the churning of the sea of milk

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in deep geologic time earth was stark and life was cradled in the sea. in hindu cosmogony, the origin of life on earth also sprang forth from the watery depths. at the center of the universe sacred mt. mandara rose from a primordial ocean. the mountain-temple of angkor wat was designed to epitomize this vision of the universe.

five lotus-shaped towers crown angkor wat—sanskrit for temple of the sacred city—it is surrounded by a water-filled moat and is the largest of all the religious structures in the world. every possible surface is adorned with script and image carved in stone that transmit visual stories of things past, present and to come.

the churning of the sea of milk

is a myth found in hinduism’s epic tales, the puranas. it is depicted everywhere in the angkor complex, including a 70 meter long bas-relief mural on the eastern gallery of the great temple. the mural is among the over 600 meters of reliefs created throughout angkor. the myth summons the eternal struggle between the forces of good and evil, light and darkness. it begins with a tale of loss.

12 precious things, among them amritsa, the elixir of immortality, have been lost beneath the ocean and lord vishnu has devised a way to retrieve them.
is a tug of war between gods & demons,
in the center of the cosmic sea, the holy mountain serves as the churning stick around which a rope, in the form of a great naga, or serpent, is wound, then tugged, head to tail, by 92 demons and 88 demigods, who join forces and pull with all their might in order to rotate this holy pillar and churn the sea of milk into a buttery froth. the churning releases the precious treasures and it also releases a deadly poison. it is a celestial tug of war that lasts 1000 years. the churning stick penetrates the milky sea. as it rotates it stirs the waters, giving rise to a seminal fluid that carries within it the seeds of immortality.

we become immortal through acts of creation. creation comes in many forms.

a tug of war between darkness & light.
as a solar calendar
92 demons mark 92 days between the winter solstice and the following spring equinox;
88 demigods, one for each day between spring equinox and summer solstice. picture the sea of milk as the milky way. imagine the earth is pulled by dual forces that rotate it towards darkness and then back again towards the light; towards darkness, and again towards the light, evermore.

the entire angkor complex has measurements that may be read as a clock
in the tug of war between gods & demons, darkness & light...comes the making.

in the churning of the sea of milk mural dozens of fishes are pictured as torn to shreds by swimming too close to the fearsome churning stick.

most of our lived moments, like the fishes, are torn asunder simply through time, and the passions and perils of living, so much is lost; most history is lost, beneath the opaque and milky waters of time.

some moments survive the chancy journey up to the surface, battered by the churning, partly broken, but making it to the light—imperfect fragments rising to the surface on the currents of longing. these are all we have. from this detritus of gathered moments comes the making—creation anew.

From a handful of parts we make it work. look to the mural—some of the fishes survive the churning
dancing particles of foam produced by the sheer velocity of the churning, float above this struggle.

these are the apsaras.

sometimes amid an inner wrestling and churning, we are graced with an insight, as blithe and ephemeral as foam.

savor the lightness of being that comes with dreams.

savor the dearness of the vanishing moment.

beauty resides here.

nimble apsaras rise above the fray. their dance seems nothing less than that flash of inspiration, the evanescent idea, illusive imagination embodied.

they are the aha! that feeds the soul, the joyfully burst bubble that lets the light come in.