Why We Need Elvis

AMERICA lacks an actual king and queen mythologically linking the people with the divine. The United States also lacks unified spiritual leadership, so we project this deep archetypal need onto our heroes and heroines, particularly rock and movie stars and occasionally presidents such as John F. Kennedy. The undisputed king and queen of this realm are Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe (both of whom self-destructed). It seems that Elvis, with his slogan TCB (taking care of business), is a truer symbol of America than Marilyn Monroe.

We need Elvis, as on the Elvis postage stamp, to be resurrected as his young true self—just as Elvis needed and searched for the healing spiritual path to transcend and unite his inner split. This may, in part, be the basis for all interest in Elvis—a symbolic expression of the fact that we need to heal our racially and economically divided country and world as well as reintegrate ourselves. Elvis, like a giant mirror, reflects our own struggles with forces of good and evil, and creation and destruction.

In a real way, when we see Elvis we see ourselves. Symbolizing the battle between the true and false selves in us all, Elvis’s huge appeal lies in his power as an archetype—his epic rise and fall captures what is in all of us.

—David Rosen, professor of psychology at Texas A&M University, in The Tao of Elvis, published by Harcourt

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