

## Avatar



Release year: 2009

Duration: 162 minutes

Movie category: Action, Adventure, Fantasy

Director: James Cameron

Writers: James Cameron

Main actors: Sam Worthington, Zoe Saldana and Sigourney Weaver

In a future not so far away, people discover a new planet, Pandora. This planet contains a mineral which people use as fuel. The People try first to civilize the "savage indigenous people" and when that fails, they use the force of weapons to conquer. Science is their ally, providing them with powerful weapons. Scientists will also create genetic hybrids, using human DNA. In this way, they create identical bodies of the "savages" (these are called "avatars"), which are much bigger than humans, blue skinned and adjusted to the planet's atmosphere where no man can live without an oxygen mask. Hence, a scientist becomes a small god because he can put man's conscience into an avatar, and feel and live, whatever his avatar feels and lives. It is like putting a soul directly into a body.

There is a complicated plot as the man sent as a spy falls in love with the planet's nature and its people. He embraces their customs and traditions and is initiated to their rituals. He realizes that their respect for Mother-Nature, their faith and everything around them (is based on borrowed energy that they have to preserve and use wisely) is what makes their lives happy and meaningful. Little by little he gets to know a very different world that he couldn't even imagine or understand, and realizes that barbarians and uncivilized people are not the ones that lack of technology; but those who have lost their values trying to have bigger profits.

The movie points out current issues. Our history is full of "savage tribes" conquered for profit and exploitation. Conquest is justified differently from time to time (we either conquer to expand Christianity or apply democracy) but the method is always the same and varies according to the technology level of each era. The way to hell, one says, is paved by good intentions; and sometimes the fanaticism and faith in our own values makes us incapable of realizing other aspects of reality. How righteous can a man or a whole civilization be when he cannot understand another aspect of reality? Can there be truth if there is no justice? Can there be love? Can there be wisdom? Probably not!

The only thing that can keep man away from fanaticism and terrorism is wisdom accompanied by understanding. Man has to learn, try to know, to be global, and to be a holistic human being. Wisdom also provides the ability to choose, and therefore to be free (this is a hero flying on the back of the dragon) and is dangerous for defense mechanisms and conservatism.

Avatars in Hinduism are the divine incarnations of superior beings of which the uttermost are (Gods) on earth. For example Vishnu, Siva, Ganesh are considered to have descended to earth in forms of Avatars, Jesus Christ and Mohammed are considered by Hindus as Avatars.

This happens when a deity uses a specific personality to transmit a message. For eastern religions, the concept of an Avatar is the superior utterances of an enlightened being, untied to the wheel of incarnation. Therefore an avatar is totally free to choose and conscientiously enslaves him-self to matter to teach love to all.

The movie's hero represents the emissary here; but as he is not an enlightened being and his purpose is not virtuous, he is taught by the "savages" and cannot teach them.

We cannot disregard that the hero is handicapped. But despite his limited physical strength, he is psychologically strong; which is important because his inner values and abilities transform him into a warrior of light. The trials he undergoes (as seen in traditional civilizations eg. Indians) are there to bring out his esoteric strengths and virtues. This is how to understand 'flying on the dragon' as a trial that only the very capable can manage.

There are many Red Indian's traditions in the movie. Similar stories are in other movies as well ("Dancing with the wolves", "The last of the Mohicans" etc). Perhaps today more than ever, there is an urgent need for an ecological consciousness that these traditional civilizations respected.

This is clearly stated in the reply of the Seattle Indian's Chief in 1855 to the American President when he requested to buy their land. Some phrases from this letter are quite similar with the movie's plot.

".... Everything on this land is sacred for my people

.... The tree's juice contains the memories of people with red skin. We are part of this land and this land is part of ourselves.

.... Rivers are our brothers, they quench our thirst

.... Air is valuable for people with red skin because everything shares it: animals, people, trees. Air shares its spirit with all life that it preserves. Everything that affects earth also affects earth's children.

... When people spit on the ground, they spit on themselves. It was not man that weaved the net of life; he is just one of its threads. All actions of man that affect the net, affects himself as well.

.... Everything is connected to each other as blood line connects the members of a family"

At the end of the film, there is an impressive cooperation of all of nature, to drive the invaders away - people that destroy everything for their own profit. Great Mother Earth realizes the "indigenous people's" worries and reacts.

The faith in Great Mother or Mother Earth as a matriarchal archetype is found in mythologies all over the world. The archetype of the Great Mother is seen even in the Neolithic era; represented by fertility figurines, representing different forms purity, fertility and wisdom. In the movie the Great Mother is called "Eywa". But Eywa does not handle man's problems; this is not because of lack of love or concern. As the hero's indigenous female friend tells him, Eywa is not on anyone's side; she is the mother of all creatures even the ones that hurt her. What she has to do is to maintain balance. She is the factor that regulates the rhythm of life-energy.

The most sacred place on the Planet is the sacred tree that bears the memories of all ancestors. In many civilizations, we find the "tree of life". According to Mircea Eliade, the tree symbolizes the regenerating universe, the wellspring of life, the sacredness of the world, and its fertility; it is the tree of Life and Immortality, the tree of Destiny, the tree of Knowledge and many others. In Scandinavian cultures, we find Yggdrasil, the giant tree of the World that connects the nine worlds of Scandinavian Cosmology. In the Jewish Kabbalah, the tree of Life is found in its Cosmology. For the Turkish tradition and other civilizations of Southern Siberia, the Universe consists of 3 zones: the upper world (sky), the middle world (earth) and the lower world (underworld) which are connected through a tree that they call rich birch or iron poplar. The souls of children and animals rest on its branches. This cosmic tree determines, organizes and connects the 3 worlds. The upper branches shade the residency of the sky God and its roots go deep into the underworld. These people believed that shamans travel between the Upper World and the Underworld by climbing on this tree. We should also recall the biblical tree of Knowledge with its precious fruits.

The tree in this movie is the tree of prayers which bears the ancestors' memories and through which their voices are heard. It is the presence of Eywa and it is not a coincidence that it sounds like "Eva" which in Hebrew means "life".

Beyond symbolisms, we have to realize its relation to reality. We may consider this movie to be a kind of artistic protest of the director against the destruction of one of the earth's biggest "lungs", the Amazonian forest. It is true that the Indians of the Amazon went through the destruction of their land, the uprooting of trees and deforestation. For these people, this was not a mere encroachment but an uprooting from the source of their lives. This has been happening for years and it is only lately that the protests against destruction have increased. Everyday, more and more people realize what the Indian chief expressed through this poetic words coming directly from his soul:

"..... because we don't know what will happen when all buffalos are exterminated, when all horses are tamed, when the most secret places in woods will have man's smell and when the view towards the green hills will be obstructed from many wires that are talking. Where is the thick forest? Gone. Where is the eagle? Gone."

So life stops and survival starts.