could start as a fairy tale would start... *in a land very far away, a long, long time ago* . . . A majority of the icebergs in the North Atlantic come from about 100 iceberg-producing glaciers along the Greenland coast while a few originate in the Eastern Canadian Arctic Islands. Glaciers form on land as a result of a net accumulation of snow over thousands of years. Successive layers compress earlier accumulations until, at depths below 60 to 70 meters, glacial ice is formed. Glaciers "flow" or "creep" outward under their own weight like a viscous fluid. When the edge of a glacier advances into the ocean the pieces that break off (in a process called *calving*) are what we call icebergs. Since the glacial ice that icebergs are made of may be more than 15,000 years old, there is a sense in which history is being transmitted even as the iceberg moves; when one meets an iceberg, one is in contact with thousands of years of frozen material. The icebergs that reach the east coast of Newfoundland probably calved from a glacier more than a year before –the language itself implies a separation from a maternal body of ice: the glacier. Icebergs often spend a year or more in cold arctic bays melting slowly until eventually passing through the Davis Strait and into the Labrador Current.

Being cut off from the glacier, the mountain of ice plunges into the sea and then *erupts*, and, similar to an old archetypal figure, sets upon a very unusual journey. Again, I



need to go back to the impression, the experience: I was standing on the boat as close as possible to the iceberg, the deck of the boat the only reminder of the solidity of the earth, the only earthy element among water elements-I can still recall how the appearance of that mountain of ice overwhelmed me. In all times the mountain has stood for the place where heaven and earth meet, where the gods have revealed their presence; in all lands and among all people, cities have their holy mountain. On that boat, it didn't seem any different: heaven and water met, the sky married the sea through that mountain of ice. Similar to the Earth mountain, the iceberg conveys a sense of mass and power. An iceberg can weigh up to 10 million tonnes. As a matter of reference, the largest Northern Hemisphere iceberg on record was encountered near Baffin Island in 1882. It was 13 km long, 6 km wide and had a height above water of about 20 meters. This explains partly the sense of majesty combined with ominous feeling that the iceberg may inspire. Sailors and fishermen know how dangerous it is to get close to an iceberg and the event of the maiden voyage of the Titanic is a sure reminder of the reason for that dread.

The iceberg looks like an invincible force. For that reason, during the second world war, (1940), the German navy proposed plans for a warship that would use a carved-out iceberg as its hull. After having carved out the hull of the warship the German navy would assemble all the various guns and armours integral to the iceberg. The advantage of such an idea, the German planners reasoned, would have been a superstructure virtually invincible to allied torpedoes or bombs. When an attacking bomb hit the ship, momentarily fracturing the superstructure, the cold environment surrounding the ship would immediately refreeze the hull back into shape. The German planners later decided against the project for two reasons. In 1941, they turned their attention towards Russia and the investment of ideas for the German navy was of lesser importance for a while. They also discovered that their iceberg plan had a flaw: it would limit the combat radius to the most extreme northern seas where the temperature would prevent the iceberg from melting. Yet, I can't help being impressed by the symbolic power of an iceberg/warship as a projection of force.

The iceberg induces a sense of an incredible force combined with a sense of awe. The sense of awe maybe somehow related to the symbolism of the mountain itself associated to "the abode of solar deities, the higher properties of the soul and the destiny of mankind to move upwards."(Penguin, p.684). Standing close to the iceberg, I intuitively knew that I was in the presence of a transcendent power. Encountering the iceberg was like encountering the mountain: an exaltation heavenwards, the means of entering into a relationship with the Godhead, like a return to the First Cause. It was encountering the Numinosum: the aspect of the supraordinate God-image. It was a meeting with a compelling force that implied a "not yet disclosed, attractive and fateful meaning." (Samuels, p. 100.)

The God-image, the encounter with the transcendent, is a multifaceted, everchanging image. The mountain of ice floats on an ocean of water--rainwater meets saltwater--and an iceberg's journey is a shapeshifting journey. The elements (currents, waves, winds, and water temperature) determine the speed at which it moves, and they

literally “carve” the iceberg. Here is an excerpt from some website remarks by Dr. Stephen E. Bruneau:

“A fantastic variety of shapes result from the deterioration process of the icebergs. Despite the fact that no two icebergs are the same, there are certain categories of shapes that are used for iceberg observation. Often the terms; tabular, blocky, wedge, dome, pinnacle and drydock are used.”

What strikes me is the expression, *deterioration process*. As the iceberg slowly melts to go back to single water molecules, it takes on a variety of shapes; all of these shapes are continually changing and mark the iceberg’s ephemeral quality. What appears to be real, solid, and tangible is in fact in the process of transformation and the attempt to capture the beauty of the iceberg and to fix it forever in still-photography does not do it justice. It seems to be related to the need that a human being has to fix things, to capture and imprison an ever-elusive reality. Icebergs are dynamic; they are constantly moving and changing.

Part of my emotional response to the iceberg is the meeting with the beauty of the ephemeral. On the first morning, when I decided to take a chance and get on a boat to have a look at the iceberg, the weather was ominous, a storm was threatening and only five of us decided to board the boat, the others decided to wait for better weather. The stormy weather certainly added to that sense of awe I felt that morning and as I disembarked, I anticipated repeating the experience by taking the afternoon trip; but a few minutes after I disembarked, I heard a huge noise, a loud cracking sound, and I turned around in time to see the iceberg collapsing before my eyes. I had been able to seize the moment and to experience one shape before I saw it collapse and change into a different shape, thus experiencing this process of the ephemeral in nature on a gargantuan scale. As I went back that afternoon, the initial tower had split into two smaller blocks, thus allowing a different experience. In June 2001, a very beautifully shaped iceberg “The Arch” which “made it” onto all different kind of pictures, postcards and calendars finally collapsed and a tourist photographer captured that moment. I have included a picture taken out of a newspaper.

In Newfoundland, I was attracted by the beauty of the photographic art of Jeannine Daigle, who specializes in pictures of icebergs. I bought some of her work and later contacted her. Her 2003 calendar front cover images are the result of what she calls her “lucky day”.

“ I was getting ready to pack up my camera gear in the car when I heard a low rumble coming from the heart of the iceberg. I quickly grabbed my camera and settled in for the spectacle that was about to take place... First, I heard a very loud crack followed by a “swoosh” sound, similar to a huge avalanche of snow falling down a mountain and spreading out onto the water. I remained mesmerized for the duration of the iceberg “floundering”.

(Calendar 2003 www.imageinspired.com)

I am including the pictures for your viewing.

In a phone conversation Jeanine told me about how she related to the icebergs through her art:

“L’artiste fait voir. Elle met de son ame dans son art. Je veux aller au coeur de l’iceberg” The artist allows people to see. She puts her soul in her art. I want to go to the heart of the iceberg. (Trans.mine)

She referred to a picture taken for one of her calendars, entitled “The golden light of inspiration” and told me that she stood in the presence of the iceberg for a long time and then let the camera capture the essence of her relationship to the iceberg in that special moment.

*“Je vis la meditation et ensuite je comprends la relation avec la photo.”
I live the meditation and then I can understand the relationship with the picture.
(Trans. mine)*

Part of her work is also to go into schools and work with the students. She lets them look at the pictures of icebergs and invites them to reflect on their vision, to exchange ideas and write poems. One particular exercise consists in contemplating a picture for at least five minutes and letting the images and representations take shape. What is that particular student seeing that is different from another student? Like little Amélie Poulain whose camera captures pictures of clouds in the shape of teddy bears and easter bunnies in the film, *Le fabuleux destin d’Amélie Poulain*, by J.P. Jeunet, or like a hiker letting the rocks talk of nature Gods, the student lets his “imagination” project unconscious contents onto the iceberg. That is the alchemical process of the outdoor laboratory of the iceberg, a sort of Rorschach test in which we are allowed to project the Unconscious onto an inkblot. That is why some of Daigle’s pictures bear the names of: “The Lady who lived in the Shoe of the Ice,” “The Laughing Whale,” “Mother Dragon” (J. Daigle). Alchemy sets itself the task of acquiring “the treasure hard to attain” a process very similar to getting to the heart of the iceberg.

We project on the iceberg a highly fascinating unconscious content, which exhibits a numinous quality. As Jung says: “... *we should not be in the least surprised if the empirical manifestations of unconscious contents bear all the marks of something illimitable, something not determined by space and time.*” (CW 12, par 247). The iceberg transcends time and space. It is both present time and immemorial time combined and the space offers a shapeshifting quality as its main feature. Some of what Jung says about the myth of the flying saucers can be applied to our subject: “*The significance of the figure lies not so much in its size and strangeness as in the numinosity of its unconscious symbolic background.*” (CW10, par 728) The symbolic background is the union of opposites. The iceberg is an uniting symbol par excellence. Emerging from the feminine water is that sometimes masculine tower of ice penetrating the sky, the coldness of the ice representing harshness, emotional frigidity and extremes of stagnation transcended when the sun hits the iceberg to uncover its iridescent colours, thus forming a coniunctio, an alchemical symbol of union of unlike substances: cold and warm, ice and fire, a harsh centre and a softening edge.

Yet, the iceberg is water. Water in all its shapes and textures is the all-pervading element:

“People ask what water is. It is the origin of all things, and the ancestral temple of all Life. Water produces the beautiful and the ugly, the virtuous and the wicked, the foolish and the clever” (author unknown, 5th Century BCE; see Of All Things Most Yielding)

The iceberg *is* water in all its manifestations: condensed, frozen in a huge block of ice, then melting to end up as an ice-cube (in the local screech drink!) for the delight of the tourists aboard, and as a simple water molecule, thus ending as it started. It is rainwater turned into snow. Compressed by its own accumulating weight to form ice. Extruded by the colossal pressure of its weight to move to the sea, then to break off, plunge and erupt. Floating on salt water is the iceberg, the cleanest source of fresh water known to man.

Water is such a vast and encompassing symbol that I will select here only a few of its meaningful correlations. Water is first the source of life, the infinite nature of the possible, containing all that is potential, unshaped: the seed of seeds. In the Jewish and Christian traditions, it represents the beginning of creation. Yet *“nevertheless, like all symbols, water can be regarded from two diametrically opposite points of view which are not, despite this, irreconcilable, and this ambivalence occurs at all levels. Water is the source both of life and death, is creator and destroyer.”* (Penguin, p.1082) The iceberg is the creator of an awe-inspiring beauty and does represent a danger of destruction. And water is also related to cleansing and regeneration. As I was doing the research on the meaning of the water symbol, I came across a beautiful book, Of All Things Most Yielding, a book comprised of beautiful photographs by John Chang McCurdy and meaningful selections of texts from the Buddhist and Taoist traditions. The quotes were more meaningful to me than anything else I had read and I slowly began to understand my fascination for the world of the icebergs and how it could relate to my life.

*“Of all the elements, the Sage should take Water as his preceptor.
Water is yielding but all-conquering. Water extinguishes Fire,
Or, finding itself likely to be defeated escapes a steam and re-forms.
Water washes away soft Earth, or, when confronted by rocks, seeks a way round.
Water corrodes Iron till it crumbles to dust; it saturates the atmosphere
So that Wind dies. Water gives way to obstacles with deceptive humility,
For no power can prevent it following its destined course to the sea.
Water conquers by yielding; it never attacks but always wins the last battle.
The Sage who makes himself as Water is distinguished for his humility;
He embraces passivity, acts from non-action and conquers the world.*

Tao Cheng (11th Century A.D.)

What moves me the most when I behold the iceberg is that aggregate of opposing forces combining to form incredible beauty. It is powerful and yielding at the same time, it is action and non-action, presence and disappearance. I know that it relates to me as a symbol of the Self otherwise I wouldn't feel such a deep, connection to it. Maybe it is my

deepest wish to be both strong and yielding, to combine action and non-action, to live my life in a state of effortless effort and active surrender.

I am reminded of another quote by Jung that I like:

“But one must learn to know oneself in order to know who one is... It is the world of water, where all life floats in suspension, where... the soul of everything living begins, where I am indivisibly this and that, where I experience the other in myself and the other-than-myself experiences me” (CW 9 1st part, par. 45)

This is what happened to me when I encountered the iceberg: there occurred a kind of merging with an object other than myself but representative of *myself*, of my psyche. The tip of the iceberg (the 1/8th of the whole mass of the iceberg) is similar to my ego. In both cases only a small part of the whole is visible/conscious, while the invisible/immersed part is of an abyssal depth and extension that can only be approached with extreme caution and will only slowly melt-away/reveal its secrets.

We know how the symbols of the Self often possess a numinosity and convey a sense of necessity, which gives them a transcendent priority in our psychic life. As the totality of the psyche, the Self combines in potential all the mental processes, from positive to negative. Those contents do not exist in chaos; they are the parts of a pattern for the development of the whole person, for the Individuation process. In a lecture, Gary Sparks, a Jungian Analyst, presented the Self as a guide, a presence full of awe, a numinous, highly emotional quality and a meeting with the divine. The iceberg is more than the physical tangibility of the concrete thing, it is rather “*the sublime intangibility of a spiritual vision*” (CW10, par 864). The iceberg experience is like “*the influence of an invisible presence that causes a peculiar alteration of consciousness*” (CW11, par 6). The iceberg is a mirror of myself, the mirror of my psyche with its 7/8th submerged unconscious reality. It is one more chance at making my individuation process conscious.

When I chose the subject of this paper, it was in an attempt to understand rationally an overwhelming experience and I thought that researching the different symbols associated with the iceberg might provide clarity; I started this paper with a wish for clarification and understanding of an experience; I was on a quest for meaning. Little did I know that the work was going to lead me in a different direction-- *its* direction. As I began doing my research, I was first surprised by how much pleasure I got from the process itself. Soon, it became clear that the research was *leading me* in directions that I had not expected. The research started in the Jungian realm in a somewhat circumambulatory way: one symbol would lead to another without my knowing exactly where I was heading. I found the process very similar to being in a forest and having to make my own way, to discover paths and make my way through them. It was both exhilarating and frustrating; I was walking uncharted territories. My research took me to books, websites, texts and conversations that I had not *chosen*: they all appeared as synchronistic events; for instance, I would be talking to a friend about the symbol of water and he would lend me a beautiful book with pictures and texts in the eastern tradition. I would then realise how that particular book was meaningful in how the symbol related to my own life.

Thus I circumambulated the different symbols similarly to my being in the boat turning around the iceberg; I examined them on all its sides so that the multiplicity of the facets/symbols was apprehended. I started the process with the goal of trying to make sense of it all and to bring everything together in a rational way for the sake of clarity. But is it possible to make a symbol of the Self clear? As *I* (ego) am part of the Self, how may I analyse my parts and still remain whole, for *I* cannot be outside the process of the analysis? Shouldn't I *surrender* to the power of the symbol as we surrender to the numinous? The numinosum defies explanation but conveys an individual message, which is deeply impressive even if it is enigmatic and mysterious. In that respect I feel that Numen and Lumen are linked. I can not separate the iridescent everchanging light of the iceberg from a sense of Spirit emanating from the mountain of ice. When I look at the picture of the opposite page, I am reminded of multiple luminosities that Jung associates with the alchemical idea of 'the *"scintillae"* - the sparks- which appear as visual illusions in the *"arcane substance"* (CW8, par.388) The iceberg is like an alchemical vision.

"One would have to conclude from these alchemical visions that the archetypes have about them a certain effulgence or quasi-consciousness, and that numinosity entails luminosity. Paracelsus seems to have an inkling of this. The following is taken from his Philosophia sagax: "And as little as aught can exist in man without the divine numen, so little can aught exist in man without the divine lumen. A man is made perfect by numen and lumen and these two alone. Everything springs from these two, and these two are in man, but without them man is nothing, though they can be without man."

The iceberg is both light and spirit; it is the light from within, a light at the core of the iceberg that is even present when there is no sun and when the weather is ominous. It is what Paracelsus might call *anima*, in a way slightly different from Jung: *the force that animates nature*. I feel that experiencing the power of the iceberg has caused a certain alteration of my consciousness; I feel I go back to the vision again and again to reconnect with the power of Spirit. *"Just as physical hunger is sated... by the sight of a marvelous meal, so the hunger of the soul is sated by the vision of numinous images"* (CW18, par.864).