

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TRADITIONAL THOUGHTS ON SOULMATE RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS VARIOUS CULTURE

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Abstract

The study attempts to present a comparative analysis of soulmate beliefs across traditional Oriental, Mediterranean and African cultures, examining philosophical, moral, and mythological foundations to uncover similarities and differences among them. It aims to explore the ideas of soulmates in Oriental, African, Ancient Greek, Roman and Egyptian cultures, highlighting common themes such as cosmic forces uniting souls, eternal love, and metaphysical connections. The study endeavours to also explore how the notions of love and soulmates are presented in folklores and cultural anecdotes across the cultures. Oriental and African traditions, supposedly, express these themes through their spiritual ritualistic forms. In the same way, Mediterranean traditions seemingly emphasize on marital rituals and rites to signify their beliefs on soulmate relationships, offering a wide range of interpretations across various civilizations. Despite similarities, subtle differences prevail. Apparently, Oriental, and African cultures have been shown to emphasize upon spiritual growth and karmic connection, whereas Mediterranean cultures focus more on romantic love and the concept of fate shaped by unique mythological stories and folktales. The study also examines the traditional myths and lores that have been passed down in these regions and have shaped and solidified the beliefs of soulmates, thus putting emphasis on the role of cultural and historical factors in their evolution. Traditional beliefs about soulmate relationships presumably incorporate moral elements such as destiny and fate, and divine intervention, emphasizing the sacred nature of the bond. The predominant aspects of morality, when dealing with the nature of soulmate relationships, seem to revolve around loyalty, devotion, and sacrifice, along with family and societal norms. The analysis seeks to attain a deeper understanding of the moral elements, their relevance and responsibility that comes with finding one's soulmate. The

research attempts to shed light upon the cultural differences and variations in the understanding of human companionship. The subjugation of morality and the existence of various societal ideas seem to influence the beliefs regarding a cosmic connection between two beings.

Keywords: Soulmates, Love, Oriental, African, Mediterranean, Morality, Destiny, Rituals, Folklores, Spirituality, Philosophy

INTRODUCTION

The belief of certain people being soulmates has been a renowned concept around the world, enticing every individual to wonder about their “better half.” Although seldom questioned about their origins and usages, phrases such as “the other half of me,” “one true love” and “forever mine” have been used widely across the world, leading us to speculate about similar cultural nuances that hint at the adoption of these powerful words.

Various philosophies and cultures across the globe offer distinct interpretations regarding the notion of soulmates, whether it be an intense metaphysical connection brought on by some divine intervention or the conception of twin flames or souls believed to be fated to meet across lifetimes. Our paper focuses on some such philosophies and beliefs that emerge in the diversifications of Oriental, Mediterranean and African cultures. The analysis underscores the shared sense of connection and desire across civilizations, revealing diverse cultural subtleties found in all three regions.

Through this exploration, the study emphasizes the permanence of such cultural connotations, deeply ingrained in human society, continuing to influence different perspectives, and revealing a common theme of unification at the cosmic level.

HALVES MADE WHOLE: THE QUEST FOR SOULMATES

Greek and Roman mythologies have similar narratives that explore the concept of soulmates, often focusing on themes of separation, longing, and the quest for unity. The overlap between the two reveals a shared cultural understanding of love as an essential aspect of human existence. The notion of soulmate was first introduced in Plato’s Symposium, particularly through the character of Aristophanes. According to him, humans were originally spherical beings with two faces, four

arms, and four legs. Their power and unity threatened the gods, leading Zeus to divide them into two separate entities. This act of separation instilled in each half a profound longing for its companion, establishing the foundational belief that individuals are destined to seek their soulmates throughout their lives. This myth is also known as the Twin Flame theory.

Plato's exploration of love and relationships goes beyond emotional fulfilment. He suggested that a soulmate relationship should not only focus on romantic notions but also elevate both individuals towards a higher understanding of love and existence. For Plato, the journey towards spiritual growth is intimately linked to the relationships one cultivates with their soulmates. Love is seen as an inspiration that propels people to pursue higher ideals and virtues. The responsibility inherent in a soulmate relationship is to support each other in the quest for goodness and truth.¹

Greek and Roman mythology are littered with stories that capture the essence of soulmate connections. Orpheus and Eurydice's story is one of the most touching tales. The talented musician Orpheus deeply falls for Eurydice, but tragedy strikes when she is bitten by a snake and dies. Orpheus, overcome with sorrow, resolves to plead with Hades and his queen to release him from his misery and bring Eurydice back to life. After descending into the underworld, he manages to win the queen over with his music. The queen pleaded with her husband to liberate Eurydice by breaking the underworld's rules as she had been struck by the power of music. Hades consented to let Eurydice return to the Earth, but only if Orpheus promised not to see her while she was still in the Underworld. Orpheus led his wife through the caverns of darkness and despair, slowly winding upwards towards the earth's surface. Eurydice followed him at a distance, so that he would not look upon her. At last, Orpheus caught a glimpse of daylight up ahead. Happily, he glanced back at his wife, only to realize even as he saw her that she was forever lost to him. Slowly moving towards the earth's surface, Orpheus guided his wife through the caves of darkness and anguish. To keep him from seeing her, Eurydice trailed after him. Orpheus finally saw light at a distance. He looked back at his wife with joy, only to discover that she had vanished from his life forever. In Greek mythology, the narrative of Orpheus and Eurydice focuses on the profound sense of loss and the inevitability of fate. Orpheus's journey acts as a reminder of the limitations of human effort against divine will. In Roman adaptations, the same story is used to highlight the enduring nature

¹ Plato. *The Symposium*. Translated by Christopher Gill, Penguin Books, 2005.

of love and its power to transcend death. The story also acts as a cautionary tale; the impact doubt and insecurity can have on a relationship.

The myth of Eros and Psyche is among the most celebrated love stories in both Greek and Roman mythology. In Roman adaptations Eros is known as Cupid. The tale begins with Psyche's unparalleled beauty. Because of her apparent beauty, people started to worship her instead of Aphrodite (Venus), the real goddess of love. Aphrodite was furious and summoned her son Eros to force Psyche to fall in love with a monstrous creature, but Eros ended up falling in love with Psyche himself after he clumsily scratched himself with his own arrow of passion.

He led her to a gorgeous palace that she knew must be the residence of a god. Psyche was informed by an unseen voice that she owned the palace, and she was dressed and cleaned by invisible servants who also brought her food and played music for her. Eros would come see her at night and depart before sunrise. He told her not to ever try to figure out his identity. One night, though, Psyche approached Eros with a lighted oil lamp while he was sleeping because she had grown curious. When she learnt who her companion was, she was taken aback. She fell madly in love with Eros after reaching for his arrow and inadvertently pricking herself. A drop of hot oil fell over Eros's shoulder. Hurt and deceived, he fled. Psyche was devastated and set out to win his love back. She faced numerous trials set up by Aphrodite that tested her resolve and commitment. Ultimately, after overcoming these challenges, Psyche is reunited with Eros, who forgives her. Their love is elevated to a divine status when Psyche is granted immortality and they live happily ever after. Greek mythology employs the tale of Eros and Psyche to emphasize themes of trust, perseverance, and personal growth through adversity. Whereas, the tale of Cupid and Psyche in Roman mythology stresses upon fidelity and commitment more than its Greek counterpart, suggesting that love should be cultivated with responsibility. The story illustrates that genuine love is resilient no matter the trials imposed upon it, ultimately leading to a profound and deep relationship.²

The popular folktales that revolve around soulmate connections in the mortal realm also guide us in navigating the idea of love and soulmates in both Roman and Greek cultures. The story of

²Dk. *The Mythology Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained*. Dorling Kindersley Ltd, 2018.

Pyramus and Thisbe is one such story. It predates the popular Romeo and Juliet story and is about two lovers of Babylon who were forbidden to marry by their families. However, ignoring their families' wishes they continued to stay in touch with one another through a crack in the wall that separated their homes. Finally, they made plans to elope but a terrible misunderstanding led to both of their deaths.

This was the first one to arrive at their meeting place but gets startled by a lioness and runs away dropping her veil in a hurry. Pyramus arrives to discover Thisbe's veil ripped off, leading him to conclude that the lion has murdered her. In grief, Pyramus takes his life so that he can be united with her once again. Thisbe finally returns; devastated by the scene in front of her she too decides to die by suicide. Their tragic death leads to the intertwining of their blood with the mulberry tree, which is said to have changed from white to dark red as a symbol of their love and loss. A similar fate befell Alcyone and Ceyx. They were a devoted couple who lovingly called one another Zeus and Hera. The king of gods, however, was not pleased with this. As punishment, Zeus had sent a storm that drowned Ceyx at sea. Alcyone had waited for her lover at the shore until she realized his fate and in grief decided to throw herself into the sea to join him. Legend says that their love so stirred the gods, that they transformed both into kingfishers (halcyons), which symbolized their enduring relationship. Lastly, Hero and Leander are another famous pair in both Greek and Roman mythology. Hero was a priestess of Aphrodite and lived in Sestos, while Leander had resided in Abydos across the Hellespont. The two fell deeply for one another but had unfortunately been separated by the distance. Every night, Hero lit a torch to guide Leander as he swam to her. However, one night a storm extinguished Hero's light causing Leander to drown. Heartbroken, Hero too decided to take her own life to be with him in death.

Artistic representations of this time period reflect the theme of soulmates through various mediums. Classical sculptures from both Greece and Rome often depict scenes from mythological narratives exploring love and connections with one another. There is a sculpture of Orpheus playing his lyre which conveys the emotional depth of his love for Eurydice.

Greek pottery frequently illustrates mythological themes related to love and relationships through vases inscribed with images depicting Eros and Aphrodite engaged in romantic pursuits emphasizing ideals surrounding beauty intertwined within social rituals associated with courtship. The literary landscape of both these regions have consistently embraced the idea of love. Poets

like Sappho expressed longing through lyrical verses while playwrights such as Euripides examined the emotional struggles faced by lovers. Roman mosaics also featured intricate designs depicting scenes of mythology emphasizing themes surrounding courtship, loyalty and eternal bonds.

The narratives from Greek and Roman mythology not only showcase the deep emotional ties between soulmates but also give an insight into the societal and divine forces that were often faced by these characters. The themes of longing, separation and tragic fate constantly serve as a reminder that true love is both a powerful and perilous journey. In every story explored, the lovers were willing to sacrifice everything for their connection, cautioning that the bond between soulmates is not merely a romantic ideal but a fundamental aspect of human existence.

THREADS OF DESTINY: SOULMATES IN JAPANESE MYTH AND CULTURE

The red string of fate, a widely held concept in China and Japan, is a thread tied around the little finger of two destined individuals. Any kind of love-based connection might be symbolized by this red thread. This encompasses genuine love, family, and friendships. According to the folktale, a man who resides on the moon ties the thread. The distance between two lovers may lead this thread to become tangled or stretched, but in the end, it tightens and compels the two of them to unite. It is impossible to break this invisible red string. The reason behind why the red threads is binding two individuals through their little fingers is very interesting. The ulnar artery connects the heart with the little finger and this thin vein emerging is carried on by this red thread to someone else's heart, forever tying two people with one another.

Believers of this phenomenon make sense of the chance but intimate encounters they share with people from time to time. While widely used for romantic love, as mentioned earlier the thread is not limited to just romantic partners, it in fact also connects individuals who are destined to teach one another important life lessons. Many folklores have been passed down in the Japanese tradition which mention the red string of fate, some of the most popular ones are:

As mentioned earlier the man who appears under the moonlight appears many times in the red thread of fate narration. Usually, stories surrounding this moon god are told to emphasize the enduring power of the red thread; this person is destiny and they will return once more. One such story is the "Stone-throwing Boy" - the moon god reveals to a young boy who his future wife is

going to be and how they are tied to one another by the thread. Embarrassed, the boy throws a rock at the girl out of childish mischief and runs away. Years later he gets married to a girl and on their wedding night when he lifts his wife's veil he notices a scar on her forehead. Upon inquiry, the girl recounts the incident about how, one time for absolutely no reason, a strange boy hit her with a rock and ran away. Similarly, an emperor upon finding out that he is connected to a commoner with a newborn baby orders her to be killed and leaves town. Later he finally marries a girl that 'fits his standard' and asks about the scar she has. She describes how she was once attacked without cause but was able to get away. These tales highlight the inescapable and predestined connection that the red thread creates between two individuals.

Another well-known folktale describes a woman who is visited by a lovely young man every night. But he always departs before daybreak. The woman soon becomes pregnant with the child of the unidentified stranger. She fastens a red string to the man's robe and tracks its course to determine where he goes missing every night. She eventually discovers that the man is a Shinto spirit when it leads her to a shrine.

This is a natural spirit and a god In the Japanese culture. Through this story, it is illustrated that the red thread of fate can tie anyone and does not only stand true for human connections. As long as there is love, the thread will always help bring the souls together. Finally, one of the most famous stories, known as The Sympathies of Benten, highlights the theme of the red string of fate. It is a meeting between the goddess Benten and a poet by the name of Baishu. Of the seven gods of fortune, Benten is the only goddess of fortune, worshipped in Japan. Those who honour her are thought to gain money, romance, and talent.

A poet named Baishu was exploring the shrine grounds when he came upon a poem written by a girl and through her words he fell in love with her. Benten heard his prayers and, through a series of apparitions, arranged for Baishu and the girl to meet outside her shrine. He is informed by this apparition that she is meant to wed him. Baishu, soon after the encounter, requested to meet a young girl's father for marriage. He discovers upon arrival that the young girl is identical to the apparitions he had seen at the shrine. They soon get married and lead happy lives together. In addition to highlighting the bond that unites two souls, these tales about the red thread of fate also highlighted how love transcends all boundaries of gender, race, caste, and colour. All in all, it is a beautiful sentiment that the believers of this phenomenon keep close to their hearts.

ONCE A YEAR, ACROSS THE STARS: THE LEGEND OF TANABATA

Another famous story prevalent across the three cultures - China, Japan and Korea, is said to be the reason behind the Tanabata festival. On the seventh day of the seventh month, each year Japan celebrates the star festival known as Tanabata. On this day people write their wishes on small colored pieces of paper and hang them on bamboo trees. These trees serve the purpose of being wish trees and when the night is over, this bamboo is sent floating down a river, in hopes that these wishes will come true.

In China, this day is also known as “Chinese Valentine’s Day” and it focuses on the romantic aspect of the holiday. The day is celebrated in a more intimate and quiet fashion. In rural areas of China traditional crafts and offerings are still practiced (offering gifts to Zhinu, as well as performing rituals for improving sewing and weaving skills). In urban areas, however, the festival is starting to mirror western Valentine’s Day. Similarly, in Korea, Chilseok is the traditional Valentine’s Day, inspired by the legend of the lovers. On this day, Koreans traditionally eat wheat flour noodles and grilled wheat cake, and take baths for good health.

All three regions share a common narrative origin. The festival is based on the beautiful Chinese legend where star-crossed lovers Orihime and Hikoboshi meet on this day once a year. Orihime was a maiden who used to weave on the bank of the heavenly river represented by the Milky Way. She was very disheartened at the idea of never finding true love and became despondent. Her Father, who was the god of all heavens and loved her very much, decided to make her meet Hikoboshi, a cow herder who lived on the opposite end of the milky way. The two fell in love with one another instantly. They loved so deeply that they forgot to tend to their responsibilities. Cows began wandering the heavens and Orihime gave up weaving. This angered Tentei (Orihime's father) and he forbade the two from meeting one another ever again. Orihime begged and pleaded with her father to let Hikoboshi stay. Her father agreed to let them meet once a year, on the seventh day of the seventh month, if Orihime continued to weave.³

³ GTV Japan. “*July 7th is Tanabata in Japan!*” YouTube, 26 June 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOahFPV-xxQ>.

The lovers eagerly counted down the days to meet one another. However, when the day finally arrived, the Milky Way proved very hard to cross. Legend says that Orihime's sorrows pulled at the heartstrings of magpies who then carried Orihime across the Milky Way to be reunited with her lover. It is said that every year both lovers await and count down the days to their meeting eagerly. Rain on tanabata is considered unlucky and is believed to be the tears of Orihime and Hikoboshi.

Celebrations are held across Japan on this day. Larger cities put on fireworks shows and traditional food time is also eaten. The entire Japan is dressed in Kimono or Yukata and carnival-like games are enjoyed. Fun fact: In Tokyo, Disneyland holds its own Tanabata with Mickey and Minnie Mouse dressed as Hikoboshi and Orihime. Other folktales that shed light on the ways in which Japanese people's views on soulmates are still influenced are:

The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter (Taketori Monogatari) features Kaguya-hime, a moon princess raised as a human. Despite being courted by many suitors, she reveals her celestial origins and past life for a moon man. Their tragic connection emphasizes that some love stories are destined to be thwarted by external forces despite their deep-rooted ties.

The Yuki-onna is a spirit who embodies fated love. In one version of her tale, she spares a man's life with a promise of secrecy. Years later, he marries someone resembling her but reveals his secret, leading to her reappearance as his wife. This story emphasizes an inevitable connection between souls that persists amid danger and sacrifice.

In tales involving Tengu, supernatural beings often depicted as human-bird hybrids, a young man falls for a woman who is a Tengu in disguise. Their love faces obstacles due to her nature, yet they share an inseparable bond emphasizing that genuine love withstands challenges or supernatural barriers.

These narratives reflect the cultural understanding of soulmates; how deeply interwoven love and fate are. The narratives also serve as a reminder that while love can be a source of joy, it also comes with a lot of obstacles and challenges causing heartache. Ultimately emphasizing the importance of patience and perseverance in the pursuit of true love.

HARMONIZING SOULS: THE YIN-YANG BALANCE OF LOVE IN ANCIENT CHINA

The red thread of fate originated in China and was later adapted and evolved by Japan. While both cultures believe in the destiny of this lore there are still subtle differences that prevail. When researching the folklore that is passed down in China regarding this concept, there is almost no difference in the stories. The plot remains the same but the characters' names undergo a change. One of the most significant distinctions between Chinese and Japanese conceptions of the red string of fate is that the Chinese believe the thread is knotted around the ankles, whereas the Japanese believe the string is tied around the pinky fingers of the two souls, thus joining their hearts. The string closer to the ground reflects their belief that their fates are grounded.

As was previously established, the idea of the Red Thread of Fate, or Hong Xian, represents an imperceptible, unbreakable link that binds people who are meant to cross paths and develop deep connections; most frequently in the setting of love and marriage. According to the legend, Yue Lao, the God of Marriage, and Love, ties a red thread around the ankles of those individuals who are destined to be soulmates.

This connection is not limited by distance, circumstance, or even the passage of time, as the thread ensures that these individuals will inevitably meet and fulfil their destiny together. The enduring image of the red thread reflects a central theme in Chinese culture: the interplay of fate (yuanfen) and divine intervention, wherein human lives are guided by an unseen but purposeful cosmic force. Several folk tales represent the Red Thread of Fate as a motif, highlighting its significance in Chinese cultural narratives. One such story tells of a young man who encounters Yue Lao one night.

The god shows him a book of marriage and reveals the red thread connecting him to his future wife; a poor girl he has yet to meet. Because of her inferior social standing, the man was initially opposed to this planned match, but after seeing how fate arranges their meeting and the development of their love, he finally accepts the relationship. The red thread symbolizes the idea of inevitability, showing that nothing humans do can break or change the divine tie.

The fable of Wei Gu and Yue Lao, which is among the first to mention the Red Thread of Fate, is another noteworthy tale. In a dream, young scholar Wei Gu meets Yue Lao and is shown the scarlet thread that connects him to his future wife, whom he initially deems as unfit. Many years later, despite his hesitations, fate brings him to her, confirming the thread's inviolability and the predetermined nature of their relationship. This story highlights the cultural view that love is a

heavenly arrangement that develops on its own time, free from human resistance or effort. More general philosophical ideas in Chinese thought, like the idea of balance and harmony, are also reflected through The Red Thread of Fate. These stories support the idea that fate-driven love is a natural force that is consistent with the greater cosmic order by showing how destined couples overcome obstacles and unite. In addition to reaffirming Hong Xian's significance, this rich folklore tradition positions it as a cultural emblem of patience, optimism, and the transcendent power of love.

Another fundamental component of Chinese soulmate beliefs is the Yin-Yang philosophy, which depicts the duality of existence by using Yin to indicate femininity and emotional depth and Yang to symbolize masculinity and reason. This interaction between Yin and Yang illustrates how opposites are interdependent, implying that soulmates frequently possess complementary qualities that provide harmony to their partnerships. The way that lovers may alternate between these characteristics reflects the dynamic nature of love, encouraging development and flexibility while strengthening their bond.

In The Story of Xu Xian and Bai Suzhen, a mortal man falls in love with a snake spirit who transforms into a beautiful woman. Their relationship defies societal norms and natural laws, suggesting that true love can overcome significant obstacles. Their enduring connection across different realms exemplifies the belief that soulmates are bound together by fate, regardless of the challenges they face.

The tragic tale of The Butterfly Lovers (Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai) parallels Romeo and Juliet, depicting two lovers from different social classes whose love transcends societal barriers. After they pass away, their transformation into butterflies represents a lasting bond, demonstrating that soulmates are connected even after death. This narrative emphasizes the moral aspects of soulmate relationships by highlighting themes of sacrifice and loyalty. Chinese soulmate beliefs, which see relationships as a component of a greater cosmic plan crafted by heavenly forces, are intricately entwined with cultural conceptions of fate and destiny. These ideas are based on moral principles like dedication and loyalty, which influence how people view and interact with soulmate relationships. These stories have influenced Chinese literature and art; destined love motifs are common, showing how traditional ideals continue to motivate people looking for deep ties. Chinese art's portrayal of subjects like fate, love, and destiny is heavily inspired by soulmate

beliefs. The traditional stories about soulmates are reflected in classic works, which frequently depict characters who are united by mysterious forces. The artistic expression not only celebrates romantic connections but also emphasizes moral dimensions like loyalty and sacrifice inherent in these relationships.

ENTWINED BY JEONG: THE EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL ESSENCE OF SOULMATES IN KOREA

Korean philosophy and folktales are known to explore the intricacies of soulmate relationships, offering strong insights into the cultural and spiritual aspects of human connections. Central to these narratives is the fundamental belief in the harmony established by the cosmic forces in an individual's life. The journey toward self-discovery and transformation is indistinguishably linked with the search for deep and meaningful relationships.

Korean philosophy proposes the metaphysical concept of “Jeong,” representing a deep emotional bond that transcends the boundaries of the mortal self and connects individuals on a much deeper level. This concept of Jeong is not a mere passing emotion, but rather a dynamic and ever-changing relationship that evolves and matures over time, inherent with a liberating and healing power that rises above the religious and cultural restraints.

The spiritual traditions of Korea contain in themselves an emphasis on the aspect of self-transformation and the inculcation of virtuous character, with the understanding of love and soulmate relationships playing a vital role in the incorporation of such traditions. These cultural nuances highlight the interconnectedness of the individual, the community, and the cosmic order as a whole, wherein the quest for love and meaningful connection is seen as a means of achieving deeper self-actualization and spiritual elevation. Folktales from Korea further elucidate the cultural and spiritual aspects of love and soulmate relationships, often weaving together elements of mythology, legend, and moral teachings. As previously discussed, the tale of the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl gives us an insight into the popular belief that true love can overcome any challenges and temporal boundaries, compelling the cosmic forces to succumb to the nobility of eternal love. Another compelling folktale titled “The Butterfly Lovers” is the Korean retelling of the Chinese tragic story mentioned, the legendary story of two lovers who turn into butterflies after being separated in the human realm. Another similar version of this story talks of a woman who turns

into a butterfly after jumping into her lover's tomb. This legend led to the rise of a popular belief in Korea that all the butterflies that exist today are the incarnations of women who jumped into their lover's tombs.⁴ These stories and beliefs give us an understanding of the nuances of the afterlife and reincarnation prevalent in Korean culture and philosophy, further emphasizing the concept of eternal love intertwined with the notion of cosmic forces aligning to play their parts in reuniting the souls.

The intertwining of Korean philosophy and folktales on love and soulmate relationships offers a rich tapestry of cultural and spiritual wisdom, inviting us to reflect on the universal human experiences of connection, transformation, and the search for meaning. The philosophy of Joeng can be observed in the morality of various such tales, emphasizing the forming of a deep connection that transcends mere mortal bounds and speaks to the very essence of the souls.

LOVE BEYOND THE MORTAL: THE DEVOTIONAL PATH OF SOULMATES IN INDIA

Regarding the discussion of soulmate relationships, India continues to show us the diversity of legends and lores while depicting the underlying unity of thoughts and beliefs. Since time immemorial, Indian soil has witnessed many eras and kingdoms, subjugating the public through intense cultural changes, and presenting interesting and captivating folk stories to pass down the generations. May it be the Mughal era giving us the tragic yet heartfelt legend of Salim-Anarkali or the folktale of Heer-Ranjha depicting their melodious love and courageous journey, the romanticism of finding the one true soulmate and never letting go of the hope to spend the rest of your lives with them or die trying to achieve that has never left the minds and hearts of the people. The notion of a soulmate carries various connotations, especially in the diverse environment of India, where societal nuances alter and evolve with every bend in the road. Contrary to popular belief, the belief of soulmates transcends beyond romanticism, also encompassing platonic bonds that share profound emotional and psychological connections. Indian culture and history have been

⁴ "Transforming Gender and Emotion." *University of Michigan Press eBooks*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1353/book.64038>.

known to showcase innumerable interpretations regarding the relationship of soulmates as understood by many.

The story of Heer Ranjha is a famous Punjabi folklore that is often understood to be the equivalent of Shakespeare's eminent play of love and tragedy, Romeo and Juliet. The tale conveys the intense connection and devotion the two lovers feel for each other. Their conviction gives them the power to fight for each other, even if it ends with their lives being taken away due to their love. Another famous legend of two lovers, Sohni and Mahiwal, separated by the mortal world but reunited in death further sets in stone the belief of going through extreme hardships to achieve the love of your beloved. Many similar stories across Indian soil incorporate the theme of reunion in the afterlife and eternal love, also hinting at the cultural belief that there exists beauty in tragedy. Such tales imbibe the belief that mortal trials are mere bumps in the everlasting journey of love and cosmic union.

Additionally, India's culture and tradition provide numerous mythological tales that delve into the realm of emotions, emphasizing that love and devotion are bound by each other. These mythological love stories often delve deeper into the realms of spirituality and the notion of the divine. The union of two individuals portrayed as a deep connection advanced by cosmic forces in the universe teases the idea of them being soulmates, sharing true faith and profound loyalty.

The story of Shiva and Parvati, the divine couple, speaks to the enduring nature of love and the interconnectedness of the masculine and feminine principles in the universe. This resonates with a contemporary theory of soulmates called the twin flame theory, which suggests masculinity and femininity coexist as two divine aspects of the Almighty, reminding us of the unity and balance within creation. Shiva Purana mentions Shiva as the formless, unchanging consciousness, while Shakti is his dynamic energy, manifesting the universe. The text says - "Sati and Shiva are united together like words and their meanings. Only if they wish, can their separation be even imagined", wherein Sati is said to be another form of Shakti, or Parvati, the consort of Shiva. This highlights the idea that Shiva without Shakti is inert, and Shakti without Shiva has no existence, emphasizing their interdependence. The text illustrates their unity through the concept of Ardhanarishvara, where Shiva and Shakti are depicted as one form, symbolizing the balance of masculine and feminine energies. The Purana also highlights that Shakti is the force that brings the universe into

existence, with Shiva providing the stability to sustain the world.⁵ Similarly, the enchanting tale of Radha and Lord Krishna within Hindu tradition unfolds as a mesmerizing journey into the depths of divine love. Their connection, marked by an intense spiritual bond, illustrates the profound relationship between the celestial cowherd and his cherished beloved. In this timeless narrative, the boundaries separating the earthly from the divine gently fade away, allowing for a harmonious union that transcends the ordinary. Their love is not merely romantic; it embodies a rich tapestry of devotion, longing, and spiritual unity, reflecting the nature of love that exists beyond the material realm.

In the poignant tale of Nala and Damayanti from the Mahabharata, Nala, the righteous king of Nishadha, and Damayanti, the beautiful princess of Vidarbha, fall deeply in love and marry. However, their happiness is short-lived when Nala becomes the victim of a curse by the demon Kali, which leads to his downfall. He loses his kingdom and wealth in a rigged dice game, forcing the couple into exile. Stricken by guilt, Nala abandons Damayanti, fearing his misfortune will harm her further. Despite their separation and suffering, Damayanti remains steadfast in her love and searches tirelessly for him. Eventually, Nala regains his composure, masters his destiny, and reclaims his kingdom. Their reunion symbolizes the triumph of enduring love after immense trials.⁶ Another tale tells of a Hindu princess, Savitri, showcasing immense strength and loyalty toward her husband, Satyavan, by saving him from the clutches of death. The story of Savitri and Satyavan portrays an unparalleled act of devotion. Savitri, a wise and devoted princess, marries Satyavan despite knowing he is destined to die within a year. When the fated day arrives, Yama, the god of death, claims Satyavan's soul. Undeterred, Savitri follows Yama, impressing him with her wisdom, resolve, and devotion. Her persuasiveness compels Yama to grant her a boon, which she uses to restore Satyavan's life. She was "driven from within" and, with that force, triumphed over all that stood between her and her faith in her beloved. Their love exemplifies the power of selfless devotion to overcome even the inevitability of death.⁷ Both stories portray love as a

⁵ Shastri, Jagdish Lal. *The Śiva-Purāṇa*. 2022.

⁶ *Nalopakhyanam: Story of Nala, an Episode of the Maha-bharata : the Sanskrit Text with a Copious Vocabulary and an Improved Version of Dean Milman's Translation*. 1965.

⁷ Deshpande, Ry. *The Ancient Tale of Savitri*. 2020.

transformative and enduring force. The tale of Nala and Damayanti emphasizes the trials faced by the couple, hinting at the idea that true love is resilient and grows stronger through adversity. On the other hand, Savitri and Satyavan emphasize self-sacrifice and the power of devotion. Savitri's determination to reclaim her husband's life from death illustrates love's transcendence over mortal limitations. Her unwavering faith and wisdom align with the philosophical belief that true love is capable of overcoming even fate. Stories akin to these demonstrate that the journey toward soul unification is replete with challenges, making the enduring nature of soulmates so much more significant and remarkable.

These mythological stories talk about the transcendental nature of love, exploring the borders of spirituality with their teachings and findings. The intricacies between the finite and the infinite, the divine and the humane are touched upon. Their narratives help in extracting moral and spiritual underpinnings revolving around the themes of faith, devotion and the divide reunion.

Alternatively, Indian philosophy and schools of thought have a different way of going about the notion of soulmates. Mainly comprising Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, the three philosophies emphasize more on the spiritual liberation of a person rather than the virtue of love as seen romantically.

The main concept across the three philosophies is of karmic connections that people form with one another. Although minor differences can be spotted among the three philosophies pertaining to karma and the spiritual journey of an individual, their common motif seems to heavily depend on the cycle of birth and rebirth and the encounter of certain individuals based on the karmic debts of a person. The Hindu interpretation is said to be derived from two main concepts highlighted in Hinduism, called samskaras and karma, where karma is the idea that actions have consequences, and these consequences will influence future lives, and samskara refers to the mental impressions or physiological imprints that form the basis of karma in a person's lifetime. According to the Hindu system, a person may meet those souls repeatedly through their cycle of birth and rebirth with whom some of their karmic debts remain pending. In such a pattern, a soul forms certain "karmic connections" that affect the outcome of their cycle of rebirth. These karmic connections can be understood as soul connections, giving a spiritual turn to the concept of soulmates and eternal bonds. Similar to this is the Buddhist take on the journey of a soul. While Buddhism does not conform to the notion of the eternal soul, it does offer insights into the belief that experiences

are often seen as results of karmic ties from past lives. Encountering someone and feeling a deep sense of familiarity and connection is seen as the lingering effect of past-life interactions. This belief also adds value to the Buddhist theory of impermanence, focusing on the process of self-improvement rather than discussing about the existence if a fixed or destined partnership.

Jain philosophy aligns its ideals with those of Buddhist philosophy in various means. Their main emphasis also happens to be the karmic connections and bonds formed due to past-life actions. According to Jain philosophy, such connections feel significant, but they are not eternal or predestined as “soulmates.” Instead, they are temporary and subject to the laws of karma. Jains focus on the importance of such relationships in a soul’s journey toward liberation. By fulfilling the karmic obligations, individuals can progress toward spiritual liberation and detachment, transcending the bonds that bind them to the cycle of birth and rebirth.⁸

All three philosophies emphasize the significance of karmic ties and the intricate connections individuals or souls encounter throughout their lives. The traditional notion of soulmates being eternal and romantic differs from their understanding of a soul's spiritual significance and devoted journey toward growth and liberation. These schools of thought profess the sacred evolution and personal growth of each unique soul. This perspective reveals that soulmate connections, understood as karmic interactions, act as catalysts for learning and transformation, fostering a deeper understanding of oneself and one’s place in the broader aspect of reality. India's rich cultural heritage, comprising its mythology, folklore, and philosophical traditions, offers a multifaceted understanding of soulmate relationships. These narratives demonstrate profound spiritual connections, may it be through karmic ties or through the human quest for love and devotion. Exploring India’s diverse perspectives on soulmates reveals a sacred convergence of spirits and minds, inculcating growth, and metaphysical transformation.

FROM THE SANDS TO THE STARS: SOULMATE STORIES FROM EGYPT

To understand the ancient Egyptian beliefs about soulmates it is essential to first understand what their view of the soul is. In ancient Egypt, the concepts of soul and soulmate were intricately linked

⁸ Reichenbach, Bruce R. “Karma, Causation, and Divine Intervention.” *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 39, no. 2, 1989, pp. 135–49. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1399374>.

to one another, as the Egyptians believed that the relationships and connections that one forms in the physical realm were not only valuable during one's lifetime but also crucial to the journey beyond death.

Life on earth was merely one chapter of an eternal journey. The soul was seen as an immortal entity residing within a mortal body. Even when the physical vessel ceases to exist, the soul transitions to another realm of existence. In this realm, the soul would continue to forever reside in paradise if it was deemed worthy of such honour by the gods. The paradise merely reflected one's earthly life.

The soul was thought to consist of nine separate parts, each playing a distinct role in both life and the afterlife. While an individual is perceived as whole in life, people who lived moral lives could gain access to various forms in the afterlife. The forms that one can access could be used to help assist a loved one or even bring despair upon one's enemies. The nine components of the soul are:⁹
Khat: Also known as the physical body, khat was considered a sacred vessel that housed the soul during its life on earth.

Ba: often depicted as a bird with a human head was the closest idea the Egyptians had to the current concept of the soul. It is said to represent all the unique components that make up an individual, their personality, and their individuality. The belief held about this component was that it could move between the mortal and spiritual realm thus, maintaining a connection between the moral and spiritual realm.

Ren: often called the true name, it was considered the most important part of the soul. A true name was given to an individual at birth and was kept secret from everyone but the gods. The ancient Egyptians believed that knowledge of one's true name gave power over that person's soul and such knowledge could be used to destroy a person permanently. Instead, people were referred to by their nickname. The soul had the ability to continue flourishing as long as the ren was present.

⁹ "Nine Parts of the Human Soul According to the Ancient Egyptians." *egyptfwd.org*, 20 Aug. 2019, <https://egyptfwd.org/Article/6/559/Nine-Parts-of-the-Human-Soul-According-to-the-Ancient>.

Ka: Sometimes referred to as the life force, this aspect of the soul was thought to be the energy that gave the physical body life. This life force oversaw preserving the body and guaranteeing survival. Even in the afterlife, this part of the soul remained. Offerings of food and beverages were placed at the grave in the hopes that they would aid in the Ka's sustenance and assure its survival.

Shuyet: A person's shadow (Shuyet) was thought to be the soul's material form. The Egyptians thought that the shadow had the ability to keep a person safe. In the afterlife, the shadow could be employed to represent a person and it could also be called upon to protect a person even after they have passed away.

Ab: The term "Ab" was used to describe a person's heart. It was regarded as the centre of emotion and intelligence and was one of the most significant parts of the soul. The Ab gave the soul the ability to feel and think.

The Book of the Dead, an ancient funerary record that provides insight into ancient Egyptian beliefs about the afterlife, states that the deceased's heart was weighed against the feather of truth in the afterlife. The person would be allowed to enter the realm of eternity if it was discovered that their heart was lighter than the feather, indicating that they had lived a moral life. However, the person would not be allowed to pass if it was discovered that their heart weighed more than the feather.

Akh: Known as the spirit, this was regarded as a person's higher self. This aspect of the soul was in charge of a person's capacity for thought and reasoning. This part of the soul would also continue to exist in the afterlife, just like the ka. It was seen as the potent fusion of Ba and Ka and symbolized an enlightened person after death. It was thought that this part of the soul resided with the gods among the stars and had the ability to communicate with a person's loved ones through their dreams.

Sahu: Sahu was a more superior form of Akh. The Sahu would detach itself from all other forms of the soul if an individual was judged worthy of entering the afterlife. It was believed that this aspect of the soul safeguarded the ones the person had loved, and that it plagued those who had offended them. Finally, Sechem represented still another facet of the Akh. While many sources claim that not much is known about this aspect, some sources think that the Sechem embodies life energy which enables control over one's environment and outcome.

It is essential to understand Egyptians' beliefs in souls because it sheds light on how much value they placed on interpersonal relationships. Love was so important that, even after death, separate parts of the soul were thought to travel across different worlds to keep their loved ones safe. One of the finest ways to comprehend the significance of love in ancient Egyptian society is to observe the ceremony of the weighing of the heart.

As previously stated, the deceased's heart was offered to Osiris, the underworld's ruler, in the hall of truth at this ritual. To assert their innocence from a variety of sins, participants were requested to state a series of affirmations known as the negative confession, declaring their innocence from various sins. This confession frequently consisted of how they treat others, highlighting love, loyalty, and moral behaviour in partnerships.

If the heart balances with the Ma'at's feather, it signifies that the individual lived a virtuous life and was deemed worthy of eternal existence in paradise, known as the field of reeds. However, if the heart is heavier than the feather, it indicates a life burdened by sin. The sinful heart was devoured by Ammit, a demoness known to annihilate the souls of the wrongdoers.

The ceremony assesses an individual's character based on their interactions with others and their adherence to moral virtues. This assessment suggests that relationships formed during life carry weight in the afterlife and that love is a significant aspect of one's moral standing in the afterlife. Without revisiting the mythical foundations of the society, no study of soulmate belief can be considered comprehensive. The story of Isis and Osiris is among the most significant myths that shed light on ancient Egyptian ideas about soulmates.

The enlightened ruler Osiris, the son of the sky goddess Nut and the earth god Geb, was a wise ruler who later became king of the underworld. Isis, his spouse, was revered as the goddess of fertility, mothers, magic, healing, and funeral customs. Osiris was strongly envied by his brother, Seth. He used a cunning ploy to imprison Osiris in a coffin and cast it into the Nile River. The casket floated down the river and was carried to Phoenicia by the sea, where a Tamarisk tree grew around it.

Isis went in search of Osiris because she was sad for him. She changed into a swallow and continued to look for her spouse. She finally located the coffin and sobbed over it, kissing the face of Osiris. She tried to sail away with the coffin but Seth found it and, in a fit of rage, cut his brother's body into fourteen pieces and scattered them across the whole of Egypt. Not only did

Isis gather all the parts of Osiris's body but also, wherever she found a piece she had magically established a wax model and left it in the care of local priests, thereby establishing shrines to Osiris across the whole of Egypt.

As she sat beside the dismembered body of her husband and wept, Ra, the sun god, took pity on her and sent the jackal god Anubis (associated with mummification). He mummified Osiri's body making him the first mummy and setting a pattern for all the kings to follow. However, the divine force of Osiris was not quite spent: Isis transformed herself into a kite and hovered over the mummified body to fan the breath of life back into Osiris long enough for them to conceive a child, Horus, who would avenge his father.

Isis's persistent pursuit of her spouse Osiris following his murder symbolizes true love's power to transcend mortality. The connection between Osiris and Isis is viewed as a divine union that had the power to overcome death itself. Their love story was not merely a myth but served as a foundational narrative that Egyptians relied on practices and beliefs about the afterlife. Temples dedicated to Isis became centres for worship where individuals sought her blessings for love, fertility, and protection for their loved ones. The myth is also seen in various artistic representations throughout ancient Egypt; scenes illustrating the reunion of Isis and Osiris or Isis mourning Osiris can be found in tombs and temples.

Another magnificent tale of love that hints at soulmate beliefs is the tale of Hathor and Horus. Horus's life was marked with battle after battle between him and Seth. After these battles Horus would naturally be drained and feel weakened, this is where Hathor used to step in. Her caring nature provides Horus with essential support during his battles. Her divine powers also enable her to heal Horus. This aspect of their relationship symbolizes renewal and restoration. This dynamic not only signifies affection but also stands as a testament to the idea that true companionship offers strength in times of adversity.

A few real-life stories that are celebrated in Egyptian culture additionally aid in gaining understanding about their beliefs in soulmates. The most famous one of these has been the story of Pharaoh Ramesses II the great and queen Nefertari. Ramesses II ruled during the 19th dynasty of ancient Egypt from 1279 to 1213 BCE, making his reign among the longest in Egyptian history. He was celebrated as Among the strongest pharaohs and was commonly known as the "Great Ancestor" by his successor. He had a remarkable personal wife, reportedly having around 200

wives and concubines, with Nefertari being his first and most beloved. Initially, their marriage was viewed through the lens of both personal and political strategy. However, evidence suggests that it later blossomed into a love affair and was marked by mutual love and devotion for one another. Nefertari played an active role in the political landscape of her time. She participated in diplomatic efforts and ceremonies alongside her husband. Ramesses II honoured her with the title of “God’s wife of Amun”, elevating her status as chief priestess and allowing her to perform significant rituals.

The most celebrated episode of their relationship is the lavish tomb that Ramesses II built for Nefertari in the Valley of the Queens. The tomb's walls are painted depicting Nefertari in various scenes with deities, showcasing her divine status. Usually, the trend in Egypt was to establish royal tombs where the pharaohs overshadowed their queens. However, Ramesses the II had two columns of Nefertari carved alongside his own, symbolising partnership and his deep affection for her. Inscriptions within the tomb express Ramesses’s love. One of the tombs famous inscriptions says; “my love is unique - no one can rival her”

Lastly, the connection between Cleopatra and Mark Antony transcends mere historical narrative, embodying a profound philosophical exploration of love, identity, and destiny. In addition to being romantically involved, their partnership was the union of two strong identities: Cleopatra, the enigmatic queen of Egypt, and Antony, the ambitious Roman general. This union represented a meeting of East and West, where their individual desires and aspirations interwoven with the broader political landscape of their time. Their love was characterized by an intense emotional bond that defied the constraints of their respective cultures, suggesting that true connection can transcend societal boundaries. In their moments together, they found solace and strength in each other, illustrating how love can serve as both a refuge and a catalyst for personal transformation. Philosophically, their relationship challenges traditional notions of power and vulnerability. Cleopatra, often portrayed as a seductress, wielded her femininity as a source of strength, while Antony, despite his military prowess, became increasingly vulnerable in her presence. This dynamic reflects the power of human connection; how love can empower individuals even at their weakest. Their tragic end is a testament to their bond; Antony, out of desperation, fell on his sword and Cleopatra committed suicide by letting a venomous snake bite her. In their final moments together, they confront the inevitability of fate and the limits of their control over their destinies.

Their deaths leave behind a legacy that questions the essence of love in the face of overwhelming external forces.

The art created throughout Egypt's history also reflects the influence of their ideas about soulmates. The ancient Egyptians had significant beliefs about the afterlife and the eternal bonds between souls, as was previously mentioned. Intimate positions or shared activities were frequently portrayed in tomb paintings of couples, signifying their unbreakable love.

These antiquated ideas still serve as inspiration for artists today. Egyptian imagery is frequently used in contemporary art to examine topics of relationships and love. Contemporary artworks show lovers entwined with lotus blossoms, which stand for purity, rebirth, and an unbreakable tie. The lasting influence demonstrates how Egyptian ideas about fate and love are still relevant in modern art.

WHISPERS OF THE DIVINE: LOVE ACROSS LIFETIMES IN AFRICAN MYTHS

African cultures have witnessed a plethora of traditions and spiritual beliefs, creating a significant impact on various aspects of life, including the expression of love and affection. Emphasizing spirituality, these doctrines provide a unique perspective on the question of soulmate relationships and experiences of an individual across the continent.

African Traditional Religion showcases four foundational concepts prevalent throughout its diverse cultural beliefs: the belief in mystical powers, the belief in spirit beings, the belief in divinities or gods, and the belief in a Supreme Being. These beliefs have a considerable influence on every aspect of their daily lives, from minor decisions to transforming life choices. Similar is the case of soulmates being heavily influenced by these four notions.

Ancient African cultures have been known to place great importance on the idea of soulmates and the sacred nature of intimate relationships. The search for one's soulmate is driven by the concept of "conjugal love," emphasizing the unifying power of love that can bind two individuals into an indivisible entity. One of the remarkable features of the African diaspora is the belief in supernatural forces and their importance in the spiritual realm. In many of their societies, spiritual rituals and practices play a vital role in courtship and marriage, believed to bring eternal happiness to intimate relationships.

Ancestral worship, as practiced in traditional African religions, refers to veneration and communication with deceased ancestors. It comes from the belief that ancestral spirits have the power to protect and influence the living. This spiritual connection and communication are initiated by traditional African healers, who frequent as religious leaders. For example, in many African cultures, masked and rhythmic dances are popular ways to communicate with gods or ancestors (Wellman, ch.9).

African culture has been described as characterized by belief in supernatural forces, faith in the magic of symbols, expectations of supernatural punishment, orally preserved tribal legends and mythological concepts with emphasis on animism, full play of affective activity in daily life, complete identification with the group; lowering of individual identity and strengthening of the group identity. These community-oriented beliefs and practices shape the understanding and expression of love and soulmate relationships in African cultures.

Spirit possession is another form of ancestral communication prevalent across African ceremonies. Possession by gods and spirits is often brought about by drumming, dancing, or both. Such shamanic possessions are said to act as channels for people to communicate with their ancestors. For instance, African-origin religions such as Candomblé and Voodoo (Vodou) showcase such practices through a woman posing as a dancing goddess, Oshun.¹⁰

In addition to the belief in supernatural and ancestral guidance, some traditions also follow specific rituals to strengthen the bond between a couple, emphasizing the role of belongingness and interconnectedness. In the Udhuk culture, a unique practice takes place to declare a marriage between two individuals. It begins with the young man openly declaring his intention to marry in front of the girl's family, followed by the girl feigning surprise. This leads to a clandestine visit by the young man to the girl's room later that night, where she tests his identity by examining the ornamental beads on his hand. The girl's response to this unexpected visit ultimately determines his acceptance or rejection. If she accepts him, the girl is seen adorning herself with beads the following morning, signifying her consent for this relationship. This sets the stage for further discussions regarding their marriage.

¹⁰ Wellman, Billy. *African Mythology: Enthralling Myths, Fables, and Legends from Africa*. 2024.

In cultures such as Masaai and Akamba, certain initiation rites take place for young people entering puberty, including a practice of “seclusion”, an arrangement wherein the youth is to live together for a certain time period in special huts in the woods. This practice is viewed as an opportunity for the youth to become spiritually and ritually bound for the rest of their lives. This proves a deep level of asserting group solidarity, reflecting an essential concept of the African philosophy of “Ubuntu.” The emergence as one body, one group and one community, paves the way for an individual to inculcate the feeling of ‘I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.’ This solidarity creates a sense of belongingness deep into the core of every individual’s belief system, providing a sense of profound security and oneness in every one of them.

Some marital rituals also hold significance in establishing and nurturing strong connections between a couple, In Batoro culture, the bride and the groom are expected to splash each other with cold water, signifying the washing away of the former unmarried life and starting anew. These practices partly symbolize the death of the former life and the resurrection of the new life of maturity and procreation. It makes the couple “ready” to start a new life together.¹¹ Such traditions offer remarkable insights into the cultural nuances present in the varied societies. At the same time, they highlight a common thread of spiritual elevation, strengthening the bonds shared within communities.

Additionally, folktales and oral traditions have long been a rich source of cultural knowledge, serving as repositories of wisdom, values, and beliefs that have been passed down through generations. Folklores have also been instrumental in preserving and transmitting cultural narratives around love and spirituality, shaping the collective understanding of these fundamental aspects of human experience.

The Ashanti believes that the supreme god, Nyame, created the world but soon, withdrew from it. He has two other names—Onyankopon Kwame and Odomankoma—and his consort is said to be the earth mother Asase Yaa or Afua. She is also said to be the mother of the dead, so she has two different aspects, one as an old woman and the other as a beautiful young woman. There are various stories of why Nyame decided to forgo the world. One interpretation says that he was annoyed by someone pounding yam and climbed back into heaven. Asase Yaa tried to reach him by making a

¹¹ Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Doubleday, 1970.

tower of mortars, but the tower collapsed. Nyame and his wife have been separated ever since, as has the earth and heaven.¹² This legend, along with many others, reflects the idea of “together but apart” in love stories and folk tales, highlighting the profound connection between the spiritual and physical realms, as well as the intricate web of relationships and cosmic forces that are believed to shape the human experience, including the search for one's soulmate.

Such cultural and spiritual elements offer a multifarious understanding of the search for soulmates, grounded in deeply rooted spiritual beliefs. Central to this perspective are concepts such as ancestral guidance and communal values, which profoundly shape the frameworks of divine connections. This value-driven perspective underscores the significance of profound bonds in African cultures, transcending the individual and embracing the sacredness of metaphysical union, where affection and faith are seen as vital to the communal fabric of life.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of soulmate beliefs across Oriental, African, and Mediterranean cultures reveals a plethora of narratives and philosophical foundations that shape the belief in human connections. In Oriental cultures, particularly within Hinduism, the ideations of reincarnation and the afterlife play a vital role in understanding the intricacies of soulmate relationships. The everlasting love story of Radha and Krishna further symbolizes the belief that soulmates transcend the temporal bounds, destined to meet across lifetimes. Similarly, the oriental folklore regarding the Red Thread of Fate conveyed the idea of an invisible connection tethered among those meant to be together, maintaining the idea of predestined relationships that endure despite life's challenges.

In contrast, African cultures present a more communal and harmonious perspective on soulmate relationships. Their philosophy of Ubuntu, emphasizing the dictum “I am because we are” brings in a sense of belongingness and underscores the importance of community in shaping individual identities and relationships. This community virtue is often reflected in stories where couples navigate familial and societal expectations to fulfil the achievement of the true spiritual experience.

¹² Wellman, *African Mythology*

For instance, the tale of Mami Wata - a water spirit revered in various African traditions - illustrates her embodying a soulmate figure to test her partner's loyalty and devotion. This narrative emphasizes moral dimensions tied to community values, suggesting that soulmate connections are not solely personal but are also influenced by broader social contexts.

Mediterranean cultures are found to emphasize more on the philosophical and mythological aspects of soulmates. Plato's "Symposium" narrating the idea that individuals are two halves of a whole, eternally searching for their other half, hints at the deep sense of connection with an individual, seeming parallel to the notion of "one true love". This philosophical construct makes itself known through the mythological stories of Orpheus and Eurydice, portraying the unwavering commitment to reclaim one's soulmate, along with the myth of Psyche and Eros, emphasizing themes of love, trust and transformation. These narratives provide a perspective of romantic ideals prevalent in the Mediterranean cultures, wherein self-fulfillment and the search for passionate love take centre stage.

The exploration of these cultural essences across civilizations reveals profound connections, particularly in the realms of tragedy and love. One striking element of Indian culture is its emphasis on the tragedy and transformative power of love. The sentiment "if not you, then no one else" resonates deeply and finds a parallel in ancient Greek tragedies, where love is often entwined with fate, sacrifice, and the divine. Stories like those of Orpheus and Eurydice in Greek mythology and Savitri and Satyavan in Indian mythology highlight this universal theme. Both tales center on lovers who confront the gods of the underworld, attempting to defy death through their devotion and determination. While Orpheus fails in his quest and Savitri succeeds, these differences in outcome reflect the distinct ways these cultures perceive love and destiny. Tragedy, in this context, serves as a common thread connecting Greece, Rome, and India, where love is portrayed as transcending mortality yet remaining bound to its inevitability.

In the broader context of world mythology, the notion of love often transcends mere romantic entanglements to encompass spiritual connections. For instance, Indian mythology speaks of love in terms of spiritual liberation and cosmic balance, as illustrated in the stories of Shiva and Parvati. Their union represents the harmony of masculine and feminine energies, aligning with twin flame theories about the merging of complementary forces to create wholeness. African traditions, on the other hand, place love within the context of community, emphasizing deep, collective bonds

and mutual support as the foundation of human relationships. In Chinese philosophy, the yin-yang concept reflects a similar duality in love, where opposites attract and complete each other, mirroring the twin flame idea of interconnected energies. Each culture's unique interpretation of love reflects its mythology and spiritual philosophy, yet all recognize its transformative and unifying power. In Indian philosophy, love frequently transcends romance and delves into the ideas of spiritual detachment and connection. This concept is in contrast yet remains consistent with other cultural paradigms, such as the Egyptian emphasis on soul preservation even in the afterlife. The "red thread of fate" in East Asian civilizations, which implies that destined lovers will find one other no matter what, is an example of the widespread belief in eternal connections found in many traditions. Though its interpretations vary from society to society, this common idea highlights the universality of love as a force that transcends cultural and spiritual borders.

In the end, even though different cultures have different ways of expressing and experiencing love, the conclusion is always the same: love is a force that unites. Love transcends individual and cultural boundaries, whether it is presented as a means of achieving spiritual freedom, a basis for fostering communal harmony, or a balance of cosmic energy. Despite their differences, these stories all arrive at the same conclusion: love's fate is predetermined regardless of the path or challenges encountered. It constantly revolves around the idea that "you and I" are meant to meet, no matter the odds.

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