

#SYMBOLISM

The Mystical History of Mirrors

In the spiritual life of Anatolian cultures, mirrors were far more than everyday objects. They were seen as sacred tools, capable of revealing hidden truths



Mirrors have long been objects of fascination and mystery, regarded as portals to the divine or supernatural. Their symbolism transcends mere reflection, representing deeper spiritual meanings across different cultures. From the polished obsidian mirrors of ancient Anatolia to the mercury glass mirrors of 16th-century Venice, mirrors have been sacred tools, linked to the divine, and transformed through history.

Obsidian Mirrors in Ancient Anatolia
In ancient Anatolia (modern-day Turkey), the earliest known mirrors were made from polished obsidian, a naturally occurring volcanic glass. These mirrors, often shaped into dark, shadowy disks, were highly prized for their reflective properties. Obsidian's glass-like surface was ideal for creating mirrors, and it was valued not just for its utility but also for its mystical significance.

In the spiritual life of Anatolian cultures, mirrors were far more than everyday objects. They were seen as sacred tools, capable of revealing hidden truths or facilitating communication with the divine. The dark, reflective surface of obsidian mirrors was believed to connect the user with the spiritual world, much like the 'smoking mirrors' used in Mesoamerican cultures. In both traditions, mirrors were thought to serve as portals to other realms, often used in rituals for divination or prophecy.

Mirrors in Ancient Egypt: Bronze and Copper Reflections

In ancient Egypt, mirrors were made primarily from polished bronze or copper. These metal mirrors had circular or oval shapes and were finely polished to create a reflective surface. Egyptians believed that mirrors symbolized the divine, especially the goddess Hathor, who represented beauty, love, and the afterlife. Mirrors were commonly used in religious rituals, often to reflect light in temples, symbolizing the illumination of divine power.

Beyond their role in daily life, mirrors were also used in burial practices, where they were placed in tombs to protect the deceased in their journey to the afterlife. The reflective quality of the metal was believed to ward off evil spirits and ensure that the soul

was safely guided to the next world, reinforcing the idea of mirrors as objects of divine protection.

The Mercury Glass Revolution in 16th Century Venice

By the 16th century, the art of mirror-making had undergone a significant transformation, thanks to the Venetian glassmakers. In Venice, artisans developed a new method of mirror production using mercury to coat glass, creating a reflective surface far superior to the earlier metal and obsidian mirrors. This technique, known as mercury glass, revolutionized the mirror industry, making high-quality mirrors more accessible and enhancing their aesthetic appeal.

The Venetian mirrors became highly prized for their clarity and brilliance, with their production techniques kept secret for centuries. These mirrors were not only coveted by European aristocracy but were also symbols of wealth and status. The mirrors' reflective properties, combined with their luxurious design, made them perfect for decorating palaces and churches, where they were used as symbols of divine light and power.

Interestingly, the use of mercury also added a layer of mystique to the Venetian mirrors. Mercury, associated with alchemy and transformation, imbued the mirrors with an esoteric aura. In some circles, the reflective surface was thought to possess mystical powers, enhancing the mirror's role as a tool for spiritual insight.

Mirrors as Sacred Objects Across Cultures

Throughout history, mirrors have held profound spiritual significance beyond their use as simple reflective surfaces. In Mesoamerica, polished obsidian mirrors were used in rituals to communicate with gods, particularly the Aztec god Tezcatlipoca, the 'Smoking Mirror' who was associated with night and divination. In Japan, the mirror was one of the Three Sacred Treasures of the Imperial Regalia, symbolizing wisdom and the divine.

Mirrors also played a role in Chinese and Tibetan cultures, where they were used for divination and to ward off evil spirits. In these traditions, mirrors were seen as tools of reflection, not just of the physical world but also of the soul and the unseen forces around it.



Buddha Statue, Bhutan with white Khata Khadar.



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The weather-beaten door swung open with little resistance, and I followed Rinzing Chewang into the unlit bungalow. "Watch out!" he said in accented English, and I dodged a gaping hole in the floor just in time. We crossed a high-ceilinged parlor, where a framed poster of the Buddha, draped in a white silk khata, gazed at us from a soot-tinted mantle.

At the end of a dim hallway, Rinzing pushed open another door and stood back. "This is the bedroom," he announced, as if he were showing me to my quarters. A pair of twin beds, the room's only furnishings, stood naked, mattresses uncovered, pushed up against a dull yellow clapboard wall. Gray light seeped in through a grimy window. Walker Evans's Alabama sharecroppers might have lived here.

Who actually had stayed here, I'd recently discovered, was a tall Scotsman of rugged good looks and incurable wanderlust. Francis K. I. Baird. My maternal grandfather. In 1831, he and fellow adventurer Jill Cossley-Batt journeyed to this remote Himalayan village, called Lachen, in North Sikkim, near the border of Tibet. Somewhere in these borderlands, the couple claimed to have discovered a 'lost tribe' of cave dwellers living high up a mountain

wall. The clan folk were unswayed by Western avarice, the adventurers proclaimed, and they lived well past the age of 100.

At the time, Lachen was an isolated settlement composed almost entirely of self-sufficient indigenous farmers and herders with strong familial ties to Tibet. Hanging on the lip of a ridge amid thundering brooks and plunging fir-covered slopes, the village still retains much of its bucolic charm. Along the rutted dirt road that serves as its main thoroughfare, Baird and Batt found shelter in this so-called dak bungalow. Resembling a rough-hewn English cottage, the structure was one of dozens, if not hundreds, of such peak-roofed bungalows built in the time of the raj to billet officers along military roads and postal routes spanning the vast reaches of British India. Back in Baird's day, the bungalow would have been more comfortably furnished. Now, it was all but abandoned behind a locked gate, evidently slated for demolition.

My mother was not yet five when she waved goodbye to her father as he boarded an ocean liner on the Hudson River in 1930, bound for India. He promised to return rich and famous, flush with tales of wonderment to recount to his adoring daughter, Flora. It was a promise he did not keep.

Ten years passed before my mother next saw him, in a chance encounter on the New York water-front. The meeting was stiff and perfunctory, over in a matter of minutes. She never laid eyes on him again. Until the end, her father remained a man of unanswered questions, a purveyor of mystery and source of lifelong bereavement.



The Loop, Agony Point, Darjeeling Hill Railway, 1880.

A Grandson's Search Of Grandpa

PART:1

"Your grandfather would have slept in this room," said Rinzing, snapping me back to the moment. I pulled back the window's thin curtain and looked out on a stack of rain-soaked firewood and, beyond it, mountain slopes rising sharply and vanishing in a swirl of mist. This would have been the same view that Baird beheld each morning during his stay here so long ago.

#JOURNEY

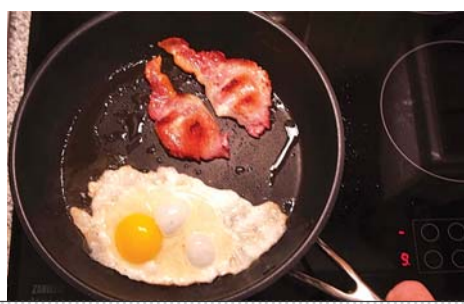
She went to her grave without knowing what had become of him. She knew not where he died, when he died, or even if he'd died.

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In the dozen years since my mother's death, I have initiated a quest of my own: to find out more about this man I never met, and to uncover the hidden role he has played in shaping my life and strivings. I have unearthed scores of documents, occasional letters he sent home, news clippings, photographs, even a film clip shot by the couple during their journey into the Himalaya. I found an obituary so deeply buried inside the archives of the New York Times that an ordinary search through the paper's Web portal does not reveal it. (He died in 1943.)

Of particular interest is a file compiled by the British India Office, whose officers were deeply suspicious of Baird and Batt, fearing they would provoke an incident if they entered Tibet. The officer even assigned an agent to tail them. That was how I came to find out they'd stayed here in Lachen's dak bungalow. And now, here I was, standing for the first time in my life in a room where I knew my grandfather had slept. "Maybe, we go now?" Rinzing suggested. A robust man of medium height and irrepressible good humour, Rinzing, 49, is Lachen's post-master. Like so many people I'd met since arriving in India, he enthusiastically offered to help as soon as I explained the nature of my mission. His grandfather, it turned out, was the village headman at the time Baird came to town. "They would have known each other," he said.

I'd begun the journey to retrace my grandfather's footsteps in Kolkata (previously called Calcutta) ten days earlier. The city was in the midst of preparing for the massive, weeklong Durga Puja festival to celebrate the ten-armed Hindu goddess Durga. Workers were stringing lights along the boulevards and raising bamboo-framed pavilions that would house enormous, handcrafted like-nesses of the goddess mother and her pantheon of lesser deities.



Celebrating the Discovery of Teflon

ational Teflon Day is observed on April 6 to mark the discovery of Teflon, a revolutionary non-stick material that transformed modern cookware and various industrial applications. The material was accidentally discovered in 1938 by chemist Roy Plunkett while working for DuPont. Known for its heat resistance, durability, and non-stick properties, Teflon soon became widely used in kitchen utensils, electronics, medical devices, and aerospace technology. The day highlights how a chance scientific discovery can lead to innovations that simplify everyday life. It also celebrates the role of science and chemistry in shaping practical solutions that benefit households and industries around the world.



Lachen.

he return home for the holidays, to Assam in India's northeast. "My mother is forcing me," he said with a rueful smile.

Soon, we were beset by a non-stop parade of freelance vendors pushing down the aisle, hawking spicy peanuts, comic books and plastic figurines of the Durga. Helen bought me hot chai, served in a paper cup. I wondered if it all wasn't a bit much for a grown woman traveling on her own: the dingy bunks, the relentless assault of peddlers, the heavy scent of urine wafting through the car. "The train's all right," she said cheerfully. She said she'd never been on an airplane. "One day, I'd like to try it."

I passed a night of fitful sleep, curled up on the narrow bunk, the lumpy backpack I'd stuffed with camera and valuables for a pillow. It was barely dawn when Helen arose and drew open the window shade. Outside, tin-roofed shacks slid past amid expansive fields of rice, tea and pineapple. "Get your things ready," said Helen, rummaging around beneath her berth. "Our station's coming up."

His destination was still far off, but Sam joined us on the platform to bid farewell. I couldn't have asked for a merrier pair of travel companions. As a pale yellow sun rose over the rail yard, I scribbled down Helen's phone number. "Call me someday," she said and vanished in the crowd.

The train to Darjeeling has a platform of its own at Siliguri's old railway station, a short car ride from the main terminal. That's because it still runs on the same narrow-gauge track designed by British engineers 130 years ago to haul colonial administrators, troops



The Great Eastern Hotel.

and supplies up 7,000 vertical feet to the burgeoning tea estates of Darjeeling. The advent of the railway in 1881 put Darjeeling on the map. It soon became one of the most prominent hill stations in British India, the summer command center and playground for viceroys, functionaries and families seeking to escape the heat and multitudes of Calcutta.

The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway also served as a conduit for a growing legion of adventurers heading into one of the world's most untamed, majestic and formidable regions. George Mallory figured among the succession of early 20th-century mountaineers who journeyed aboard the train on the way to Everest via Sikkim and Tibet. In 1931, the DHR bore Baird and Batt with all their supplies to Darjeeling, the operational base for their enterprise, which they christened the British-American Himalayan Expedition with no small measure of grandiosity.

Goats rummaged languidly in the midmorning sun, as I waited for the train to arrive. Finally, nearly an hour behind schedule, a blue diesel locomotive backed into the station, pushing three passenger cars. It was immediately apparent that the railway's narrow-gauge specs had miniaturized its moving stock as well. The engine and the cars were each about half the size of a typical train. Because of its diminutive size, and perhaps, also because some of its locomotives are steam engines that bear a strong likeness to Thomas the Tank Engine, the rail line is popularly called the Toy Train.

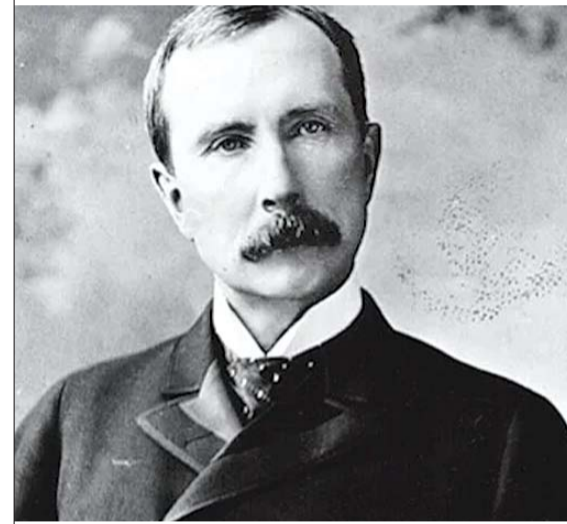
To be continued...

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#JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER

From Oil Tycoon to Philanthropist

At 53, Rockefeller was suffering from severe health problems, which included chronic insomnia, gastritis, and a variety of stress-related ailments



John D. Rockefeller was once the wealthiest man in the world, known for his ruthless business practices and dominance in the oil industry. His fortune, which reached an estimated \$400 billion (in today's dollars), made him a symbol of American success and industrial power. However, his story is not just one of wealth and business; it is also a tale of personal transformation, health struggles, and a profound shift in his views on money, life, and legacy.

The Rise of Rockefeller: King of Oil
Born on July 8, 1839, in Richford, New York, John D. Rockefeller grew up in a modest household. His father was a traveling salesman, and his family often lived in financial uncertainty. However, Rockefeller displayed an early aptitude for business, which would later lead him to dominate the oil industry.

In 1870, Rockefeller founded the Standard Oil Company, which revolutionized the American oil industry by controlling nearly every aspect of oil production, refining, distribution, and marketing. By the late 19th century, Standard Oil had a monopoly on oil in the United States, and Rockefeller's wealth surged as he expanded his empire. At its peak, Standard Oil controlled around 90% of the U.S. oil market.

Despite his immense wealth, Rockefeller faced criticism for his monopolistic practices. He was often portrayed as a ruthless businessman who crushed competitors and manipulated the market to maintain his control over the oil industry. However, his story took a dramatic turn in his later years.

The Illness That Changed Everything: The Turning Point at 53
In 1897, at the age of 53, Rockefeller was suffering from

severe health problems, which included chronic insomnia, gastritis, and a variety of stress-related ailments. His health had deteriorated to the point where he was bedridden and reportedly in constant pain. Rockefeller, who had spent decades building his empire and accumulating vast wealth, found himself confronting his mortality in a way he had never expected.

At this low point in his life, Rockefeller realized that his wealth had not brought him happiness, health, or peace. He was in a position where even the best doctors and all his money could not alleviate his suffering. Rockefeller's condition seemed dire, and he was said to have given only a few months to live.

However, something remarkable happened. He began to take a new approach to his health. With the help of a physician who suggested a new, balanced diet, a regimen of rest, and a focus on natural healing, Rockefeller's health began to improve. Slowly, the pain that had consumed him lessened, and he regained his strength. This recovery was nothing short of miraculous, and it marked a significant turning point in his life.

The Rockefeller Transformation: From Wealth to Philanthropy

Rockefeller's recovery led to a deep reflection on his life. He realized that the pursuit of wealth, while it had brought him immense power and material success, had also left him with nothing of true lasting value. In the midst of his recovery, he had an epiphany: wealth alone was not the key to happiness or fulfillment. Instead, he began to believe that a life of purpose, service, and giving was the true path to contentment.

This realization sparked a profound transformation in Rockefeller's outlook. He shifted

his focus away from accumulating more wealth and towards using his fortune for the greater good. This shift would define his later years.

The Rockefeller Foundation: A Legacy of Charity and Innovation

In 1901, Rockefeller established the Rockefeller Foundation, one of the first major philanthropic organizations of its kind. His goal was to promote the well-being of humanity by funding research, healthcare, education, and social causes. One of his most significant contributions was funding the study of penicillin, which would later play a crucial role in the development of life-saving antibiotics. This research helped shape the future of modern medicine.

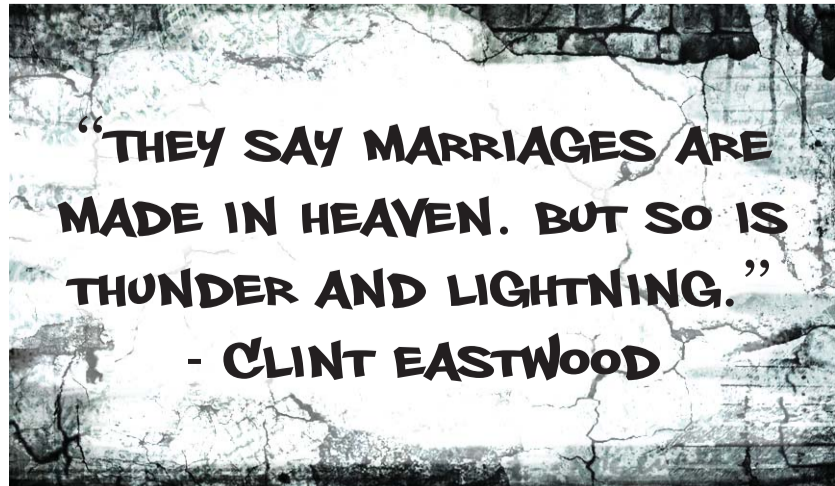
The Rockefeller Foundation also funded public health programs, the establishment of medical institutions, and even the creation of educational programs aimed at improving global living standards. Rockefeller's shift from wealth accumulation to philanthropy marked the beginning of a new chapter in his life, one focused on giving back to society.

Reflection on Wealth and Life

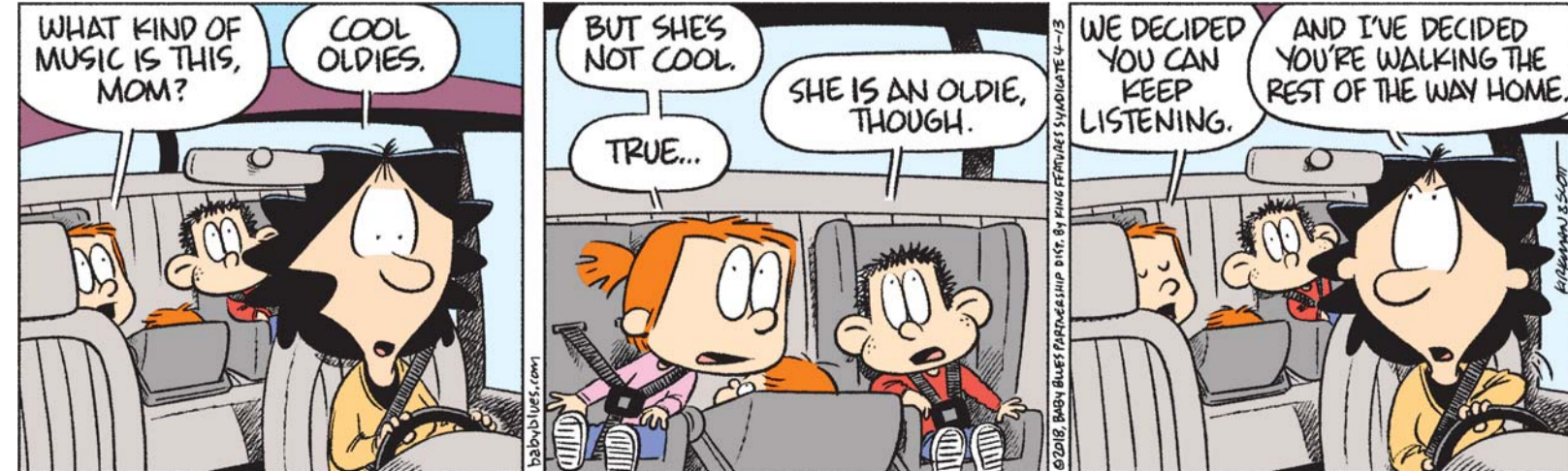
In his later years, Rockefeller was known to reflect on his life and his transformation from a business magnate to a philanthropist. He often spoke about the lesson he had learned from his health crisis: that wealth was nothing if it didn't contribute to the greater good.

Rockefeller's experience of pain, illness, and recovery led him to redefine success in terms of service and contribution. His health crisis forced him to reevaluate his entire philosophy of life. Where once he had focused on building his empire, he now focused on building a legacy of giving and healing.

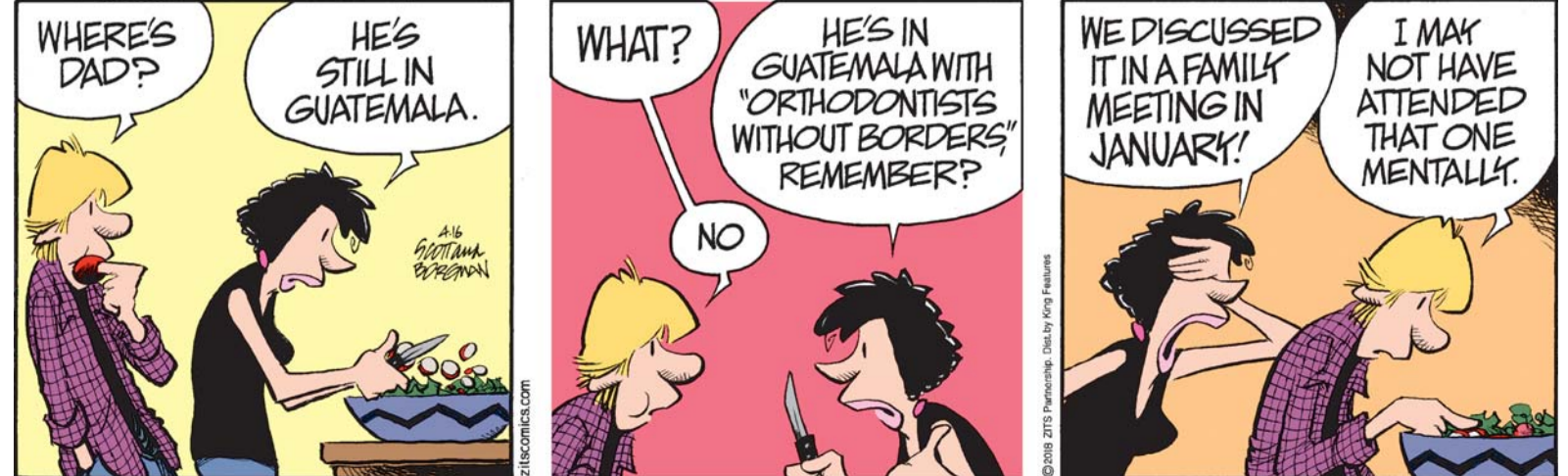
THE WALL



BABY BLUES



ZITS



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