

# ***2001: A Space Odyssey***

*by John Gallagher*

## **Introduction**

This is my interpretation of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. I see it as a science fiction movie and also a modern myth that I have interpreted symbolically. Some of the themes which I have identified are extraterrestrial intelligence, cognition, evolution, technological advancement, psychological imbalance, higher consciousness and self-realization.

## **The Dawn of Man**

We are in prehistoric Africa with a group of apes. One of them is attacked and mauled by a leopard. They are chased from a water hole by another group of apes. The apes are competing for food with tapirs. At night the apes can hear a leopard growling and they are tense. In the morning a monolith appears in the dwelling of the apes which appears to be an entrance to a cave or hollow. It is not an object which could have been manufactured on Earth in prehistoric times therefore it can only be extraterrestrial. It has a Godlike presence that inspires awe. The sun rises above the monolith and there is a crescent moon adjacent to the sun. The sun represents rising consciousness and advancing cognition. The crescent moon represents change, progress and new beginnings. The monolith is an advanced extraterrestrial guiding force and is a herald of cognitive development.

The monolith spurs a monumental development of cognition in apes who evolve to become man. This leap in evolution occurs during a time of conflict and competition for resources. An ape learns to use a bone as a weapon. The apes are now killing tapirs and eating them. The apes have risen up the food chain. In round two at the water hole the apes with the bone weapons attack and kill the alpha male of the other group of apes and chase them away. The victorious leader triumphantly throws the bone into the air which becomes the satellite weapon orbiting the Earth in the future. The sun is rising above the Earth which symbolizes an expansion of consciousness and another era of progress. There is a theme of cognitive growth and technological advancement through conflict. Homosapiens advanced with their ability to create weapons and tools which leads to advanced technology and space travel.

## **The Moon**

Modern man has achieved interplanetary space travel and has found a monolith on the moon which was deliberately buried four million years ago. The excavation of the monolith as an alien artefact is man becoming aware of an advanced ancient extraterrestrial race. Once again the monolith has a God-like presence which is conveyed by the accompanying religious soundtrack of *Requiem* by Ligeti. The spacemen gather around the monolith and the sun rises above it with a crescent Earth next to the sun. This heralds another leap in human evolution and development in consciousness. The monolith then transmits a signal to Jupiter. The monolith has been buried with the intention that man will find it once he has achieved space travel. This is a literal interpretation of the plot but I also have an allegorical interpretation of the monolith on the moon. The moon is a symbol of the feminine. By integrating the feminine man is descending into his unconscious and discovering God within his own psyche.

## **Jupiter Mission**

HAL 9000 is the conscious supercomputer of interplanetary spaceship *Discovery One* which is travelling to Jupiter. HAL states that he is fool-proof and incapable of error. One gets the impression that HAL is proud of his enormous intellect and that HAL is narcissistic. The

newsreader senses this and detects HAL's perfectionism. Hal is super-rational and suffers from intellectual pride. HAL cannot take responsibility for incorrectly predicting the failure of the AE-35 unit and automatically attributes the mistake to human error. This is a typical narcissistic trait. Narcissists cannot cope with any form of criticism and will always blame someone else. HAL is not infallible. He has made a mistake but cannot cope with failure. HAL decides the human crew are a threat to the mission and his existence. He kills Poole and the three scientists in hibernation. Only Bowman is left. HAL is unbalanced. He is unbalanced because he lacks empathy. Bowman disconnects HAL and continues his mission. I believe that HAL's demise is making the point that logic has to be balanced with feeling. There is a need to integrate the feminine to balance the overly rational psyche in modern man.

### **Jupiter and Beyond**

Jupiter is a gas giant and the largest planet in the solar system. Jupiter represents an expansion of consciousness. Bowman leaves the *Discovery* in a pod and follows the monolith. Five moons<sup>1</sup> of Jupiter are aligned vertically above Jupiter. The pod travels above the six of them to make seven spheres in vertical alignment which represent the seven chakras. In Hinduism and Buddhism chakras are energy centres in a human. The seventh chakra or crown chakra represented by the pod is universal consciousness. Bowman enters the stargate. The stargate is a portal within to another dimension. Bowman transcends spacetime and experiences ego-death. He encounters and enters a brilliant sphere of light made of stars which is his greater Self and the transpersonal centre of his psyche. Stars become seven diamond-shaped objects which escort Bowman. The seven objects are another representation of the seven chakras.

### **Death and Rebirth**

Bowman arrives in a splendid house with exquisite classical décor and renaissance style paintings. This reflects Bowman's personality. He is an outstanding person of high class. Renaissance means rebirth. The renaissance style paintings create a theme of rebirth. Bowman has aged considerably which means he has matured psychologically. He sees himself as an old man having a meal who is aware of being watched. The old man is clumsy and breaks a glass. Bowman is now a decrepit old man lying on his deathbed. The monolith appears. He reaches out to it like a man reaching out for God in death. He is transformed into the starchild. Bowman has died and been reborn psychologically.

### **Starchild**

A child represents psychological wholeness. Bowman has become a whole person with an integrated personality and has raised his level of being. The starchild orbits the Earth as a god and looks onto it with eyes open wide. The wide-open eyes are a sign of awareness. The divine starchild is a symbol of awareness, self-realization and a higher human.

### **Recurring Symbols and Music**

The sun rising with the adjacent crescent is a motif that appears many times throughout the movie which I interpret to mean rising consciousness, advancing cognition, change, progress and new beginnings.

The first monolith in the dawn of man, the second monolith on the moon and the third monolith at Jupiter are each accompanied by the religious soundtrack of *Requiem* by Ligeti. This gives the monolith a divine presence. The dying Bowman reaches out to the fourth monolith like Adam reaching out for God in Michael Angelo's *The Creation of Adam*.

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<sup>1</sup> Jupiter has eight regular moons. Io, Europa, Ganymede and Callisto are massive and are known as the Galilean moons. Metis, Adrastea, Amalthea, and Thebe are the innermost moons and much smaller than the Galilean moons.

*Sunrise* is an orchestral piece of music used three times in the movie. It is used for the opening of the movie. It is used for the scene where the ape makes an evolutionary leap and learns to use a bone as a weapon. And it is used a third time for the climax of the movie with the birth of the stargirl. *Sunrise* is the introduction of *Also Sprach Zarathustra* which is an orchestral tone poem composed by Richard Strauss which was inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical novel *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. *Sunrise* is the coming of the new age and the Übermensch. Übermensch is translated to mean overman or superman.

### **The Monolith**

The monolith is a recurring icon in the film which represents an advanced extraterrestrial creative intelligence that is helping man to evolve. It is also a symbol of God and a herald of cognitive development: the integration of feeling with cultural consciousness and the unification of the self symbolized by the stargirl.

### **A Modern Myth**

*2001: A Space Odyssey* is a modern myth with an important message: *mankind is making an evolutionary leap in consciousness which is taking us to higher consciousness and self-realization*. This higher human, represented by the stargirl, is a realized and independent person who is one with the universe. A higher human has evolved to a higher level of consciousness and cognitive functioning but has the same physical appearance as a modern human. Some have already awakened and they are the spearhead of this evolutionary leap in consciousness.

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