

“At the third stage of development, called the *tropological* (which means having to do with growth), we leave behind the Christ mystery as the template through which all emotions must be processed and allow the images to form their own patterns and cross weavings. At this stage, the light begins to dawn that the Bible stories are holograms of the soul’s journey. They are rich portraits, in analogical language, of the stages and the steps we all go through in the journey of transformation. Jonah and the whale, for example, is no longer discounted simply as a myth or folktale; we see that every new beginning involves a fleeing, a constriction, a darkness, and then being “coughed up” onto new ground. Mary and Martha, the sisters in Luke’s Gospel who invite Jesus to dine with them, are no longer two different individuals, but a parable about the Mary and Martha in each of us and how the busy, self-important egoic self must give way to the heart, which knows how to sit in rapt adoration at the foot of the master. Once we begin to hear scripture, it’s like suddenly beginning to crack the soul code.

My teacher, Thomas Keating, vividly describes this stage in his own monastic journey, when his novice master assigned to him the Old Testament Book of Exodus for his Lenten scripture reading. Having hoped to spend Lent with the Gospel of John, he embarked on his task with a heavy heart. But soon his excitement grew as he realized, “This book is talking about my life. Whoever wrote this book must have been a psychiatrist!” He could see how the narrative of the Israelite’s escape from slavery in Egypt and miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea was a vivid metaphor for his own conversion experience.” (Cynthia Bourgeault in “Chanting the Psalm” pages 51 and 52)