The Pearl Within
Discovering the Riches of the Underworld

Philip Levine, M.A.
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Are we more vitally conscious than an Egyptian 3000 years B.C. was? Are we? Probably we are less. Our conscious range is wide, but shallow as a sheet of paper. We have no depth to our consciousness.

— D. H. Lawrence in Apocalypse (1931)

*Tis the times plague, When madmen lead the blind.*

— William Shakespeare, King Lear, Act IV

*It is as if you were a whole small universe inside, while externally you are simply a unit... as if each individual were a little universe, a little microcosm in the macrocosm. But as if inside he were a macrocosm too, and contained many microcosms... You see, infinite greatness and infinite smallness are infinitely true, and it is quite possible that we contain whole peoples in our souls, worlds where we can be as infinitely great as we are infinitely small externally—so great that the history of the redemption of a whole nation or of a whole universe might take place within us.*

— C. G. Jung, Visions Seminars
RECENTLY I HAD A DREAM and I take dreams seriously. I saw a young orphan girl, dressed in rags, standing alone. A woman approached showing contempt for the orphan, and then spat at her. As I awoke, I suddenly realized that I was this girl’s guardian. I heard her voice asking, “Who will speak for me?”

How do I speak for an orphan?

I can imagine being treated with contempt, receiving no respect, and having no parents or support of any kind. I am tender, innocent, and yet shunned, even attacked.

I remember a quote from an inscription on a stone: “I am an orphan, alone... In woods and mountains I roam, but I am hidden in the innermost soul of man.”

There have been times when I have felt that alone, wondering how I would survive in this universe, feeling a solitary place deep inside, unknown and unrecognized by those around me, and probably unwelcome.

I remember one such time, on a strange journey to Maui in 1989. My life was in chaos, my marriage of 17 years was ending, and one day I suddenly felt I was being urged to go to Maui, a place I’d never been or really even thought about. This meant a trip of 6000 miles at a time when I could not afford it. Why?

No matter how much I reasoned, the urge was insistent. Just go. So I made the trip, and on my first night on the Hawaiian island, as I was setting up my tent at dusk in a remote area, I spotted a dark young man watching me from behind a tree. He was the only other person there. He finally walked toward me, and when I said hello as he approached, he ignored me and walked right past, into the woods.

Initially I had felt scared being in a strange and alien environment with no plan or purpose. A traumatic childhood camping experience made camping feel very unsafe. But now I faced an apparent new threat. Who was this young man, and why was he acting so strangely, and worse... what did he want with me? I wondered where he had gone, and then I noticed him watching me from behind another tree.

I panicked, and once my tent was set up, I raced back to my car and drove off leaving him and the tent. The feeling was one of overwhelming aloneness, with nowhere to turn and no one to help me.

I felt like an orphan.

I sat on a cliff overlooking the sun going down. I had never been anywhere like this, and I’m sure there were many romantic couples enjoying the sunset on Maui that night. But I was so scared and alone. Where could I go? What could I do? I could feel that young man waiting back by my tent in the darkness. I was prepared to spend my ten days on Maui inside that car.

I had not felt such fear since I was a child. I cried and pleaded, “Why am I here? I don’t even know why I’ve come here, and what am I going to do?”

But there was an answer, perhaps from the same inner place that first led me to undertake such a puzzling journey, and I unexpectedly found myself saying, “I don’t know why I’ve come 6000 miles to be here all alone, and this man may be waiting at my campsite to murder me. If I have come this far without even knowing why, in order to be killed, then let me do it well.”

I felt a powerful calmness inside me, replacing the panic, and I drove back to the darkened empty parking lot. As I hiked to my tent, I thought I would probably not sleep that night, but in fact I went right to sleep and did not wake till morning.

It is in hanging out in such empty and rocky places of the soul that the orphan can be found. Sitting at the bedside of a dying loved one, faced with the inevitability of their leaving and all the jumbled feelings of fear, anger, grief, sadness and confusion, if we pause and listen, accepting what is, we may be surprised to find ourselves in a deeper place within. Perhaps this is the mythical and spiritual underworld.
Quiet, solitary, and fragile, the voice of the orphan soul within each of us can be heard. Sometimes it sounds like silence. Something had responded to my plea, calmed my panic, and filled me with the willingness to accept my fate. Was that me or someone else in me?

I suspect there may be many others in this world who have had similar inner experiences, though we tend not to speak of them.

Since our modern science and our more “factual” worldview came on the scene and made belief in God or any higher Powers a much more challenging proposition, we have all in some sense become more like orphans without that hidden Support. We are certainly less secure than our ancestors. We can still choose to believe as they did, but somehow it feels like we are further out on the precipice.

And the contempt and the spitting—what of that?

At the same time that we experience a greater estrangement from our universe, we appear to have become more skeptical, less trusting of faith. Innocence is now mocked as naïve, and someone who believes in a hidden Intelligence should “know better,” or at least have a good reason.

This certainly does not apply to all of us, but it does seem to describe the ambience of our postmodern world.

Is innocence under attack? Children are deprived of their naïveté at an earlier age by parents and mass media. We say we must do so to protect them because their purity of heart makes them vulnerable to exploitation. Even the phrase “purity of heart” will evoke cynical smirks and discomfort in some.

It is very likely that the same attitude—held even by ourselves—prevails toward our own guilelessness, those places within each of us which are unknowing and open, curious and vulnerable. Did we get to where we are because the world turned harsher, making defense and protection more necessary, or has the world become more dangerous because we have stopped valuing innocence and protecting its right to exist?

Who is this orphan? Perhaps she reflects for us the abandoned and lost state of our own soul—the interior ambiguous world of dream, fantasy and imagination—which no longer fits into the objective literal universe of technology and concrete facts.

This orphan is also a symbol of a necessary stage of growing up and into the individual each of us truly is:

...the experience referred to by the image of the orphan is a part of individuation [becoming the person you truly and really are]. The experience of being abandoned, of losing the support of all parental figures and sources of external security—these all belong to the image of the orphan. It’s a necessary experience, because you cannot discover the inner source of security upon which your existence rests until you have been deprived of all external supports.3

And if the orphan is something that is “hidden in the innermost soul of man [and woman],” then how are we to find it, and why should we want to?

I have chosen to offer my best effort to give her a voice, and in doing so, to try to find answers to these questions. I have found that sometimes her voice (or maybe it’s just mine) is tinged with anger at the way things are. Please forgive the harshness.

The Lost Soul

...and you tell me over and over and over and over again my friend, ah, you don’t believe we’re on the eve of destruction.4

Our other task is to bring ourselves to face the situation we are in. By abandoning and rejecting the value of our soul—our interior and its messages—we have been cut off from our intrinsic guidance. This loss of
such a vital and traditional source of correction for our excess and errors is putting us in an increasingly precarious position.

There are signs in several growing trends that we are headed in an alarming direction. Whether we look at increasing anxiety, depression, and gastrointestinal distress in individuals; declining standards in education, social behavior and institutions, and loss of respect for life and each other; deteriorating quality of air, water, nutritional content of food, and destruction of the environment; spreading of weapons of mass destruction into the hands of fanatical individuals and groups seeking to “make a statement”; increasing violence, in particular at younger and younger ages; mushrooming numbers of prescriptions for behavior-altering drugs, especially for the young—there are plenty of signs that we are reaching a critical moment.

After the crisis of nuclear proliferation of the 1980’s, when we thought humanity had to choose between a path of survival or else self-destruction, we find ourselves still facing that choice. It was not the weapons; it was us. Giving up the weapons has only confronted us with the human motives that created all those weapons in the first place. Why are we doing what we do? What hope is to be found in continuing along the path we are following?

We are like a man in the midst of a heart attack, gasping for air, brought to his knees by the pain, all the while insisting that he is fine and there is no need to go to the hospital.

A man crippled and in denial, and an innocent orphan being rejected while having much to offer—perhaps we have something precious to learn from these images. What does the man need to do if he is to have a chance of surviving? What do we need to do if we are to recognize the orphan and hear her voice? What is she able to feel that perhaps we have lost touch with?

I think that it will take a fundamental moment of remorse—and this is absolutely essential to the death-rebirth experience—a long moment of remorse, a sustained weeping and grief. It will be a grief of the masculine for the feminine; of men for women; of adults for what has happened to children; of the West for what has happened to every other part of the world; of Judaism for pagans and indigenous peoples; of Christians for Jews; of whites for people of color; of the wealthy for the poor; of human beings for animals and all other forms of life. It will take a fundamental metanoia, a self-overcoming, a radical sacrifice to make this transition.5

The orphan wants to be heard now inside of each of us. We need to listen, to turn back toward the empty and innocent place which we have abandoned. It is my hope that if articulated at the right moment, the Mystery which the orphan represents can reach us through our numbing, denial and escapism, and awaken us once again to the realization of who and what each of us really is, beneath the roles we play.

Will you join me? Take a chance? Throughout this book you will see a stop sign at points where we recommend that you stop, put down the book, and take the time to reflect upon and write about the questions being raised. Ask yourself the questions, and listen.

Some who read this book will see it as dark and depressing. Yet it is an expression of hope. For years our situation has haunted me, and led me to struggle with despair, anger and pessimism. In truth, I feel little hope and believe we must prepare for the coming times with great concern. Yet there is some part of me that will not be extinguished and will not give up. I have no radiant vision to share of our joyous deliverance. Instead, I feel this writing is a cry which I must let out before I leave this earth rather than taking it with me into the silent Unknown. May it make some small difference in the lives of those who hear it, though how, I cannot picture.

This book is not a recipe for self-realization. The encounter with one’s True Nature is not under one’s control, nor is it usually a very pleasant experience. The angelic choirs, if there be any, come much later. This book is more a lifeline, to be clutched when there seems nothing to hold onto. Few people will read these ideas and choose to pursue them voluntarily. You will be called, and the price of refusing the call is often death itself, spiritually if not literally. When that time comes, may this writing serve to preserve you and help you to consent to the necessity (fate) presented to you by the Mystery That lives in your own soul.

We must stop what we are doing.
STOP!!

We must honestly face our desperate situation and admit our confusion and lack of direction. And then like the many wise people who have somehow been inspired by new direction and guidance from a sacred Source, we must listen.

Be still, and listen.
There was once a young man, a son of royalty, who was destined to rule his native land with his brother. Before he could be deemed ready for that responsibility, he was given a mission by his royal parents to go down to Egypt, a foreign land, and to rescue the Pearl which was guarded by the dangerous serpent.

After making his way to the alien country, he thought it would be wise to lay low, disguised as one of their own, to eat their food and cultivate their habits, while scouting the situation regarding the Pearl and the serpent.

Unfortunately he did such a good job that he forgot his original identity, his parents and his mission. He “fell asleep.” In this state of having adapted to his environment our hero was very much an “orphan,” dispossessed (deprived, bereaved, disinherited, lost).

His parents were aware of his situation, and they decided to send him a letter. This letter—able to magically transform itself into an eagle (the mail was very slow in those days)—flew to his room, whereupon he awoke and read it:

From thy father the King of Kings, and from thy mother, mistress of the East, and from thy brother, our next in rank, unto thee, our son in Egypt, greeting. Awake and rise up out of thy sleep, and perceive the words of our letter.

Remember that thou art a king’s son: behold whom thou hast served in bondage. Be mindful of the Pearl, for whose sake thou hast departed into Egypt.

Remember thy robe of glory, recall thy splendid mantle, that thou mayest put them on and deck thyself with them and thy name be read in the book of the heroes and thou become with thy brother, our deputy, heir in our kingdom.

And so he awakened to his true but forgotten identity, rescued the Pearl, and returned to his original home.

This book begins with this story (an ancient Gnostic hymn from the beginning of our era) because in a profound way, this is our story. So many of us have come from forgotten origins, on a mission we no longer recall, and we now find ourselves lost, disconnected from our Real roots and alienated from our True Nature.

We are outcasts from earlier times when human beings felt they belonged, and that they were observed and protected by divine Powers. If you or I seek to recover our True Nature, beneath the layers of family history and cultural conditioning, and to find our Way back to our real native land from which we have wandered, we must leave our present “home”—our familiar roles and routines—and undertake the risky journey to the hidden lower regions, because our road Home passes through the underworld.

You won’t find this underworld journey in any travel brochure, and directions are sometimes obscure, but the way our world is heading, it is fast becoming one of our only options.

What is the “underworld?” It implies deep, down and inner. The Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend tells us:
In the cosmography of peoples all over the world, a region under the ground, to which the entrance on the surface exists somewhere, and in which live the souls of the dead...To reach the underworld one must cross a river in a boat guided by a spectral ferryman; at any rate, a guide is needed, the...conductor of souls.6

The theme of the descent to the underworld occurs throughout the world as well:

The motif of numerous stories occurring in the mythology and folklore of every people in the world, ancient and contemporary...Invariably the descent is made to rescue someone either abducted to the land of the dead, or rightfully dead; to find the answer to a question or discover a secret from the ruler of the [under]world; to ask a favor, or to seize some treasure.7

Once the honored home of venerated ancestors and heroes, the modern worldview derived from our Judeo-Christian roots has equated the underworld with “hell” and a place of suffering, punishment and torture. This leaves us with no desirable place to descend to anymore. Our journey here is not to hell, though there are times one wonders. It is to the interior lower space of hidden treasures, mysterious secrets and renewal.

Translated psychologically: the underworld—once imagined to be the residence of the souls of the dead and to be ruled by a forbidding god—is the “place” (deep, dark and inner) where we imagine that our own “dead” thoughts, memories that have passed on or been prematurely buried, are contained. A collective attitude of reverence, like most cultures have always had, would appreciate whatever value these interred memories may hold, and facilitate the willingness to descend, if required to in the course of rescue or recovery, or to “find the answer” or “discover a secret,” or to “seize some treasure.”

This would be the domain of the shaman as healer or visionary, and also the metaphorical goal of most psychotherapy or psychoanalysis.

But psychologically, once Christianity re-cast the underworld as the Hell of damned souls and the Devil, stories of heroic rescues and recoveries of hidden treasures ceased, and our collective attitude made the underworld a place to be avoided, containing nothing but trouble. And if you imagine it to be that way, then everything that emerges from that place within will take on the appearance of a danger and a threat. We need to remember the underworld has largely not been seen in that light, and to be willing to find out for ourselves just what is down there.

So when a “complex” of buried memories and feelings presents itself in the form of anxiety, depression or obsessive-compulsive behavior, or even disturbing dreams, what will be your attitude toward this messenger from your underworld? Do you banish it back to the silence and barricade the door, or do you pause long enough to engage in an encounter, and consider you may be being offered a treasure or even renewal?

Why should you care about the underworld? Because it is in you and around you all the time. This book is about change. Change means death for the old, birth of the new. To understand more about the internal dynamics of change means that you can more skillfully navigate the crises, dilemmas and problems of your life. Disturbing symptoms of breakdown are not necessarily always to be fought with “treatment” but are often natural elements of change. When you treat the symptom you may very well be resisting necessary transformation.

We have placed all our eggs in the basket of materialism, technology and the “factual” outer world of the senses. In doing so, as we historically repudiated superstition and myth and most of religion in favor of reason and science, we have made an orphan of our inner selves, cast off as useless and shunned as an embarrassment.

It is such a stretch from our “modern” understanding to a time when people once treated the hidden realms inside themselves with respect, and believed helpful influences arose from within. Now that we have lost our bearings, we largely fear our inner depths, and when something erupts we rarely pause long enough to experience a real encounter with whatever lives in there. Ours is now a world of symptoms and medications.

Perhaps we have erred or lost our balance.
This book offers the orphan a voice, so that the lost and abandoned soul within you and me can be heard. And it reminds each of us that we are like the young man in the story, having become so involved in the trappings and distractions of modern times that we have forgotten who we really are (our True Nature, as the Buddhists like to call It) and desperately need a reminder, a “letter” from Home.

Finally, The Pearl Within asks us to consider what such a Pearl could be, a precious treasure to be found concealed within our dreams, fantasies, symptoms and other mysterious inner promptings. Our worldly troubles arise from only one place—the inside, within our human minds or souls. All plans, ideals, suicide bombings, cruelties and misunderstandings originate there. In addition, all hope, rescue, healing or rebirth come forth from the same place.

This book is passionate. Times are reaching a critical stage, many people needlessly suffer, and there is so little understanding or even concern for this inner source. How can that be? I cannot stand by any longer without ardently proclaiming my faith—not in this God or that religion—but in the soul of humankind.

I hope that as we shine light on some of the features of our inner terrain that you will be encouraged to begin your own exploration, or to go deeper yet toward the riches within your own soul.

Dark Times

We are living in dark times.

Fear is in the air. The cold wind blows, carrying on it the echoes of howling wolves. Are they getting louder?

We are like primitive natives as an unexpected eclipse of the sun begins. The brilliant light of reason dims. The reassurance of our technological marvels is no match for the encroaching shadows.

No matter how far we seem to advance, fear is primal, from the Stone Age.

Some proclaim the end of the world. Or the end of an age.

Optimists sing a different tune, though hollower by the minute.

Others await messengers from outer space to bring peace and our rescue.

Our leaders refuse even to acknowledge what many of us increasingly feel. They don’t want to be “negative.” People vote for optimism, not reality.

S.O.S.

Save Our Souls

The Universal Signal for Distress (Morse code)

Is it possible to talk about the sense of foreboding, our concerns and fears, without succumbing to pessimism or depressed passivity?

If we can find a basis upon which to address the turmoil and decaying values perceptible all around us, and our feelings about it, is there a point to such discussion?

Is it possible to do anything to reverse the accelerating trend, or is it instead a matter of searching for the right response to the inevitable?
In tribal communities going back to the earliest of human times, when a member of the tribe became ill, the shaman or native “witch doctor” would “journey” in trance to the dream place where he or she would engage in a struggle with the spirit of the sickness in order to rescue the soul of the one afflicted. If successful, the patient recovered. If not, the healer herself could be negatively affected.

If the community as a whole was in trouble, because of disease, poor crops or hostile neighbors, the tribal leader or visionary would consult omens and dreams to divine guidance.

This was the only avenue they felt was open to them, and it sustained the survival of the tribe and its members through many crises, according to tradition.

Now it is our turn. But we have lost our faith in such intangible solutions and our respect for those still gifted with vision. We sit in the growing darkness but cannot recognize the candles within our reach.

Our need is not to “fix” things, because they cannot be fixed.

Our need is to see—to see into ourselves and our souls, just as the healers and visionaries have done for thousands of years.

But if we are to be able to do this, to follow the path of insight trud by those before us, we need a new perspective. The old tribal gods are seemingly absent, and the shaman or medicine man/woman is no longer respected or even recognized.

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
For love would be love for the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

In order to arrive at what you do not know
You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.
In order to possess what you do not possess
You must go by the way of dispossession.
In order to arrive at what you are not
You must go through the way in which you are not.

And what you do not know is the only thing you know
And what you own is what you do not own
And where you are is where you are not.9

In my own dark time, when it seemed all external support was failing, I was left with only one apparent option: let go and fall, down into the darkness, surrender, without hope or faith.

After a lifetime of trying to make relationships “work” I was faced with the fact that all my relating had been an avoidance of a deep dark void in my heart, which felt as old as I was. I had been addicted to being in relationship, and had either done everything possible to make them last, or to find a replacement. Just being alone with myself was not an option. Yet with the last loss, I could see how I had been unsuccessfully avoiding this emptiness inside, and I chose instead to stop my addictive behavior and to voluntarily go wherever that choice to be alone took me.

It led to two years of darkness, pain and grief. Did I know why those feelings were there, or what they meant? Not at all. I just went with them. Now I would say they were probably part of my earliest childhood and the imperfect mothering I had experienced.

I was depressed, but I was not “ill.” I did not suffer from a “disease.” Why wouldn’t I be depressed? Depression is a natural part of life and the up-and-coming treatment is electro-shock. What does it say about us and our society that we treat depression this way?
After the grief came a prolonged period that felt like more depression and terror. It was very much like a tour of the underworld. I learned to be with myself, to nurture and love myself.

That unsought-for journey to that dark inner place led ultimately to a great treasure—a sense of solidity, peace, and contentment. Enriched by this trying experience, I came to find that others had made a similar pilgrimage, and had left maps or clues for those of us who followed later.

Now as things appear to be deteriorating and insight or guidance is nowhere to be found, I feel compelled to try to articulate a way out, or perhaps better, a way in. I am as much at a loss as anyone, and as fearful, when searching for answers to our situation. But I do have a strong sense that a way out will not be found by logic and problem-solving, nor by denial, and that our way through lies in turning ourselves around and returning to those places within us we have rejected as obsolete.

This is a book about the hidden and rejected world inside each of us—the realm of dreams, unconscious motive and fantasy—out of which can come the nourishment we so hunger for. It describes the landmarks of a necessary yet perilous journey we humans must make if we are to survive and offers encouragement to the traveler: “Be not afraid of the universe.” Be not afraid of the Mystery.

In a dark time, the eye begins to see,
I meet my shadow in the deepening shade;
I hear my echo in the echoing wood —
A lord of nature weeping to a tree.
I live between the heron and the wren,
Beasts of the hill and serpents of the den.

What’s madness but nobility of soul
At odds with circumstance? The day’s on fire!
I know the purity of pure despair,
My shadow pinned against a sweating wall.
That place among the rocks—is it a cave,
Or winding path? The edge is what I have.

A steady storm of correspondences!
A night flowing with birds, a ragged moon,
And in broad day the midnight come again!
A man goes far to find out what he is — Death of the self in a long, tearless night,
All natural shapes blazing unnatural light.

Dark, dark my light, and darker my desire.
My soul, like some heat-maddened summer fly,
Keeps buzzing at the sill. Which I is I?
A fallen man, I climb out of my fear.
The mind enters itself, and God the mind,
And one is One, free in the tearing wind.10

This really is a plea, because I dread the world my daughter and all the children are apparently going to live in. It is not meant to depress, except in the true sense of the word, to take you down beneath the surface world. Myth and tradition throughout the world tell of the journey of the hero to the underworld, to the land of the dead and place of the ancestors, in order to redeem the suffering of the people.

We have lost the myths and traditions, but the underworld is still there.

And now it is necessary for this expedition to the underworld to be undertaken by each one of us who is called. This book is a call, and some may hear it and respond. The rest of us are counting on that, whether we are aware of it or not.

The dread and resistance which every natural human being experiences when it comes to delving too deeply into himself, is, at bottom, the fear of the journey to Hades.11
With no compelling myths to show us, we are left with the only vital area of modern thought that has addressed these realms: psychology, specifically that field known as "depth psychology."

What Is This Book About?

Not intended to be a rejection of religion, this book tries to maneuver around the inert and elderly institutions still functioning, to appeal to the soul within each of you, whether you call it a Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Taoist or agnostic soul. Our exploration should only serve to deepen whatever spiritual ideas are contained in any religion, not to replace them. This is no threat to cherished religious ideals, only perhaps to those who claim religious authority.

To preview what you are getting into if you continue: this book is not meant to be a textbook of psychology or a dry collection of philosophy. It contains elements of both, but it tries rather to bring its ideas to life, to make them relevant to your life. Perhaps you’ve never read a book on psychology before, or maybe you have gone through many.

We are attempting here to cross the wide river dividing academia and the intellectual codes of the experts from the more down-to-earth and immediate world you and I inhabit, because it is just this world that is in such danger now.

There is no expertise here, no school of thought to follow. This is more in the spirit of experiment. There is an underworld which can be found, penetrated and explored, and it opens its door inside of each of us. No need to believe me or anyone else, only to be curious (and maybe desperate) enough to find out for yourself. Try to avoid the narrow labels we are all used to, the ways we cage and control much bigger mysteries.

Is it about meditation? Yes, but it’s not a book about meditation. And what is meditation, anyway? Is it about psychology? Yes, but not as an abstract study of brain waves and pathologies. It is psychology as the study of the soul. And what in the world is “soul?” Start scraping away those preconceptions.

In the end, if there is any one aim to this writing, it is the hope that you will come to recognize that there lives inside of you something or someone who is not under your control, whom you did not put there, and who can provide you with companionship and inspiration on your way.

This probably needs repeating: there is someone or something inside of you who knows how to do whatever it is that is being asked of you by our time. It is not up to you, nor probably are you even capable, to solve our current dilemma with reason, the only tool our civilization has faith in. To hope to encounter this inner Companion requires a leap of faith, at the very least of curiosity.

The foundation of this presentation is the Gnostic “Hymn of the Pearl.” The Gnostics were people who lived around the time of Christ, and who had their own particular slant on spirituality. Their ideas, while interesting, are not explored here.12

The “Hymn of the Pearl” serves as a vehicle for our discussion, because its theme of leaving home, a mission, forgetting, awakening, a test, and returning seems to convey a fantasy that resonates in the soul. It is as if each of us has a place deep within that has some recognition of these themes, a dim sense of memory. The journey that takes place in the Hymn may be in some way our own individual journey. And the story contained in the “Hymn of the Pearl” is a hopeful one.

We can awaken from our sleep. We can remember what we came here for. In doing so, we can return to our true Home, from which we have been wandering for so, so long.

But a great deal is being asked of you in order to do so. It is easy to dismiss or overlook the hidden depths in such familiar words as “soul” and “fantasy,” or the deeper nuances of any situation for that matter. For most of us, it will necessitate a reversal of the usual way of thinking. These concepts refer more to what we experience as emptiness, voids, and the spaces between the things we call real. It is not our habit to penetrate the surface, and the acceptance of the superficial face as reality has been conditioned into us thoroughly.
Likewise, how challenging is it for our intellects to consider the possibility of the presence simultaneously of two opposing elements? Or that events in our world may not always be the result of cause-and-effect? It takes patience and persistence—as well as courage—to hang out in the void, to endure paradox, to suspend judgment.

Even more to the point: it would take a major reversal for most of us even to admit that we are in the midst of a crisis at all! Somehow we are able to be faced with horrible acts every single day that indicate an epidemic of what can only be called insanity, and the lack of any kind of meaningful response or coherent reason for what is happening. “There’s something happening here. What it is ain’t exactly clear.”

Can you admit, or at least concede the possibility that we are in a major crisis, together?

In Plato’s story about the cave, the prisoners are chained inside since childhood with their faces permanently turned away from the entrance and their heads unable to turn. Everything they experience as their reality consists of the shadows cast on the cave wall in front of them. They have named the shadow characters and believe sounds they hear in the echoing cave come from those shadows.

Then what would happen if one of them could be released from his chains, and could turn toward the entrance and the light?

And now look again, and see what will naturally follow if the prisoners are released and disabused of their error. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his head round and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows; and then conceive someone saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, when he is approaching nearer to being and his eye is turned towards more real existence, he has a clearer vision, — what will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is pointing to the objects as they pass and requiring him to name them, — will he not be perplexed? Will he not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now shown to him?
The Hymn of the Pearl

When I was a little child and dwelt in the kingdom of my Father’s house, and delighted in the wealth and splendour of those who raised me, my parents sent me forth from the East, our homeland, with provisions for the journey. From the riches of our treasure house they tied me a burden: great it was, yet light, so that I might carry it alone.

They took off from me the robe of glory which in their love they had made for me, and my purple mantle that was woven to conform exactly to my figure, and made a covenant with me, and wrote it in my heart that I might not forget it: “When thou goest down into Egypt and bringest the One Pearl which lies in the middle of the sea which is encircled by the snorting serpent, thou shalt put on again thy robe of glory and thy mantle over it and with thy brother our next in rank be heir in our kingdom.”

I left the East and took my way downwards, accompanied by two royal envoys, since the way was dangerous and hard and I was young for such a journey.

I went down into Egypt and my companions parted from me. I went straightaway to the serpent and settled down close by his inn until he should slumber and sleep so that I might take the Pearl from him.

Since I was one and kept to myself, I was a stranger to my fellow dwellers in the inn… I clothed myself in their garments, lest they suspect me as one coming from without to take the Pearl and arouse the serpent against me.

But through some cause they marked that I was not their countryman and they ingratiated themselves with me, and mixed me [drink] with their cunning, and gave me to taste of their meat; and I forgot that I was a king’s son and served their king. I forgot the Pearl for which my parents had sent me. Through the heaviness of their nourishment I sank into deep slumber.

All this befell me, my parents marked, and they were grieved for Me… And they wrote a letter to me, and each of the great ones signed it with his name.

“From thy father the King of Kings, and from thy mother, mistress of the East, and from thy brother, our next in rank, unto thee, our son in Egypt, greeting. Awake and rise up out of thy sleep, and perceive the words of our letter.

“Remember that thou art a king’s son: behold whom thou hast served in bondage. Be mindful of the Pearl, for whose sake thou hast departed into Egypt.

“Remember thy robe of glory, recall thy splendid mantle, that thou mayest put them on and deck thyself with them and thy name be read in the book of the heroes and thou become with thy brother, our deputy, heir in our kingdom.”

Like a messenger was the letter… It rose up in the form of an eagle, the king of all winged fowl, and flew until it alighted beside me and became wholly speech.

At its voice and sound I awoke and arose from my sleep, took it up, kissed it, broke its seal, and read. Just as was written on my heart were the words of my letter to read. I remembered that I was a son of kings, and that my freeborn soul desired its own kind.

I remembered the Pearl for which I had been sent down into Egypt, and I began to enchant the terrible and snorting serpent. I charmed it to sleep by naming over it my Father’s name, the name of our next in rank, and that of my mother, the queen of the East. I seized the Pearl, and turned to repair home to my Father. Their filthy and impure garment I put off, and left it behind in their land, and directed my way that I might come to the light of our homeland, the East.

My letter which had awakened me I found before me on my way; and as it had awakened me with its voice, so it guided me with its light that shone before me; with its voice it encouraged my fear, and with its love it drew me on.
(Then, as he approached his homeland his parents sent out to him his robe of glory and his mantle.)

And with its regal movements it pours itself wholly out to me, and from the hands of its bringers hastens that I may take it; and me too my love urged on to run towards it and to receive it. And I stretched towards it and took it and decked myself with the beauty of its colors.

And I cast the royal mantle about my entire self. Clothed therein, I ascended to the gate of salutation and adoration. I bowed my head and adored the splendour of my Father who had sent it to me, whose commands I had fulfilled as he too had done what he promised… He received me joyfully, and I was with him in his kingdom, and all his servants praised him with organ voice, that he had promised that I should journey to the court of the King of kings and having brought my Pearl should appear together with him.
Notes


5 Richard Tarnas, “The Great Initiation.”


7 ibid.

8 “SOS is the commonly used description for the international Morse code distress signal… From the beginning, the SOS distress signal has actually consisted of a continuous sequence of three-dits/three-dahs/three-dits, all run together without letter spacing. In International Morse Code, three dits form the letter S, and three dahs make the letter O, so ‘SOS’ became an easy way to remember the correct order of the dits and dashes…. In popular usage, SOS became associated with phrases such as ‘Save Our Ship’ and ‘Save Our Souls’.” (Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sos)


12 See Jonas, Gnostic Religion. Also The Gnostic Gospels.


We might have lost the Light and the Height; but more frightening, we have lost the Mystery and the Deep, the Emptiness and the Abyss, and lost it in a world dedicated to surfaces and shadows, exteriors and shells, whose prophets lovingly exhort us to dive into the shallow end of the pool head first.¹

There’s really not much we have to do to begin—only to look at what is happening in our world around us without an ideology or agenda, within the context of our evolutionary history. Then we need to apply an equally objective eye (if there is such a thing) to who we each are and what makes us behave in the ways we do.

Reminding ourselves of the multi-cultural global tradition which has always recognized and respected the Presence of some sort of Higher Power or Mystery in the form of nature spirits, gods and goddesses, planetary Powers and other forms of deity (or formless), we can see that it is only in our most recent times that we have lost such a Center. In Chapter One the importance of the Mystery is revitalized and we look for signs of Its Presence in the modern world.

Chapter Two presents a brief sketch of the movement of evolution from the Big Bang to the present, and searches for likely trends based on our momentum today.

In Chapter Three we explore the inner side of life, preparing the way for some fairly radical reversals of contemporary assumptions about who we are, what moves us and why. These three chapters lay the foundation for Part Two in which we begin our actual journey to the underworld and the mysteries of the unconscious psyche.

Chapter One
The Mystery and Its Many Faces

As the day begins, I find myself standing here in the doorway between two worlds. Through my open eyes I see my night table, clock, and lamp. Looking around I find my bureau, a chair, my computer and of course, my bed. But when I close my eyes I see the other world, the one I was just in. Fading quickly away are the charming lady and her plaid dog, as they jump into the ravine. Now what was it she said to me?

Why is it that I believe the world of table and chair is the “real” one? And that the other world of dreams is somehow fake, or fantasy and not real? Could it be because others can also see the furnished world of my bedroom, but that only I can see the inner world? Are the only real facts of my existence the ones I can validate through others? Is anything that arises within my own mind somehow unreal or pretend? Or is it what the Hindus have said: that I have it backwards and the outer world of agreed-upon reality is really the dream, and the true reality can be found within my own soul?

We have lost our way. We are drowning and don’t know it. The tide is rising and we are too busy rushing around, being entertained, looking for love, and trying to get somewhere to notice.

The inner world of the soul, with its dreams and fantasies, is like an orphan inside of us, an abandoned child, needing our protection. She is starving and under attack from our world which mistrusts her, threatened by her innocence. We have abandoned her. Who is she?

“I come here from a place not known to you. I am alone and without my parents. I am your hope, but you do not see me. If you did, you would not want me.”

What is it about this child-like innocence (not harming; lack of worldly experience or sophistication; lack of knowledge) that threatens us? Why do we fear her, attack her, ignore her? Without innocence how will we open our eyes to see what she sees, what she can show us? Mistrusting our world within, believing it is only a chaotic realm of psychic debris, we cling to the “hard” facts of science and the senses.

The time is coming when you will feel real fear. The props that you imagine are holding you up are not real. Some hide behind cynicism, others behind blind hope. It takes great courage to stand at the edge of the abyss and to know that you have nothing to keep you from venturing and falling in. Time is running out and yet you believe either that there is plenty of time or that it is too late. In either case, why bother?

What is this “rising tide?”

It is the violence that once was occasional and now is the rule.

It is the vastly multiplying medication being given to younger and younger children in order to relieve their “problems” or to manage their behavior.

It is the growing number of adults who rely on pills to get through the day and who believe they are incapable of surviving the experience of their own feelings.
It is the increasing loss of any real meaning attached to what people do each day in order to earn their livings, in order to buy all the toys and diversions that we are told we need.

It is the loss of respect for life, for each other, and especially for the Mystery that we embody while It embodies each of us.

It is the increasing destruction of the earth and of the air we breathe and water we drink, all for the sake of money and material desire.

We do not understand that it is an unknown Mystery that holds it all together. We do not honor this Mystery as those before us did.

Because their chosen words and names for this Mystery are old-fashioned and based on a level of education that we consider antique, we have mistakenly and foolishly decided if the name is outdated, so is the Mystery. Whether called "God", "Allah", "Krishna", or "Satan", the Mystery IS. It does not depend on a name, nor does any one name really capture the Identity which I am calling "Mystery."

We are addicted to certainty because we have no safety net anymore. Without any belief in a Greater Power, what is there to save us, to catch us as we free-fall when our traditional answers serve us no longer? We prefer certainty to the truth.

In a time of increasing danger and confusion, the black-and-white convictions of religious fundamentalism and mandatory jail sentences, of the political "axis of evil" and the implicit assumption of our role as the force of "good" have great appeal. So do the hard "facts" of our technological world. It is often the outward appearance of certainty that is most attractive. Young people in particular yearn to feel as secure and sure as those they see around them who have the “answers” to life’s questions.

Many philosophers have told us it is not only the answers that matter but the ability to live the questions. And living the question means being unsure, living in ignorance or uncertainty, risking making foolish mistakes and appearing hesitant and insecure. Just like the legendary hidden entry hole into the underworld, this is our entry into the world of the orphan and its innocence.

So the questions constantly being posed by life do not open us up to wonder anymore. We avoid the questions with pat answers that have been spoon-fed by the sham of education. It is merely atmospheric conditions that caused the awesome glow in the night sky. It is only your imagination that leads you to envision impending disaster. A recent NASA website displaying the grandeur of a sunset described it: "What’s happening over the horizon? Although the scene may appear somehow supernatural, nothing more unusual is occurring than a setting Sun and some well placed clouds."

When something suggests any presence of mysterious depth or “higher” powers, it has to be reduced: feelings reduced to chemicals in the brain, unexplainable phenomena to atmospherics, psychic anomalies to mental illness or “imagination.”

But “I wonder…”

Look at ANYTHING…your big toe, a dust ball, a tree, the sky.

Wonder: Why does it exist? Where did it come from? What is my relationship to it? How much do I need it? Depend on it? What would I do if it were suddenly not here? Where does it go when I can no longer see it?

Interestingly, we do not know where the word “wonder” came from, but one must be innocent to wonder. Why is it childish to spend time wondering where did I come from? or why am I here? What does it imply to call these core questions that should concern us and once did matter to others “childish?” It implies that with sophistication, education and experience, somehow these questions become irrelevant. But do they? Are they no longer important and worth considering?

We use words here like “God,” “soul,” “spirit,” “fantasy,” and certain Latin terms left to us by the practitioners of the obscure art of alchemy.
If you are called to make this pilgrimage to the underworld, these terms can serve as provisions. But to use them, you will probably have to work to scrape off the accumulated prejudicial definitions of familiarity and history, and learn to see them anew, with fresh eyes as if for the first time.

“Soul” is used here to refer to whatever it is that you experience as your interior, as inside of you, the “place” of your feelings, fantasies and other inner activities, whether intentionally initiated by you or seeming to arise from unseen sources. Soul does not have to mean, but certainly could mean, those things which religion has made of it.

You have an inside, full of moods, symptoms, problems, questions, insights, and complex mysteries. That is all you need to concern yourself with here when you think of “soul.” Leave the rest to theology and philosophy for now, concerning the afterlife, heaven and hell, or reincarnation. It is just inside you, and it’s a Mystery.

“Unconscious” refers to those unseen sources. We don’t know what a soul is, nor have we discovered the real meaning of the unconscious. It is simply for now the realm in which you live, and which lives inside you, which is invisible, hidden from view, undefined, and mysterious.

You have an unconscious, or perhaps we might be better off to say you have a relationship with the unconscious. Since we do not know what it is, it is hard to say whether we possess an unconscious or just swim in it, or both. The unconscious is conspicuous in countless ways every single day in your life. There is no need to concern yourself here with what this or that school of psychology has speculated about the unconscious. It is just in you and around you, and it is a Mystery.

Mystery is really the core of our exploration here. We talk about It, walk around It, seek to penetrate It, but all the time, respect It as beyond our comprehension. The world is a different place when it rests upon Mystery.

Who really is an expert in the Mystery of life? We all start in the same place, and your insights may be the most important ones for you and possibly others. We all are born naked, and we all remain ignorant when it comes to explaining the Mystery. You are a Mystery, life is a Mystery, and the crumbling world with its occasional beautiful flowers and acts of kindness, its agonizing painful deaths and senseless violence, is very much a Mystery.

You are invited to pursue your own investigation of the Mystery.

“God” can mean whatever it has meant for you, but here it is another word for the Mystery. God is a very tricky word to work with, because we have been programmed all of our lives to imagine God in some way or other, but rarely purely as Mystery.

“God” is one of our words here for whatever ultimately is the “Higher Power,” the unseen moving Force that stands for that which is beyond our comprehension, yet somehow in charge, whether with intelligence or the blindness of random chaos, or both.

“Fantasy” is a name for the stream of feelings, thoughts, sensations, and imagery that arises spontaneously on the screen of your mind, in your inner world, or soul. It is not a term that separates useless imagining from “reality,” or that means “only” daydreams. It arises without needing to be judged, and is observed because it came from the unconscious and therefore serves as our only clue as to what lives in the unconscious. Fantasy deserves our respect and devoted attention for that reason.

Just as you have a soul, a place of inner and private reflection and activity, and you have a relation to the unconscious, and you are a Mystery, you have constant fantasy. Like dreams, it is not a matter of learning how to have fantasies, only of beginning to pay attention, to observe and record what you experience as the raw material you can then work with.

So this is our simple task: to explore the soul, observe our fantasies and dreams, and remain mindful of the undeniable fact that everything is really a Mystery. It is a challenging Work, asking eventually everything of you. But it has always been said by those who did the Work that it offers the greatest treasure for those who persist. Endurance and patience have no substitutes.
The Greeks—like so many early civilizations—believed in the presence and influence in their daily lives of gods and goddesses. They had names, functions, and places to be worshipped. When the Greeks passed on as a predominating culture, their gods went with them. But did those divine forces which were so real for the Greeks cease to exist? Did they leave the scene, never to be heard from again? What if they are still here, just as they were then, only now lacking identity and our recognition?

The gods—by whatever names and no matter what the culture or historical epoch—kept us humble. We knew we must follow their laws, abide within their limits, and respect their powers. When we stopped believing in the gods and replaced them with scientific formulae and economic obsession, we no longer felt the need to honor and respect these higher powers.

We became the gods. But we are not. Certainly not. All we apparently rule over is the mess we have created for ourselves and which is engulfing us.

What is a god? Some greater force perhaps, outside our control and unavailable to us in our awareness, but which RULES. We do not know how the god thinks, what it wants, unless we are given a sign, unless we watch and listen. But how will we do that if we do not believe the god exists? Who is watching and listening to them now?

What is there now in our world that meets this definition of “god?”

What is outside of our control and unavailable to our awareness?

**Symptoms and Catastrophes**

When you develop a symptom (“from syn- + ppitein to fall; so to fall on, happen to; something that indicates the presence of bodily disorder; something that indicates the existence of something else”—whether physical or emotional or mental—you are suddenly faced with something threatening and therefore fearful. You didn’t put it there, would choose to make it gone, but here it is, needing to be faced. It “indicates the existence of something else.” It is as if you had been unexpectedly struck by an arrow. It is a sign (which—like “symptom”— also means “something indicating the presence or existence of something else”).

When a catastrophe (“from kata- + strephein to turn; a momentous tragic event ranging from extreme misfortune to utter overthrow or ruin; a violent usually destructive natural event; utter failure”) happens, whether on a mass or personal scale, you are again facing an event or situation which you did not choose and would prefer to avoid. It is another sign.

Falling in love may be more welcome (not always!), but it is very much the same as symptom and catastrophe. Romantic love has often been poetically described as a wound or illness. In a sense, these are all signs pointing to a hidden reality which has visited itself upon us and which we cannot fathom. The definition of sign from the dictionary is “something material or external that stands for or signifies something spiritual.” But if you look without prejudice, you will begin to realize that signs are not always material or external. They appear within us as well, as moods and fantasies, some wounding and unwelcome, others blissful and comforting.

So you are faced with symptoms and catastrophes which are experienced as external to your nature, as not-you, but happening to you.

Perhaps these symptoms and catastrophes are just our new names for those same old gods and goddesses. We have taken away their past home in the heavens, in the underworld, in the sanctuary and the place of worship, and—being homeless—they have been forced to assume these seemingly more mundane forms. Perhaps the ancient gods and modern symptoms and catastrophes are both just masks for mysterious “other” forces we do not understand.
Again, if a god is external to our awareness and a power to be reckoned with when it brings us face to face with its demands and limits, how is that different from the symptoms and catastrophes that enter our lives unbidden and unwelcome today?

If in fact these are our old gods in new guise, then how do we presently respond and how might we better relate to them?

**Symptoms**

The symptom appears—let’s say anxiety, a chronic pain or a disease—and our first typical response is denial: “It’s nothing; it will go away.” Some people respond by making a very big deal out of any symptom. We may call them hypochondriacs, but in fact they are according greater respect to the symptom than we do in our denial.

When the symptom does not follow our wishes and disappear, then we feel compelled to name it, to find out what it is, to get a diagnosis either from the doctor or the internet. By naming it we hope to gain the power over it to eliminate it. Treatment and cure. We want to rid ourselves of the symptom because it makes us uncomfortable, disturbing our security.

Why are we uncomfortable? Certainly there may be physical dis-ease, but we are also disturbed because of the unsettling way this unwelcome visitor has entered our “house” and made itself at home in our domain.

So having named our anxiety, our pain or disease, we seek the proper treatment—warmth, rest, medication, acupuncture, counseling. If we are lucky, the treatment eliminates the symptom and we move on safely in the illusion of our protection. If we are not, then the symptom resists our attempts and we must enter into a new phase of relationship with it, seeking a way to live with it.

But if in fact the symptom is now the only way for the gods to manifest in our lives, then eliminating it puts us at risk. The god manifests for a purpose, and by escaping its presence we have lost the opportunity to receive what it offers—the chance to gain insight into ourselves, to become aware of the need for change, or to correct our errors which if allowed to accumulate can lead to disaster.

This might be a good moment for you to pause and consider this very unorthodox thought again. Slow down, be aware of habitual thinking and feelings that may arise in considering this radical idea. Observe.

What if we treated our symptoms as if they were manifestations of the gods?

We would listen. With awe we would know that our survival and well-being were at stake and that history is filled with tragic examples of those who ignored the signs and warnings of the gods. We would ask: “What are you saying and what do you want from me?”

We would listen to hear through the symbolism of the symptom. Why anxiety? What kind exactly? Anxious about heights? Crowds? Death? Intimacy? Poverty? When did it start?

Is it arthritis? What is arthritis? A hardening, a kind of petrification. Is that somehow reflective of an attitude we have? Where are you hurting? The throat? Why the throat? Is there some issue not being faced about swallowing or communicating? What is the symptom saying in its specifics? Can we look at the symptom as a symbol conveying a message, even while at the same time seeking medical assistance?

We would ask “What do you want from me? Why are you speaking to me in this way at this time?”

We would wonder how to respond, to signify our submission and compliance with the wish of the god. We would find ways to alter our lifestyle, to change our attitude, and to perform rituals that would allow us to digest this new information. But compliance is not on our minds anymore.

None of this will happen when the symptom is viewed only as an annoying intrusion needing to be quickly removed. Yet we live in a world where symptoms are multiplying as rapidly as cancer cells. Diagnoses
beget more diagnoses and new medications appear each day. But somehow the overall picture becomes more and more bleak. We do not get better; we collectively get worse. Our approach is not working because we are not listening.

We seek to rule our own domain rather than to know we are granted what we have—the time we have and the comfort we have. We want to believe that we are the authority and arrogantly turn away from the humility necessary to submit. We go further and further away from our roots and our Source.

And it is here that we find ourselves today—lost and abandoned like an orphan without a home or parents, seeking protection from a guardian which we believe is science, medicine and technology.

Everything has its limit and its breaking point. We are near ours, and getting closer every day. Time moves on, each moment passes, each breath leaves us with one less, and our death approaches with no pause.

Isn’t it time to listen rather than to fight?

Catastrophes

While our personal lives may be visited unexpectedly by symptoms major or minor—a hangnail or terminal cancer—we also face the always present possibility of a catastrophe. Storms, transportation accidents, fires, and other disasters erupt suddenly and wreak havoc on small and large groups anywhere on our planet at any time.

On a smaller scale, a car accident or a slip on the ice can produce results that at the time may seem relatively minor, and yet the repercussions may last a lifetime, changing goals and possibilities for better or worse. Can we not imagine this too as an intervention by the gods?

Again, the gods were once considered as the cause of these “accidents” or turning points. Why? Because they were out of our control, originating from beyond our intent, and because they were considered to have a purpose, as if there were intention behind the specific circumstances of the event.

The point here is not a revival of Greek or other traditional religions. We have moved on. But if we imagine that these earlier effective formulations of the hidden and unknown forces in our lives might have been justified in their recognition of and respect for those forces, then we can at least realize that our current position of denying the existence of any such powers calls for reassessment. And our interface with these powers lies in the realms where they visit us with frequency—our symptoms and catastrophes.

As I sit writing the first pages of this book, the U.S. Space Shuttle has just at the same moment been sent crashing down to its death from 20 miles in space across eastern Texas, wiping out its crew of 7 astronauts. How would the ancients have viewed such an event?

Would it be seen totally as a random accident, without meaning other than to point out flaws in the space flight process which could eventually be specified and then eliminated? Just as we do with the symptom, this is how our civilization responds to the fearful prospect that highlights our vulnerability and mortality when someone is suddenly wiped away in an unpredictable catastrophe. There is no consideration of the event as a sign, and if one were to speculate on that possibility, they would have forfeited any credibility in the eyes of our official institutions.

The ancients would have immediately sought for guidance and interpretation from their wisest elders, their seers. The event would be “read” as a sign, much like the symptom would be read as a sign. They would seek to divine (“the art or practice that seeks to foresee or foretell future events or discover hidden knowledge usually by the interpretation of omens or by the aid of supernatural powers”) the intention, the hidden purpose, as a message from the gods intended for humanity, in order to adjust to this new directive.

The lines of communication between each of us and our mysterious roots have been lost. We are the orphan with nothing to protect us and no one to guide us. Whatever “Mother” gave birth to us all, whatever
“Father” rules this Universe, we are on our own, like the hero of the “Hymn of the Pearl,” unless and until we are shocked into awakening and remembering who we really are.

Maybe that letter that was sent by his royal parents has been sent to you. Maybe it is contained in a symptom or catastrophe that has intruded unexpectedly into your life. Have you considered that possibility?

Consider it now.

**Signs**

It might be extreme to suggest that every symptom or catastrophe contains a hidden meaning. But is it reasonable to assume that any such event is NEVER a sign? The thought that something is hidden or concealed naturally makes the mind uneasy. The rational mind lives for clarity and certainty. It often sees the world through a two-color spectrum—black and white. If it’s not one, it must be the other—no gray in the middle where it might fall into confusion. It won’t be your mind that will lead you into the realm of the Mystery, though it may carry you to its edge. It will have to follow your curiosity into the mists and there try to do what it does best—clarify and sort things out.

If you were to be married and the place where the wedding was to be held burned down the night before, would you consider that a possible sign? Even if you never thought like that before, don’t you think something inside you would wonder, a slight doubt might be raised? What could that be, if it’s not your rational mind? Is it only alarm and fear, or some deeper instinct dormant from years of neglect? Like your appendix, you still carry a vestigial irrational antenna which once was adept at seeing through the obvious for the concealed.

But now such musings are considered “spooky” or “weird.” The intuitively felt oddity must be dismissed before your inner censor or others suspect your sanity. How did we learn to think this way? What is it meant to avoid? What does it protect? What does this dismissive reasoning think of the orphan soul inside you? Does it stand at the gate, guarding your reason against the corrupting influence of fantasy, innocence, and ambiguity?

Are the fluctuations in the stock market based solely on rational decisions being made by statistics and logical analysis, or are many motivated by hunches and feelings in their decisions? Like astrology, the belief in signs and omens has persisted through the ages, no matter what our official “experts” tell us to try to dissuade our “superstitious” leanings. The irrational mind cannot be eliminated, though we certainly have tried.

But if you want to go about talking about how this or that event was a sign that such-and-such was going to happen, who would you expect to listen? In our desire for a universe that can be controlled by technology and logical thought, we have swept intuitions and gut reactions under the rug. These still function as they always have, but now they are beneath the radar, not acknowledged. People are compelled to back up their hunches with rationalization so as to make them seem reasonable. But ask any wildly successful person how they got where they are, and almost always they talk about hunches, chance, or intuition, if not fate. When you are successful, you can often afford to openly acknowledge the irrational, though not always. Look at the reaction when news leaked out that President Ronald Reagan and his Chief of Staff were using information from an astrologer.

So who is there to tell us about the signs now? What if it is up to you to read the hidden meaning of events in your life? Could you? Would you even dare to try? What if in fact there IS a deeper meaning, and the only thing keeping you from seeing it is your belief that no such meaning could exist? And where would you say such a belief comes from? Is it the result of rigorous experimentation? Is it a collectively held taboo?

Think about it: for thousands of years people assumed there were hidden powers (gods) at work in their lives. They made crucial personal and group decisions based upon the interpretations of a few “seers” who claimed that they could read divine intention in the stars, animal entrails, tea leaves, or the day’s hunt. Now
that is all gone and we are operating as if we are handicapped by this lack of vision. We don’t know where we’re going, have no plan as to where it should be, and seem largely at a loss, and lost.

Is it that radical an idea to wonder if perhaps those people before us actually had something going for them? That maybe our current attitudes about hidden signs are wrong? Can you pause long enough to really examine why you believe that the events in your life could not possibly be signs waiting to be read, indicating a direction or a suggestion that you change your stance, correct your course?

If this is how you think, then do you really know why? So many of our fundamental assumptions, upon which we base our lives and decide which things are important and which are meaningless, come from questionable sources. Perhaps one of the main reasons more people are unable to consider an actual living Higher Power of some sort (not just a kindly old man who favors only “our” religion) or the presence of invisible intentional powers and the signs they leave us, is that to really consider these things would undermine the unexamined assumptions that we rely on to give us our false sense of security.

To realize the Mystery as present in every moment of uncertainty, and to understand that no one REALLY KNOWS the ultimate Truth about anything, leaves us very vulnerable, teetering on the edge of the abyss of the unknown. It’s much easier of course to take the words of the experts and authorities as dependable—until you reach a situation like we have now, where their words have led us to, as is said, “going to hell in a hand basket.”

So what choice do you have? Blindly follow those who assume the air of superior knowledge, those who have led us to our predicament, or let go of the illusion that they offer protection from the scary realization that NO ONE KNOWS? If you let go, then you have no other choice than either to go looking for different experts, say an astrologer to replace your broker, or to take the risky plunge into trying to find your own inner source of guidance.

Some would argue there are no signs to be read, only vivid imaginations. Perhaps they are closer to the truth than they realize. Maybe there are really signs, and the way to read them is with the imagination. How will we begin to salvage the imagination and its fantasies from the trash heap where modern civilization has put it?

You have a dream. You remember only a scrap of it, but it grabs your attention. You feel like there’s something there, but you can’t quite get it. So you give it up. But if you only wondered if perhaps there might really be hidden messages contained in dreams and events, you might not let it go quite so quickly. All that’s required with a dream is to keep it around for a while. Just to wonder about it. Not even to wonder what it means, just what is this? If you hold a dream or fragment in your mind for a while, as a curiosity or puzzle, you will often find a moment of realization, an “aha!” And once that happens, dreaming will never be the same. It’s like your first kiss—a channel of communication has been opened.

So the first important key for determining if there are signs hidden in everyday life and its happenings is your willingness to give something your attention for a while, rather than dismissing it as foolish or meaningless. You don’t have to obsess for the whole day and neglect your work, just keep it in your mind. Think about it during the morning commute, maybe while you’re eating. Maybe your curiosity leads you to do a little research on the internet. You dream about a three-legged chair, and you look it up. And in reading, something strikes you as odd, or maybe reminds you of a situation in your life. Something suddenly makes sense. You have uncovered meaning in your dream. That’s how it works.

This is very different from the way we’ve been trained to use our minds. This buried and little-used ability is in most of us, but it is not valued and there are few opportunities to develop it. It is another facet of the orphan soul. The fact that it’s been cast off and now seems to have no value does not make it so. There are many real treasures to be found in the refuse that was so quickly tossed aside in our enthusiasm for technology and reason.

Having reached a critical time in our world, it would seem likely if there were a God or divine powers, they would be working hard right now to get through to us. It is time to pay attention. It is time to wake up and look. It is time to stop following the fad of the day, each new trend in thought and philosophy which comes
and goes like last year’s Paris fashions, and to think for ourselves. No one is going to miraculously come from the skies to save us. If a Messiah is to come, it may well be in your mind and mine, in the awakening of our ability to find out for ourselves, to pay attention to the soul, and to try to fathom the deeper meaning of our lives.

There is nothing wrong with feeding our bodies. We must. But we now live in a time when the soul hungers and our response is still to feed the body. The soul hungers for wonder, contemplation, and fantasy, but we are deaf to the soul’s voice, and so when it needs filling, we respond in the only way we know, by shopping for things for the body and eating food. The soul withers while the body bloats.
Chapter Two
Losing Our Way — Losing THE Way

It is conventional to think that the ancients—the Chinese, the native American, the Hindu, the aborigine, the African bushman—lived in closer harmony with the earth. Their myths reflect a sense of belonging we seem to have lost, of feeling at home in this world. This more immediate connection may be due to the fact that ancient peoples were less removed in time from their origins—"younger" in terms of human development—and therefore more bound to their roots in the soil and in nature. Or perhaps this natural relation is the result of a lack of the sophistication which we now possess from our advanced technologies.

These two perspectives really say the same thing, but give opposite values to this earlier stage of innocence. In the first case, we see such natural innocence and belonging as a "paradise lost." This romantic view usually arouses the argument that such a time was fraught with dangers and very harsh, since it lacked our modern technological achievements. Life was mainly about survival.

The second point of view claims that we are better off to have lost our childish ways, that we were deluded and naïve. In fact, the same opposing attitudes are likely if you ask what anyone thinks about their own childhood. Some see it as a lost golden era, and others as foolishness to be outgrown. Is the truth perhaps in both, that there was some real value there that has been lost, and also benefit in growing up as well?

Our modern civilization believes the old trust in gods and nature spirits is outdated and superstitious ("a belief or practice resulting from ignorance, fear of the unknown, trust in magic or chance, or a false conception of causation") and that we "know better."

In the inflated rush of exhilaration from new discoveries which liberated us from mistaken beliefs and the limits of ignorance, we have thrown the baby (reverence for a divine or higher Power which has knowledge, intent and capability) out with the bath water (the imagined sources, sizes, names and appearances of such divine powers). While we cannot really imagine such a being as Zeus hurling thunderbolts or Loki, the Norse god of fire, we neglect to ask whether there may be another more modern yet still divine power responsible for these phenomena.

Instead we embrace our new knowledge of natural processes based upon quantitative measurement as the final or ultimate explanation for what we observe. This is like trying to explain a mystical experience on the basis of measured brain activity. But little do most of us appreciate how the new gods—named "matter", "gravity", "electricity"—are yet still unknown. Science has identified explanatory concepts which help us to understand the dynamics and mechanics of the world around us (and inside of us—"complexes", "compulsions", "addictions"). But science has yet to really explain exactly what these concepts truly are, or why they are.

By throwing out the belief in divine powers due to the refinement of our technical knowledge we have lost our way. There is no channel by which the messages of these powers can reach us anymore. The mind has closed in on its prideful superiority, compared to our superstitious past, and with that closing has come a painful isolation which is destroying us within and without.
When to my conscious outlook there is no possible way of going ahead, and I am therefore “stuck,” my unconscious will react to the unbearable standstill.¹

How are we to find our way back to the Source of our being, using terminologies and techniques acceptable to our modern sensibilities which neither embarrass us nor are beyond our capabilities? There must be a way to re-establish our natural connection with our taproot, the internal foundation that supported us before we outgrew our early myths and our beliefs in divine helping powers. We need them now as never before.

The quieting or stilling of desire has long been seen as a path to enlightenment or spiritual realization. Perhaps it is no coincidence that at a time of great spiritual poverty and shallowness our desires for any form of material gratification and entertaining diversion are being stimulated as never before. The void within that has been created by our abandonment by the gods (or have we abandoned them?) compels an almost insane continuous seeking for anything that can temporarily fill that emptiness. But nothing really does for long.

Time is now a commodity to be partitioned and scheduled, not a moving stream to be immersed in and carried by as it flows on and on. We are no longer at home in time, just as we are strangers in our world. If we could experience time as a river we could face the fact that its ultimate destination for us is the end of our life. By avoiding the confrontation with our death and the realization that we will be extinguished and our life will become a void, we have made our lives in the present more of a living death.

Time is running out. We have been duped into believing that there is so little time to do all the things we are taught we should be doing. What is the hurry? What is the deeper reason that pushes so many at such a frantic pace?

People are running themselves into the ground in order to keep up—but to keep up with what? We NEED to have the biggest SUV, the biggest house, the most friends, the most activities, to be seen as busy so as to appear successful. But it is killing us and our souls. Why do we do this? Is the trend toward obesity a sign of our overdoing as a way to compensate for our emptiness?

How will you find the time to devote to finding your soul through inner exploration? There’s never enough time. “Life is too short,” people like to say. But maybe life is too short to waste in meaningless activity when our souls are crying for relief. Indulgence to excess, rampant obesity and alcoholism and drug abuse, depression and anxiety all testify to the emptiness encroaching more and more on our pretense of “living life to the fullest.” How often do you buy something or eat something in order to fill the void?

We are starving for some kind of nourishment that is not being provided by advertising and entertainment. If your body needs protein, then all the carbohydrates in the world will not satisfy your need. What is it that we need so badly? We need to find protection and guidance somewhere, like the orphan within us, and our political leaders and educators are largely in the dark just as we are.

Rather than denying or running from the emptiness of the Mystery of existence, from not-knowing and uncertainty, we need to trust that what we seek is hidden within It. It is in the “holes” and “gaps” of our existence, the ones we compulsively try to fill, that our rescue can be found. If we would but watch and listen, be uncertain and curious, then the Mystery will speak to us, just as It has throughout history.

Religion was once the home of the Mystery, and devotion brought eventual initiation into Its secrets. But now religion, by paying lip service to “God,” joins science as another way to seek reassurance in the feeling of certainty. Now belonging to a church makes us one of the elect whom God will favor at the end of time while destroying all non-believers. This attitude was not apparent in the Mystery religions of ancient times.

As we said earlier, if a native American tribe came on hard times because of drought or vanishing food sources, it might be through the dream of a tribal shaman or wise person that the tribe would be guided to move to a different location. At other times, the flight of birds or the entrails of a chicken, the pattern on a tortoise shell or the counting of yarrow stalks revealed the signs to those who could “see” the hidden intent of the Divine.
What do we have today that can tell us, guide us?

Where do the signs reside?

**Karma, Dharma and Tao**

We are hindered in our need to recognize the inner world of the soul by the fact that our language has few words that apply. Whatever words there still are to refer to an inner and deeper realm have become concrete and literal like the imagery of the Bible. “Soul” has been shrunk to a vaporous ghost that is supposed to survive physical death. In other languages, there are still words that reflect the bipolar nature of the individual because it is recognized that persons are both ego and soul, lower self and higher Self, outer shell and inner essence:

> Two birds, beautiful of wing, close companions, cling to one common tree: of the two one eats the sweet fruit of the tree, the other eats not but watches his fellow. The soul is the bird that sits immersed on the one common tree; but because he is not lord he is bewildered and has sorrow. But when he sees that other who is the Lord and beloved, he knows that all is His greatness and his sorrow passes away from him.

We believe that the consciousness of a person is the whole self, that the psyche is whatever memories and thoughts, sensations and feelings we are aware of. Our inner world is supposed to be ruled by a single authority, or one God—the ego. But depth psychology discovered that the ego is only the center of its own world of consciousness, and that this whole ego kingdom floats precariously upon the great deep sea we call the unconscious. It is only natural for the ego to dearly wish that its authority would be sufficient to exert control over everything within the person. However Freud and others discovered that this was an illusion fostered by the ego to keep itself in power. The ego is at best a provincial magistrate of the psyche, refusing to answer all requests from the true ruler to submit to the Real Power upon which the ego’s little domain depends for its survival.

There are terms that are useful for describing life in the light of the soul that have been borrowed from languages which respect the Mystery, aware of the weaknesses and impermanence of the ego. “Karma”, “dharma” and “Tao” are three such words that have knocked on the narrow door of the Western psyche and been smuggled in by people searching for a greater enlightenment than that of reason.

These concepts made their first large-scale entry into our consciousness in the 1960’s when the partial collapse of traditional authority opened people’s minds to alternative possibilities and interest in what the East had to say. It became fashionable to meditate like the Beatles or throw the I Ching like the Grateful Dead. And with these new fads came the language of deep soul sophistication from China and India. In a sense this period began the questioning not only of political and religious authority, of parental authority, but also of the domination by the ego. LSD and other drugs in widespread use undermined the narrow and concrete domain of the ego and brought deep personal experiences that simply did not fit into the shallow model of the ego world.

This was of course terribly threatening for those who could not go beyond the literal and traditional. Ironically, the invading Eastern ideas and techniques were probably more traditional, or belonged to a deeper and much older understanding of the soul than that of our modern Western technological universe.

**Karma** has largely been considered to refer to the mechanics of reincarnation. The idea has been that either actions undertaken in the present lifetime will generate a kind of “fallout” that will influence the quality and circumstances of a future lifetime, or that favorable or difficult situations in the present are the outcome of beneficial or destructive actions in previous incarnations.

But these are only one aspect of what karma represents. In its broadest sense, karma refers to the natural tendency of the universe to keep all things in dynamic balance. This of course implies a very different picture of what our universe is and can do. In our own universe there is no apparent principle that keeps the individual acts of human beings in some kind of “record” that makes necessary future balancing. Our
law that “for each and every action there is a corresponding and equal reaction” only refers to the realm of physical matter. Karma just extends the same law into the non-material. We also have no theory of life beyond one single lifetime, since we believe there is no life beyond the physical body and ego.

Karma simply applies the same law of action/reaction, but extends it beyond the physical into the moral and behavioral. A life of rampant greed will necessitate another life of poverty. A life of gluttony produces a future life of hunger. Only a life of devotion and self-sacrifice will not generate karmic obligations for the future.

Of value for us here is the thought that the repercussions of any given act may extend beyond the immediate present. We do not have to accept reincarnation to believe in karma. We can see for example in the visitation of the “sins of the father” upon the son that there is a cost for wrong-doing. We do not have to fathom the mechanics of how such a balancing act can operate to accept the possibility that there is something inside you and me that does keep score.

The world we live in now is largely a world without any sense of karma. What the little self wants, the little self is going to have, and why not? What is there in our culture’s worldview that would give one pause before joining the latest pyramid scheme, even if someone else is going to lose out? That’s their problem we say: “Buyer beware.”

Going for it, living for today, and making the most out of your opportunities are the themes of life in a shallow world. Why yield on the highway, why not step in front of someone in line? It is now the strongest or biggest that rules, not the highest or best. If this sounds like the law of the jungle, it is.

If we are not going to accept the ancient Indian idea of karma, what do we have that will keep us in line? If you don’t believe that God is watching us, then why not get away with everything you can?

Let us not concern ourselves with questions of whether or not we have lived before or will live again. Let us not get lost in philosophical discussions about the mechanics of such a law of reincarnation. Maybe you have lived before and maybe you haven’t. This is not a debate about which philosophy to believe in. It’s about our having lost our way, being away from our original Home, and the need and hope that we will awaken before it is too late. And it is getting late.

If there is in fact Something mysterious inside you and inside me that we are calling the “True Self” and which is different from the ego and deeper, also outside consciousness and yet available to dialog and communicate through signs in dreams and fantasies, symptoms and catastrophes, then that Something may hold a pattern or a blueprint for our destiny which we can either stray from or embody. If you imagined that each decision you make has this hanging over it, you might choose differently. Yet we resist this idea of boundaries on our potential because it is too close to being childishly dependent on parents and rules and flaunts our ideal of the autonomous ego: “I can do whatever I set my mind to do.”

We don’t like to think that maybe we cannot. And “can’t” brings back memories of parental authority based quite often on nothing more than superior physical strength and intimidation. If you imagine that karma is nothing more than the same thing, of course you will resist. But what if karma is reflective of your own deep and True Self—a deeper “I” that brings greater fulfillment the more you are able to align your will with Its own, and an Identity that feels more like who you really are the more your conscious sense of self includes Its broader contradictions and the shadow self?

Karma brings an attitude toward life’s obligations and necessities that says, “If this is what I must do, then I will do it as well as I can, willingly.” This is very similar to Jung’s definition of free will, as “the ability to do gladly that which I must do.”

Do we pay for our transgressions or are we “free to do what I want, any old time” as the Rolling Stones put it? Do we live in a universe that has no central law to keep things in balance? And if the universe does in fact have a mechanism for karma, then what in the world do you imagine will be necessary in order to balance the results of our time of environmental destruction and rampant selfishness?
It is well worth the time to pause and ask yourself, do you believe in some concept like karma? And are you living your life each day in a way that reflects your answer?

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**Dharma** is another idea that only makes sense if you imagine that there is another deeper Self within you with a broader pattern to be lived, like karma. Dharma is like the law of your own being, the purpose for which you have been born, the role you have to play. It is what we refer to when we say someone is or is not “true to herself.” Every day you have opportunities to act and speak, or not to, that fulfill your dharma or do not. “Better is it to live one’s own dharma poorly than that of another well.”

In our world with no concept like dharma, we are brought up largely to fulfill the expectations of others. Parents and society have their own ideas about what your life or mine is best spent for. In one way or another, this usually translates into serving their ideals or purposes. Many times these ideals are worthy, and sometimes they are not. An ideal of heroism may not be authentic for you, but at least it’s a noble ideal. It is better than being expected to succeed in a field where your father or mother failed. Then it has very little to do with who you really are, and only to do with making up for someone else’s lack. This very common situation is deeply wounding to the individual. It is one aspect of the “primal wound” in which we are not seen by those around us for who we really are, only as an object to fulfill the wishes and desires of others.

In our times, particularly since the 1960’s, the concept of authenticity has a similar feel to the Indian term dharma. How is one to know one’s dharma? There is no astrologer present at our birth to inform our parents of our rightful place in the universe or how to fulfill our unique pattern, as there has been in other times and places. There is often very little concern for any question at all about individual purpose. The collective world has its own plans and uses for another cog in the wheel. There are both subtle and blatant pressures upon us to conform and to live up to others’ expectations.

What will tell you when you are living your dharma and when you are not? Signs will tell you. Dreams will disturb you, symptoms of stress will upset you, emptiness in your soul will warn you. If and when you become aware of such signs, it still remains a question whether you have the courage and self-reliance to turn aside from the path chosen for you by others and to be able to follow your own. The big question of your life’s authenticity and dharma is probably decided as much in the small and frequent choices each day about whether to be true to your inner nature in your dealings with the world or not. Being accommodating, when that is not how you really feel or what you really want, is not the way to fulfill dharma.

The desires to please others and to belong are often opposed to the living of your real and True Nature. What will you stand on as foundation if the approval of others is no longer there? Defiance is not always dharma either. A reactionary stance in which you think that you are strong when you disagree is no pathway to authenticity. It is a reaction, a rigid stance that is both limited and limiting.

Ask yourself, are you living your dharma now? If not, was there a time when you did, or at least when you knew what was the right thing for you? Do you know now what it would mean for you to be more authentic and to live your dharma each day? Can you see any instance in the recent past or coming up where you face the choice between authenticity or “living the dharma of another?”

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“How do we talk about something that cannot be spoken of? The **Tao** is an elusive Chinese concept that can only be approached indirectly, like many other ideas that attempt to describe the Mystery: “It is not this, it is not that.” This technique is also found in India, where in order to find your way to the core of your being, you simply observe all thoughts, feelings and sensations that arise into awareness, and meet each one with “neti, neti,” which means loosely “this is not me either.” After negating all contents of consciousness, you are left with a pure subjective state, the Witness or Observing Self. You are meditating.

The Tao can be translated as the “Way.” It can be imagined somewhat like the feedback devices that beep more loudly when you are on course and less or not at all when you stray. In each moment there is a Way.
that is right. In each action or non-action, each choice, there is an alternative that is in synch with, compatible
with, expressive of the Tao. This would then suggest that there is an objective pattern that can be followed
that is not generated by, nor known by, the conscious ego. The ego that seeks to follow the Tao is looking
for an intuitive sense that tells it how to follow the proper path.

This concept is somewhat akin to dharma, and karma could be seen as the natural self-correcting tendencies
of the universe, and of you and me as part of the universe, that nudge or clobber us to stay aligned with the
Way or Tao. In all these three cases, there is a sense of a helpful if unconscious other “self” within us that
keeps score, has a pattern for the fulfillment of our unique role or destiny, and may act through our souls or
uncontrollable circumstances when necessary.

If there is any truth to these assumptions, then we certainly should be expecting greater disruptions—both
from inside the individual psyches of more and more people, and through collective and natural environ-
mental catastrophes—that are meant to awaken us and to push us away from the brink of self-annihilation.
Signs of straying away from dharma and Tao are increasing illness, insanity, meaninglessness, and disre-
spect for life. You do not need to be a mystic to see which way we have been going.

Where Are We?

Let’s try something.

Let’s try to drop our preconceptions and prejudices to whatever degree possible and to take as honest and
objective a look at ourselves as we can.

In our effort to grasp our present situation, let us begin by looking backwards to see where we’ve come
from. From this perspective, if we can gain some recognition of our present state of affairs, we can begin to
speculate on our future, on the path we seem to be on and where it might lead.

We have evolved over millions of years from more primitive and simpler life forms. Preceding that, we
have to allow that the materials by which this evolution proceeds probably developed from earlier and
simpler forms of matter. The Hindu image of the Days and Nights of Brahma—inconceivably long periods
of alternating activity and apparent non-existence lasting billions of years—can fit nicely with our scien-
tific hypothesis of the “Big Bang.” We can imagine the Big Bang as the beginning of our present “Day of
Brahma,” just not necessarily the first or only such Day.

During this “Day” which we guess began 3.5 billion years ago according to the latest estimate, evolution
has unfolded simple atoms organizing into molecules into single-cell and then multi-cellular organisms.
From inert matter into living forms, from dense and apparently unconscious and unresponsive materials
into conscious and sensitive creatures.

So we can see that first evolution was carried by the gradually increasing complication of simple inert
elements (matter). From there at some point evolution had enough materials to work with to proceed to the
next level—living biological organisms. From inorganic to organic. Again the process seems to have gone
from simple amoebae and paramecia to more and more complex living beings consisting of cells which
could reproduce and absorb nutrients. From the simple to the complex.

When this living organic stage had produced human beings, this biological emphasis or wave seems to have
ended with the emergence of the next level: the unfolding of consciousness. Humans became increasingly
capable of perceiving more and more, and of knowing, thinking and imagining with greater complexity.

Try to picture a wave of progress (physics) first riding the advance of material substances from the simple to
the complex, then another wave (biology) taking over moving forward through the growth and increasing
complexity of living organisms until with the human being, a third wave (psychology) comes to the fore
in the development of consciousness or the capacity to respond to the environment through reason and
creative imagination. It appears that each stage begins with the simplest elements, and after expanding and becoming more complex, it reaches the necessary level to provide the foundation for the next wave.

Let’s pause here during this somewhat dry Evolution 101 lecture to wonder:

It doesn’t matter for our purposes whether we call this brief description “God” or “Darwinian evolution.” Let’s not get caught in that trap of arguing beliefs. Let’s just grant that something can be observed and scientifically justified that resembles a process of movement from the simple to the complex, and from the inert to the living to the conscious.

It is here in our quiet meditation on such a process that we find ample opportunity to consider the Mystery. How did such a process begin? Was it accidental or for a purpose? Is it going somewhere or is it running itself randomly until it runs out of steam?

Let us try to make this more personal and relevant. This is not an abstract lecture on the history of human consciousness (well yes it is, but it is not just that). Stop and breathe. Feel how your lungs involuntarily force the air out and expand to take it in...

Place your hand on your heart or your fingertips lightly on your front of your throat, and feel the rhythmic pulsing of your circulatory system, beating the blood around your body, bringing it into the heart for oxygen and sending it out to the outlying areas of your body—the same in/out rhythm observed in the lungs.

Imagine how many millions of years it took for these taken-for-granted movements to evolve.

Consider the equally involuntary process by which you take in life-sustaining nutrients and absorb what the body needs, then eliminate the waste. We’re talking about the Mystery of peanut butter sandwiches and fecal matter.

Try to open yourself for a moment to the utter miracle and Mystery that you are, considering yourself only as a living breathing organism, not even thinking yet about the miracle of mind and feelings and inspiration and imagination...

This Mystery of our deepest origins is the “orphan” who lives inside and who says: “I have come here from a place not known to you. I am your hope, but you do not see me. If you did, you would not want me.” How can it be that if we move forward into the uncertainty and not-knowing of who or what we really are, that it is there where we will find our answers? On the other hand, where else but in the place of not-knowing would we expect to find what we are looking for?

Why are we so casual, so disinterested, so blind to this miracle or Mystery which IS US? We are not talking about UFO’s or space aliens here, nor about detective novels or jigsaw puzzles. Are you able to open yourself for the moment to the utter not-knowing of who you are? To the amazing roots from which you’ve sprung, going back to the beginnings of the universe?

Does anyone out there ever wonder about these things anymore? Or is it just indicative of eccentricity, or of someone who needs to “get a life”?

Watch your mind and feelings to see if they suggest reasons or fears to back you away from this edge of the abyss of the unknown:

“We already know all this.”

“I feel dizzy and disoriented.”

“I’ve got to get busy now.”

“I’m hungry, thirsty, tired, need to watch TV.”

Please try to STOP! Just stop all the distractions if you can and try to realize the significance of BEING something you don’t really understand. You are an orphan. You may know the people who provided your
physical body, but you do not know your true Mother nor your Father—neither the One that provided the original seed that created us all as human beings nor the One that carried us and delivered us, and carries us now.

You don’t know where you really came from. You don’t know where you belong.

These unknown Parents are both lost in the dark depths of almost infinite time before the known, yet both are within you as well, waiting to be discovered here today along with your True Identity. But to do so, you have to have the patience and persistence and curiosity and imagination to LOOK inside, to wonder and question, and to hurdle the ideas and excuses that keep you from looking.

Are you still with me?

Let’s recap: if we can stop our running and wanting for a few moments, and we can wonder about the Mystery of what makes us tick as biological human beings, we bring ourselves to the edge of the known and the brink of the unknown. The only way to penetrate the Mystery of who we really are is to plunge into that Mystery, which means absolutely NOT knowing anything.

Don’t be distracted by the scientific and religious explanations. They are not going to help us with the Mystery, except to show us the partial answers and fantasies which have grown up along the way. Now they are less answers and more defenses which can be clung to in order to avoid the chaos and disorientation which real questioning will bring.

The closest inescapable thing to the Mystery we have in our lives today is the fact of our own future death. That too is dark and unknown, and with no reassuring belief system to hold us as religion did at one time (you’ll go to heaven, to the next world, etc.), death is greatly feared and avoided. But what is it that causes our fascination with death? As much as our fear wants to run, something else compels our attention; we cannot turn away. What is that?

Here too is the orphan—the Mystery of Death, all Mystery including the very real One of WHO AM I; WHAT AM I. (Orphan = “one deprived of some protection or advantage; without parents; bereaved”)

So, to resume our enquiry, we can see that we have mysteriously evolved from the past to our present situation as living breathing human beings. The latest wave of our development seems to have moved through our growth into an upright mammal with a brain to the unfolding of consciousness. What we know and are capable of knowing has grown tremendously since early homo sapiens (sapiens = “wisdom, good sense”).

It is now time for our awareness to grow, beginning to penetrate into the deeper layers of our own internal identity, not only the laws of matter (physics) or biology.

We have “progressed” from being obsessed with foraging for food to our present state of playing video games, searching for porn on the internet and gabbing on cell phones. But when we were searching for food we seemed much more in touch with our true identity than we appear to be now.

We appear very much to be in a phase of breakdown. As our previous respect for community, authority (both religious and secular), and each other has eroded to a chaotic level, there is less to hold us together, either as a group or individually.

Rather than facing our increasing anxiety and emptiness we are largely foraging for entertainment today. “Entertainment... in the popular sense at least, is a way of avoiding soul.”¹⁸ But if food feeds the body, what does entertainment feed? It feeds the need to direct our attention somewhere, rather than to let it come to rest on our problems and our emptiness. But it is our problems (symptoms and catastrophes) and our emptiness that now contain the Mystery that once was found in ritual and spirituality.

Who or what can make us face this seemingly empty place within us and our society? We are so driven to distraction and our social well-being is completely equated with materialism. They are marketing us to death in order to provide one more dollar for profit. The more we avoid facing our emptiness, the emptier our world has become of substance and nourishment.
When feelings and thoughts threaten to break through our defenses against this underworld and to reveal our despair and deep longing for something meaningful and worthwhile, many of us turn to medication, when we would be better off with meditation. But how can someone meditate and open to the swirl of chaotic and fearful feelings within when there is so little in our culture to help us to be still while empty or to bear what we will find within ourselves?

As an example, at one time Saturday or Sunday was a day set aside from the usual business of the week and all people knew how to use that day for worship, reflection, or at least for rest and recreation. A mini-vacation, it allowed us to experience a “vacating” or emptying of our normally busy lives. But now the fear created by the emptiness of this withdrawal has led us to abandon any attempt at retreat on Sunday. Instead it is seen as a day to be even busier in trying to make up for the lost time of the rest of the week, a time for chores to be done, a time to “catch up.”

Almost as if systematically, all signs or opportunities for quiet reflection and inactivity have been stripped from our environment. Why? Is it the discomfort and fear of sitting still and being with ourselves, or is it because there is no profit to be made? Or both?

So we find ourselves in the present having evolved mysteriously from inert matter from the stars, the apparent pinnacle of life’s unfolding, unable to find anything better to do with our achievements than to make money from them. Materialism has perverted all higher aspirations—art to make money, suffering to make money.

There is apparently nothing inside of us anymore except demons and space. God has retreated to the outer fringes of the universe, pushed back by our scientific space voyages of discovery. It’s as if not finding the big bearded man we once called God up there on His throne, we have decided God does not exist at all.

When you were small, if you thought your mother was in the kitchen because someone told you so, and you went there and did not find her, would you then conclude that your mother did not exist???

While exploration of the outer material world has not turned up God or gods or spirit and instead has only brought us an emptiness full of random chaos, investigation of our inner world has lagged far behind. It is there the Mystery can still be found. But there is no interest anymore in wondering who we are, what we are, why we are. The questions have been declared irrelevant and anyone who considers them is depressed or morbid, taboo, off-limits. We can trace our material evolution scientifically back to the earliest atoms, but what effort is being made to discover a similar origin for our thoughts, our consciousness?

So again to recap the present: we have arrived at the culmination of evolution after millions of years only to watch Entertainment Tonight, devour Krispy Kremes (mmmmm), shop, shop, shop till you drop, and make money. Obese people in obese vehicles guzzling gas and polluting the air. Three-car garages. Storage bins rented to hold all our toys and equipment. Worship is now not for gods, but for movie actors (or “stars” who cannot act) and athletes. From stars in the sky inspiring us to wonder, to “stars” with lots of money.

There is someone inside you now, crying out in hunger for something that no store or book or dvd can ever give you. While it appears that this food has been removed from our world, it is in fact all around you, and in you. Don’t ignore this cry or consider it too small or unworthy. It is the crying out of the abandoned and starving orphan in you, needing protection and nourishment.

Don’t listen to me. Listen to your insides and see if you hear someone who has been abandoned, who feels lost and alone, who cannot find the deep sustenance s/he needs in this world.

We are on the brink and we must leap, or we will be pushed by our own foolishness into something from which we may never recover. Choose to leap into the Void, the unknown Mystery, in order to find the Other You that waits only for your recognition. Or be pushed into the void of empty activity and mindless distraction, with your world becoming shallower and shallower, a parched desert offering no nourishment and only death.
Where Are We Going?

Where are we heading, now that we have skimmed our past and faced the present?

In the past, we were ruled by instinct in the body and its feelings. Gut reactions, emotions and natural responses of the biological being provided us with the knowing necessary to ensure survival.

In our times it is more the mental ego that rules. The ego’s authority is built on the subduing of instinct, just as our society is raised on the subjugation of nature. Instead of survival it is now specialness and image that drive many of us. Some are caught in the battle between instinct and ego, struggling to control emotional responses and physical desires that have the potential to do damage, especially to self-image. The ego’s drive is to acquire whatever will swell it to greater proportions and make it stand out as distinct from others. The ego does not recognize a Higher Power than its own. The power of instinct and the certainty of death pose major dilemmas for the ego, because it cannot control its own destiny.

Part of what we have lost with the ascendancy of the ego is the ability to be solidly who we truly are. The pressure to conform, to adapt to societal norms in order to fit in and be “normal” makes it difficult for anyone but the strongest individual to be true to themselves. The pressure has always been there, but our isolation from our True Nature has made us even more needy for a sense of belonging, no matter what it may cost us. Where our authentic nature and our character causes friction or disapproval, most of us shave a little off here, smooth the roughness, patch up the cracks, and before we know it, we’ve forgotten who we really are.

Living a life from an inauthentic place is death. Our world is filled with T.S. Eliot’s “Hollow Men” who have become so alienated from themselves that their only hope lies in following the footsteps of the masses. So artists are instead lawyers, writers are instead accountants, adventurers are instead housewives. No single vocation is authentic, but there is something genuine and true in each of us, in our souls, and by the time we arrive at adulthood, we may have lost our way, pleasing others or their expectations to such a degree that we ourselves are lost. This is an epidemic of our times.

Is this you? Are you living the life that is truly yours? Are the choices you’ve made along the way really true for you, fulfilling for you? Or is there a desperate voice inside you, feeling the passing of the hours and the days, each moment taking you further away from the man or woman you were born to be? Is this the time when you begin to make your way back, no matter what the cost, to your own dharma?

And what about our future? If instinct ruled the past, and ego dominates our age, then what will make the choices in the time to come? It is probably likely that with the world as it is and heading in its present direction under the leadership of the ego, we are doomed unless there is a shift in perspective.

Let us look briefly at the future, as projected from our collective past through the present.

People over age 50 can remember when the world was a different place. Those younger have no such memory of a time of values, respect and integrity. This only hastens our slide into chaos as time passes. Chaos is right for now as the old dissolves and the new has not yet formed. But we have lost our way so badly that we need a good smack to wake up the sleepers. What will that smack be?

Many believed 9/11 was such an awakening, but time has shown it not to have made much impact on most of us who were not personally jolted by that tragic event. Instead the events of 9/11 have largely served to heighten fear and paranoia, and to justify the loss of individual rights as the government takes even greater control, thus pressuring individuals to conform to an official profile and to avoid any appearance of differing from the norm.

I hold no fantasy of a sudden reversal and improvement. This is a call to each of us to ask ourselves what we must do before we die to leave the world something other than an accumulation of property. And we are dying now.

There will be more environmental disasters, and worse.
There will be more intrusive and aggressive marketing and profiteering.  
There will be more senseless killings, and worse.  
There will be more people losing their grip and committing random acts of violence.  
There will be more corruption and greed.  
There will be more terrorist attacks, and worse.  
There will be more asthma where children cannot breathe.  
There will be more disease, more denial and more death.  
Throw in genetically altered food and human cloning without sufficient controls.  

These do not require a crystal ball. It is happening now, and has been for quite a while. What provides any hope that these trends will diminish?  

Our only hope is to embrace the Mystery in us all, to trust in the Source of Life to inspire us to live better, to retreat from the uncontrolled desirousness, shallowness and distraction in order to live more simply and to LISTEN.  

It takes courage and patience to explore and learn about our inner terrain. It may take years if not a lifetime. Results will be slow to appear, and the rewards may not be material. But there is within each of us an Other, an Other Self or “I.” There are in fact many others in us, and discrimination is necessary to sort them out, to understand which are in our best interests and which are destructively selfish or wounded.  

Why should we bother?  

Does the future already upon us sound appealing? Is it what you want for our children? Something bad is going to happen...don’t you feel it?

**AIDS, Alzheimers and ADD**

As we carry on the endless human struggle to survive the many threats in our world, we are confronted by death through disease, war, accidents, environmental cataclysms and the pollution of the air, water and food we need. It should be apparent by now that in our heroic quest to eliminate disease from our world with all the technological means at our disposal:

1. Profit rules. The massive research effort to save humanity from death and disease is mainly motivated by profit, not compassion or the desire to save mankind.

2. Human values are largely neglected as tests and treatments become so expensive and inflated that they are beyond the reach of more and more people—not to mention whole nations. Health care has become a game played by insurers and providers.

3. Most importantly, the eradication of diseases like polio, typhus, tuberculosis and the plague do not really seem to make an overall difference, because new diseases and disorders appear to take their place. So-called gain is measured by increasing life-span, with two glaring omissions: first, life-span is increased because hospital care is much more prevalent than in the past and death is delayed even when it is appropriate; and second, while people are living longer, no concern is shown for quality of life.¹⁰ What good does it do for us if we live 5 years longer but we go broke paying to line the drug company’s pockets or are shuffled off to a “home” to sit in a chair in front of a television?

Now we are confronted by new diseases and disorders like AIDS, Alzheimers, SARS and ADD. Why weren’t these an issue in our past? What brings them to us now? If we ever do conquer them, what will arise to replace them, still haunting us with our own vulnerability and death?
Millions of humans are dying from and being infected with AIDS. Since most live in Africa, it is somehow of lesser concern to the rest of us. AIDS comes from indiscriminate sex and swapping of needles, and is considered by fundamentalists to be retribution from God for immoral sinful behavior, as if God were saying “STOP your fooling around!”

Who can say for sure that they are wrong? Is it a sign?

Alzheimers is expected to become widespread as baby boomers age. What a symbolic statement of our times! We forget who we are and everyone and everything around us. We FORGET! We have forgotten who we are, like the hero of the “Hymn of the Pearl.” Rather than making any effort to remember our true identity, we run from the emptiness like the orphan we are, panicked because we lack protection, lack a meaningful container of ideas in which to believe.

ADD/ADHD (Attention Deficit Disorder) afflicts millions of youths and adults according to our experts. Any aberrational behavior inherits a new label, a new disorder, thus legitimizing it and creating a false security by pretending we can “cure” it with proper drugs and treatment. Ritalin becomes the new God, making its owner wealthy and having unknown long-term effects on those who feel there is no alternative.

What does it MEAN that so many adults and children are “diagnosed” as being incapable of sustaining their attention? Why should we be able to, given the amount of random and meaningless stimulation aimed at us from our earliest days? When is quiet time provided, peaceful introspection or concentration modeled by our leaders or teachers, or the value of reflective contemplation taught?

Would we call an alcoholic someone who has Sobriety Deficit Disorder?

Is it possible that what we diagnose as Attention Deficit Disorder is really indicative of an addiction to stimulation? Anything that loses its stimulating appeal is quickly dropped from attention as something more exciting is needed. And where would a child learn this behavior?

We have become pawns in the system that wants us to sit and receive countless messages competing for our attention and for our money. This system will become more and more prevalent and intrusive, as it has so much in the past 20 years.

This is not good. Some might go so far as to call it evil as it saps our attention and demands our time, not for our own benefit, but for the gain of others. We are being marketed to distraction.

**Literal Replacing Spiritual**

If we can admit that our current way of life is taking us in the wrong direction, or at least are willing to question it, then we must ask ourselves what is the predominant value which rules us, providing the context for the goals we espouse and the motives which underlie our choices. The Supreme Value, the highest importance in our lives, is that which at other times has been called “God.” No matter how we may define this Being or what we call It, It reigns as the highest Value, above all others.

What is that Supreme Value today? It is not what we declare or wish, but that which is reflected in our actual lives and choices. Politically it appears to be money and power—dominance over others in order to enforce our will, and wealth in order to...what? It seems that accumulation is for its own sake, thus making possession and greed our apparent Supreme Value. Of course there is no one who will admit this, and so instead we find our governments operating in a two-faced way: pursuing policies to increase influence and resources while claiming to be serving God. But why would “God” have such an agenda? No founder of a major religion has ever said the purpose of that faith was to achieve greater power or wealth. Yet even traditional religions are today seen to be operating as if that were their goal. It’s all about money. Money is today’s Supreme Value, today’s God.

Another way to look at this is to realize that in the vacuum created by our loss of belief in the Mystery, money has become the substitute. Money is a symbol for our desires; we pursue it in order to be able to
have what we want. But why is it so important to have the things we buy with money? Are they really so valuable? Do they heal us? Do they fulfill us? Do they provide us with contentment and inner peace? Not often.

In the absence of the ability to have faith in an unseen and indescribable Mystery, we try to fill that substantial void with literal and concrete objects. We do not know we are doing it. We have lost something and worse—we don’t even know it’s gone. But it is not really gone, because the Mystery is always there, in every pause and every hidden reason behind what we do. Why we do this, why that, what motivates us really, eventually when pursued to its source disappears into a mysterious question. Of course most of us rarely travel there, and officially such a frontier is denied even its existence. To speculate on such things is called “thinking too much.”

We do not even feel the absence of the Mystery that for so long supported and sustained us as human beings. We numb this feeling and run from it with stimulation and the need to fill every empty space in our lives with something. Empty space is becoming extinct. The cemetery is one of the last places where quiet emptiness remains.

The doctor’s waiting room, the bus station and airport leave no stillness for reflection. There must be music or news all the time. Cell phones and iPods and Walkmen bring constant stimulation. Empty space is considered “boring,” which it is if you do not know how to be still and are uncomfortable with your insides, unwilling to entertain the inner guests and fantasies and images which will spontaneously arise if given room.

So money as symbol of desire is our ruler. We are ruled by desire, not by the objects we want, but by the wanting itself. As long as you are filled with the need or desire for something, you have a project and a goal, a reason for getting up each day. Choices are easier because they are considered in the context of whether they will help your desires be fulfilled or not.

But what if we are desire-free? What if we want nothing? Interestingly, when we are depressed, when we are pulled downward and inward, one of the main symptoms is loss of desire, loss of appetite. We no longer seek to fill our emptiness, we are just with it. Society has mustered all its forces to prevent just this from happening. We must “cure” the poor depressed person and restore their zest for life (i.e., “desire”) so they can get up and become a consumer once again. Of course suicide is a danger for the depressed person, but you have to wonder how much of a threat it would be in a society which understood depression as a timely need from within to go down and be still, without desire.

What if it were allowed and supported, helped along and accepted, rather than feared? The attempt to eliminate depression, as if it were a disease like cancer or polio, is a sure sign of our complete inability to recognize an inner imperative, an invisible but oh-so-meaningful world within which needs our participation. Depression is not always an illness or disease, but a call: time to STOP! and be empty.

But every behavior that interferes with our constant drive to go higher and get more is seen now as an affliction, something “wrong” which must be cured. The void created by our loss of Mystery now is filled with the literal and concrete. No respect is shown for non-material things like dreams and fantasies, or subtle reasons in the psyche for the appearance of our symptoms and compulsions. And these “diseases” which interfere with our “normal” activities of stimulating distraction and more and more accumulation of “things” are claimed to originate from literal causes like maladjusted brain chemistry and hormonal imbalance.

But even if diagnostic tests can verify that a depressed person lacks the normal level of a chemical in the brain, why do we assume a causal connection? What if a cause in the soul produces BOTH the chemical deficiency AND the resulting depression? By assuming symptoms are only caused by concrete and material bodily malfunctions, we do not even allow ourselves to consider the existence of a deeper cause. We seal off any penetrating questioning by stopping at the literal level. Dead end—case closed. If we are truly on target in our concrete materialistic assumptions, then why with our increasing ability to diagnose and our rapidly growing arsenal of technological wonder drugs, are we not a healthier society?
Notes


3 For a great meditation on this theme, you might consider watching Woody Allen’s “Crimes and Misdemeanors.”

4 *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna speaking to His disciple Arjuna.


10 Rachel Remen, M.D., *The Human Patient*
Chapter Three
Up and Down, In and Out:
Why the Ego Doesn’t Want to Awaken

For the ego is not the whole psyche, only one member of a commune. Therapy works through the paradox of admitting that all figures and feelings of the psyche are wholly ‘mine,’ while at the same time recognizing that these figures and feelings are free of my control and identity, not ‘mine’ at all.\(^1\)

According to many wisdom traditions, the wheel of life can be particularly unconscious and habitual until we awaken. Eventually the natural process of life brings us the opportunity, often through shock, to “wake up” to the person we truly are, beneath the façade of social expectations, pleasing behavior to win approval, and—for most of us—many defensive strategies to keep the ego’s rulership and image intact by fostering the illusion of invulnerability and specialness.

It is our “sleeping” habitual state that is responsible for the mess we are in. It was adequate for a while, until our technological know-how entailed a level of responsibility beyond the capacity of the defensive shallow ego. Now old-fashioned human/animal greed and aggression carry too big a price with our nuclear and biological weapons, cloning, and the destruction of the fragile environment for profit. Continuing to sleep—to remain unaware—is destroying the world we leave for our children.

How do we begin (or continue) to awaken—to free ourselves from the “wheel” of life and its inertia? It is generally agreed that the first step requires simply stopping our compulsive habitual behavior to observe ourselves without judgment. But if you’ve ever tried—say stopping smoking, over-eating, over-working or any of countless addictions—you know it is not easy. This is, however, how we begin to recognize the “other” in us, the forerunner of the One we need as our Companion if we are to survive, the One Who can guide us and sustain us. At first this “other” can appear to oppose your will, even your well-being.

One result of this self-observation can be the discovery that “I” seem to have originated in some kind of act of splitting or separation from the unified though disorganized chaos of unconsciousness. Arising from the womb of this original “mother” like a new island from the sea, we are divided into a subjective “I” and the objective “not-I”—the world around and outside of us.

Only by emerging from our identification with unconscious or womb or mother can we establish a separate sense of identity. Yet what follows from this separation is the illusion that we ourselves are a unity, a well-organized and freely choosing self, an “I.” This makes it necessary, sooner or later, to face up to and admit that we are indeed fragmented and multiple, that we consist of opposites, which brings the encounter with our “shadow” which we will return to shortly. Beyond this recognition of our internal opposition and division lies the potential realization of a deeper, more inclusive Self, an identity which is not the same as “I” but includes the “I”—a true Unity.

So observing ourselves honestly and then admitting our addictions compels us to experience our powerlessness, our inability to control our own lives, shattering the ego’s illusion that we ARE in control. The
ego tries to control everything, and where it can’t, it pretends it can or dismisses what it cannot control as unimportant. Awakening is felt to be a defeat by the ego, by our personality. Or to put it conversely, not getting what we want, feeling defeated or powerless is the opportunity to awaken to who we really are.

No wonder we feel resistance to looking too deeply or seeing ourselves too clearly. The ego prefers “up,” but our waking comes from going down. Winning, being successful, meeting your expectations does not awaken you to a deeper awareness of yourself (unless you have always seen yourself as a “loser”). Losing, rejection and disappointment do (or at least can). The ego wants to be “in,” but self-realization makes one an outsider.

Of course, who among us seeks out such experiences? Typically the only person who seeks defeating experiences is the one whose ego defense is to be the “victim” or “loser.” In this case, the failure only feeds and reinforces the defense; it does not awaken. Awakening requires a gentle or shocking shattering of the ego shell. We are often in need of repeated disappointments before we stop and think that maybe something is not as we imagined it to be. The first line of defense in failure is to seek someone or something to blame. Then we don’t have to examine our own imperfections and weakness.

The devious strategies we devise as egos are quite remarkable, and if we are able to examine them with any objectivity (not easy) we can see they are designed to keep us from looking at ourselves and seeing ourselves as we truly are. We may even avoid seeing our goodness and strength, our gifts and loveableness. The issue does not seem to be whether the things we avoid seeing in ourselves are flattering or demeaning, only that they do not fit with the image we have built for ourselves (largely though parental and social conditioning) and therefore threaten to break down that image. This is about survival, but the problem is that it’s the survival of the ego/self-image. If this is partial (it almost always is) or false, then the survival of the ego may mean the destruction of ourselves—our total personality.

Imagine being lost in the desert and having no water. As thirst drives you mad and your craving for water becomes the only thing that matters, you come upon a spring. Drinking from this water which saves your life, it is certainly understandable if at that moment you make water your ultimate Value, the God to be worshipped. Yet if you do, you will drown.

Or imagine starving for love because of a harsh and cold family upbringing, the first time someone showers you with attention, warmth and affection, that person becomes your God, someone you worship. And you become obsessed with being with that person. Or perhaps in a life devoid of spirit and meaning, you discover a book that reaches you, convinces you that your life does indeed have a purpose. So you dedicate yourself to absorbing the ideas of the author and preaching their system. And your mind closes.

When a great need is filled, at least for the moment, it is human nature to attach with full force to whatever has nourished you. But to do so in the long term is disastrous, because what is needed is the absorption and integration of this experience into the totality of your being. If instead you run away from the hunger and toward the nourishment, you abandon yourself and your hunger, substituting one type of starvation for another. This is how we often proceed.

As a result, many people are not addicted to cigarettes, sex, alcohol or drugs, but to light, height, certainty, community. These do not sound like addictive substances that can be abused, but if you attach yourself and your well-being to the need for the constant presence of these and other sources of nourishment, then you simply prolong the imbalance and the need for healing in your personality.

Are there groups to help addicts who believe that the world and everything in it has to be light, who refuse to accept the dark? They see darkness only as something to be converted to light. What about someone who lives addicted to meaning, unable to accept that life contains random chaos and meaninglessness? What about addiction to happiness, depression, a positive attitude? Everything belongs; everything counts. There is a “time for everything under the sun.” Anything less is partial and therefore less than the truth. It is easy to say “holistic” without realizing what “whole” means.

Life is light and dark, high and low, certain and a mystery, togetherness and solitude. If after a life lived in darkness or depression, confusion or loneliness, we may feel fortunate to encounter the cherished (and possibly feared) opposite, we are taking the next step in the recognition of the opposites. To become extremely
attached to the new pole as if it can eliminate the old one may feel better, but it still is to remain under the spell of splitting what is whole, and we remain split in ourselves.

As we said about the emergence of the ego: our origin as a conscious being was a splitting of that which was whole, but undifferentiated, chaotic and unmanifest. Maybe this reflects the symbolism of the myths of the separation of heaven and earth. Or maybe it’s a genetic memory of the cell-splitting that began our own organism. The ego arrives eventually with the false belief in its own authority and autonomy, omitting the splitting and inner divisions that brought it to power. Any continuation of splitting, in which part of the psyche is allowed to be conscious and part is banished into the dark world of the unconscious, only works against the spiritual goal of recovering your whole personality, of being whole.

Remember, our point is that we have lost our way, that we are living falsely and dangerously on the edge and moving in the wrong direction. Wrong not according to my beliefs or yours, to this religion or that philosophy, but wrong in light of what is occurring all around us. Increasing mental illness and medication of all, especially children, lack of respect between individuals and groups, loss of central values and integrity can be seen anywhere and anytime. These are the signs that we are losing our chance, missing our opportunity to live life in any enriching and rewarding way.

So we see that the first step toward reversing this momentum towards destruction is to awaken to the state we are actually and truly in. Open the eyes and see what IS. Our realization of the prominence of addictive behaviors has provided just such an opportunity in the past two decades. And hitting a wall, being smacked by life, experiencing defeat, failure and disappointment may be the only way to awaken in a world which does not value self-discovery for its own sake or teach us anything about who we really are other than to be consumers. The time is ripe, with our growing recognition of the prevalence of addiction. It used to be the alcoholic or drug addict who was singled out. But in the last few decades it has become more and more apparent that almost all behaviors—when compulsive and out of control—can be seen as addictions.

Addiction is on our collective minds. Sex addiction, workaholism, gambling, chocaholism, addiction to power and control, shopping madness (especially obvious during the “holiday” season), tv, video games, sports, pornography—obsession is everywhere. And wherever it is, we are not in control. There is a reason why the first of the Twelve Steps originally articulated in Alcoholics Anonymous is “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.” We see what IS after evasion and denial of the truth.

Do you have the courage to stop right now and list your top two or three addictions? Even the first one? And if you can, can you take some time to actually reflect on it and its consequences in your life for you and those around you?

It’s not easy. Most people don’t do it. And that’s a major reason why we are where we are. But we have come a long way in that regard from the time when people were so ashamed to enter rehabilitation programs or support groups. Now groups are everywhere, and the question has changed from “do you have an addiction problem?” to “what addictions do you have?”

To return to where we started: the ego guards its image, false or partial as it may be, with great ingenuity and tenacity. If you were only your ego, then any troubling addiction would be gone with the simple choice to let it go. If you were only your ego, as prevailing cultural attitudes and education believe, there would be no one in you to observe the ego’s defenses or to choose to try to do anything to change it. But people do, and there is someone or something inside of you who can observe and make choices, even when they go against the ego and lead to painful transformation.

Who is this? Really—WHO IS THIS? This is not a language trick or clever reasoning. Any of us can glimpse this real fact that THERE IS SOMEONE INSIDE OF US CAPABLE OF SEEING OURSELVES IN A TRUER AND DEEPER WAY THAN THE WAY WE HABITUALLY PRESENT OURSELVES OR ENVISION OURSELVES.

How can such a remarkable fact remain so hidden, rarely brought up or discussed?
Put down the book, and think about it: who or what is it that is inside you that does observe and is observing your behaviors and thoughts, and can recognize when they are defensive and deceptive (though not always immediately)?

Perhaps there is a silent “conspiracy” (call me paranoid) among all of us egos to continue the shallow and false ways we live, even when it hurts us, because we fear facing our True Natures. If so, is the reason—as many believe—because our True Natures are so awful? Freud seemed to think so. Or is it that we fear the “death” which we will have to go through if we see ourselves truly and need to change? Or could it be that many believe we are unable to change who we are and so it would only be painful to imagine a more ideal True Nature and to try?

Maybe you cannot change your True Nature because that is a given and fundamental foundation, but that doesn’t mean you cannot change your surface ego and your personality. It does, however, often hurt to do so. It can hurt you, and often hurts those you love as well. In any revolution, old idols are smashed, previously beloved leaders are exposed, corruption must be rooted out and purged. The euphoria of the “new era” can only take us so far. A superficial cleaning that does not get to the heart of the matter cannot do much. The idols of your beliefs, the favored faces of the personality, the covered up dirt of the shadow—all must be faced honestly and courageously.

How much of addiction, disease and depression is the direct result of a personality incongruent with the True Self? How much unconscious guilt with resultant alcoholism and drug abuse stems from refusing to live authentically?

Thus again, here we are: we—in avoiding this necessary task of facing ourselves, our responsibility as human beings—cannot do other than create and protect an increasingly shallow and false world. And living in a meaningless shallow world based on entertainment, consumption and distraction will sooner or later take its toll in driving us all mad. And so it is, and so we are.

If this were our only option—to live as we have been—then to face its inevitability would lead many to depression, suicidal behavior or the random destruction of values and each other. And it is. Are we being taught any other possibility? The spiritual teachers of the world do teach that there are alternatives, but our culture marginalizes them and their message, portraying them as eccentric and highlighting their oddness, thus justifying our giving them little consideration.

Eccentric is a word derived from “out of the center,” someone who does not follow the straight line of normality. But in our culture, normal is not good. At one time, normal seemed to mean healthy, but in a sick culture, normal simply means being like the majority, even when it is ill.

Anyone who has the potential to help liberate us from our bad habits and false selves will, by definition, be outside the mainstream. Why do we believe that being like most people is a good thing? Because it feeds the ego’s need for approval. Once again the villain seems to be the ego. This is not to say that the ego is evil per se, only that when evolution persists in the stage it has appropriately reached (growth of an ego) and something resists its natural future development (beyond the ego), that may perhaps be as good a definition of “evil” as any other.

All of evolution, as discussed earlier, appears to have had the development of the ego as its ultimate goal. That is what we collectively believe. Those teachers who have lived before or are among us now that say otherwise are usually distrusted or ridiculed, or at least overlooked. And if you are at the ego level and life is good—you have your money and your sex and your car and your entertainment center and your cell phone and your computer—why care or look for ways to change?

But if you have these things and you are not happy or fulfilled, even if you once were, then this is a sign that it is time to move on, to seek the next stage of your evolution, whatever we choose to call it. But as things stand today, your unhappiness will be a cause for alarm (and it is for the ego), will probably lead you to seek help (because you believe you SHOULD be happy, and once were) and in our world, the help you’ll get is a prescription for a drug that will either suppress your depression or unhappiness, or sedate you, or help bring you feelings of elation.
The ego will win, the drug company will win, and you will lose. You will lose yourself as so many are, and you will not even know it is happening.

Not that many years ago we were brought up by parents and teachers who believed that the proper way to raise children was to break our wills, and to do it at an early enough age that we would never even realize it had happened. Now decades of psychotherapy have revealed how destructive and foolish that attitude was. Some day, if we live that long, a similar realization may occur with regard to the diagnosing and medicating of the natural desire to transcend the very limited world of the ego.

Awakening to our True Nature requires an “ego death.” This death-rebirth experience is a theme of Part Two. The ego will suffer from the loss of its self-image and its fantasy of control. There may be anxiety, fear, depression, or grief, in small or large doses. It is all right to experience painful or unpleasant feelings. It is not necessary to run to the doctor or pharmacist every time. Sometimes it may be necessary, but now it has become the normal thing to do. Women have known since time began that birth can be extremely uncomfortable. There is a time for all things, even discomfort.

Pause for a moment and ask yourself: you might be willing to give up certain pleasures in the moment in order to afford a two week vacation next year. You may be willing to drive an older car for a few more years so your daughter can go to college in 10 years. Would you be willing to suffer emotionally, to hurt, to be uncomfortable for a year if it meant you could live the remaining years of your life with a deep sense of fulfillment and peace? Would you suffer voluntarily for 5 years to end up with the feeling that you had authentically lived your deepest true self? Why do we cling to the fantasy of a pain-free life in the face of all the unavoidable suffering that simply IS a part of life?

Repeating—after seeing what IS, going beyond the ego requires stopping your compulsive habitual behavior. But the mind wants to know what to do instead, so how to stop? Just breathe. Initially you need to recognize when and how you are functioning automatically and unconsciously. If you need a goal to focus on, then make it learning to observe while you breathe and to suspend judgment. Be still and be quiet, inside and out. Practice regularly.

If you were sent to a foreign country on assignment and you were unfamiliar with their language and social customs, the wisest course would be to hold back and to observe so as to learn their ways. The same metaphor applies to movement into the underworld and the trans-ego realm. By breathing, observing and withholding judgment, witnessing not to assign value as “good” or “bad,” you will open a “space” not filled with desire and activity. As you become more familiar with the ways of the inner world, you will encounter an increasingly vital universe of imagery and fantasy revealed by stopping. It was always there, but masked.

To follow such a personal and solitary path requires commitment and courage. We often seem to need a group of supporters as we take the plunge into facing ourselves. And this can be quite helpful as you expose hidden areas to the light of day. Support groups have multiplied everywhere for countless topics. But there is also a darker side to group work, because it may prolong dependence on others for approval. Support groups often resemble dysfunctional families, and even though their focus is on health and recovery, if all the members come from wounding backgrounds, it is only natural that some of the interpersonal dynamics will serve to enable or to cover defenses. A group may have an unspoken taboo around anger or confrontation. Another may turn everything into conflict.

The question is when does a group help to foster the emergence of the True Self, and when does it hinder? If you cannot be your authentic self and still be accepted, if outsiders are mistrusted or considered inferior, then you may not be in the right group.

The striking frequency of cult-like behavior in so many groups that are organized for the purpose of growth and healing should certainly raise questions. In a cult—which most of us tend to think of as religious fanatics or young people following Hindu gurus, but which can in fact include a Catholic Church, a fitness center, a therapy group or a graduate school—the members become devoted to an idea or a leader, and develop a mistrust of anyone outside the cult. There are the believers and the non-believers. This group approach is the opposite of what is being described here. The power of your healing and expanding consciousness does
not rest on any school of thought or any individual. It is inside you and comes from you, though not only from the ego but the greater “You” which is largely unconscious. Thus the responsibility for following and for the outcome is largely your own. And sometimes you need to seek help.

Once the armor of the ego has been pierced by defeat, then the opportunity arises to see through it. But we have to be looking, and listening. Up to this point, we have seen that our evolution has brought us to the state of being an ego, with ego goals (separateness, comfort, uniqueness, popularity, immortality). A world that evolves no further would look much like the one we live in today. But pressure is building from our own developmental process, which is natural but largely not understood, for many of us to begin to transcend and grow beyond this state.

If that is the case, then lacking any education in this matter or examples from public life—except spiritual teachers considered as flakes or on some kind of self-serving mission (many certainly are, which means they are still about ego and only ego)—we are really on our own. This brings us to our critical situation today. Almost like an underground conspiracy, we must educate each other about territory discovered within and hope that it resonates with enough peoples’ intuition and experience to bring about further movement into humanity’s future.

We have mentioned briefly the idea of the Companion, of Someone or Something that lives inside of each of us waiting for us to listen, to be open and receptive to the possibility that inner guidance beyond the ego and its goals exists. The word “Companion” (“someone that shares your bread with you”) does not really serve as any kind of definition or description, other than to say that Whatever It is, It proceeds alongside us as we live what appears to be our solitary individual life.

In trying to understand and build a relationship with this Force, Being, Entity, Spirit, or whatever word we try to use, we must particularly beware of our mind’s tendency to think that anything with a name is something we understand. That is why we are emphasizing the idea of Mystery here. It is one word that still resists any penetration of its meaning, other than that it represents an enigma, an Unknown.

As people through the ages have made the journey described here as “returning to our Home,” they have applied names to this Mystery, and in doing so made it easier to discuss. But they have also prejudiced our understanding by calling It “Christ” or “Buddha” or “Angel”, or something established in the mind as being recognizable. It must remain a Mystery, at least until we have joined with It as One. Certainly one of the most confusing and misleading names for this Mystery is “God”.

Listen to a modern politician or cleric speaking about “God’s will” or “God’s Plan” and ask yourself what they are really talking about. We are told we must have “faith in God.” What does that mean? Who even asks anymore? People talk as if they know what they are talking about, and everyone listens and joins right in the illusion. It is a Mystery. Unknown. Unknowable. A Conundrum. A Puzzle. Only by allowing this Mystery to retain its unknowableness will we find the necessary curiosity and humility to truly follow.

The names we have given to this Mystery only serve to reduce its vast openness and in the end cost us the innocence which we need if we are to grow beyond ourselves. But as we said, without reverence for or recognition of this Mystery we are addicted to certainty and explanations, unable to open up the inner “space” in which to float in a kind of free-fall until we land on the bedrock of that which truly holds and supports us.

When the ego defenses crack by sustaining a failure or defeat, a compulsion, symptom or catastrophe that breaks through our illusion of being in control, the opportunity arises to become aware of the Companion. Psychology has coined the term “unconscious” as a way to acknowledge that forces impinge on us and drive us of which we have no awareness. These forces are only seen by their impact upon us, how they move us, the shock that pushes the ego aside. When this happens, unless we are completely debilitated, the ego quickly sets out to repair the damage. We mentioned earlier the favorite strategy of blame or scapegoating in order to avoid having to admit powerlessness or responsibility.

This dynamic of ego defense and its cracking, potentially opening the door to realization of the presence of forces (gods, demons, God, unconscious, Mystery—you name it), can be observed as well on the collective
level in nations, communities and organizations as it can in the individual. If you look for it, you will see it everywhere, since control is an illusion and is constantly being challenged by something that seems “outside.” But you often have to look quickly because the defensive avoidance of realizing loss of control is so prevalent and practiced. Start watching closely what happens when you or others sustain a shock or disillusionment.

If you are seeking your way out of the illusionary box created by the ego and are tired of its games and toys, then you must take the opportunity created by defeat, symptom and addiction and really hold onto it and work with it. Otherwise it will be lost just as quickly as a dream when you awaken in the morning. Spiritual teachers have often used the metaphor of dreaming and sleeping to describe what we take as our natural waking life. The real awakening comes when we are shocked out of our trance and realize how vulnerable, powerless and mortal we truly are.

If our first goal is to realize the Presence of the Mystery in our lives—both as individuals and collectively—then we must practice patient and diligent observation of ourselves, above all with courageous honesty. This requires for most of us the development of something like a new “muscle” in our minds, because at first we are quite weak in our persistence.

So lacking teachers and an understanding of the process, how are we to proceed? The Mystery has left tracks for us in the past, and also speaks to us almost every day. We must pay attention. The “tracks” can be found in the quaint and strange stories left to us from antiquity, when people were able to devote themselves to Mystery. We have largely left these in the trash bin of history as we have soared like Icarus, inflated by our new knowledge and technological expertise. They are still there to be reclaimed and used to educate us in a whole new language and attitude.

For example, the largely discredited art of what was called “alchemy” contains a wealth of images and strange ideas full of Mystery. Biblical and other scriptural stories, myths, Jesus’ parables, and even “superstitious” rituals and beliefs reveal much about the way the Mystery works. But we have to believe these things might possess intrinsic value and not come to them with our modern prejudices which have been instilled into us since childhood.

In addition to these older revelations that have been waiting like buried treasure for rediscovery, there are also important tools for establishing contact with your Companion. The process of doing so—let no one take this lightly—risks danger, confusion, and the possibility of becoming lost. To repeat an earlier analogy: if you wanted to learn more about a foreign country, say China, and undertook to do so by being parachuted to the ground in the middle of the country, with no knowledge of customs, language or surroundings, how many wasted efforts, foolish mistakes and dead ends do you think it would take before you learned even the equivalent of a five-year-old Chinese child?

So be armed with the beginner’s mind. The beginner does not know. The beginner is empty of preconceptions, inexperienced, ready to learn.

You probably do not know what you are doing. Even the people around us who claim they do know, don’t always really know. It is just when you think that you DO know, that you are at great risk. The road to the Companion and back to your Home is paved largely with humility. There is great wisdom in the saying attributed to Jesus about the “kingdom of heaven” (which is another term for what we are calling “Home”, like the Tao): “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Like little children: innocent. But most of us as children imagined the kingdom of heaven to be a place with castles in the sky, thus polluting our potential for hearing this expression with openness, curiosity, and fresh innocence.

Think about it now: what is the “kingdom of heaven?”

Take this moment to observe your reaction to having a biblical quotation in front of you. This may show how our prejudices can interfere with a real open willingness to absorb “as children” the wisdom that has been around us all along. If you were raised as a Christian, studying the Bible, then you have memories—good or bad—stirred by such a quotation. If you were taught in a harsh dogmatic fashion then you may
either feel turned off or reassured. This writing becomes either more convincing and inviting or just another belief system.

If you were raised Jewish, then you may feel this is not for you, because you were taught that Christian teaching was for Christians, not Jews. But perhaps if you were brought up as a Native American or a Buddhist, you can entertain this saying with fewer prejudices. No matter what the source, it is important for us to hear the teachings of all wisdom with new ears, without prejudging. We can be poisoned by the attitudes of our teachers, perhaps making us swallow gullibly or reject unthinkingly the treasures that have been left along the way by the Mystery.

Sometimes it is easier to appreciate the gold buried in the teaching with which you are least familiar. But it can be found just as well in all of them, even the ones you learned by heart years ago, when seen with new eyes. For an example of Jung’s interpretation of an alchemical allegory, please see the Appendix.

Jung emphasizes that one must foster a personal relationship with the unconscious and its mysteries by paying attention to the dreams and fantasies coming from it, rather than chasing the desires of the masses: comfort, possessions, fame, etc. This does not mean that you have to sit in a cave in a loincloth contemplating your navel, only that you have priorities and know which is truly the source of your life and well-being. It is in just such a dry and lifeless desert that we find ourselves today. The mass desires are relentlessly emphasized and stimulated for us by advertising and marketing. But for those who feel the emptiness of a life based on having things and looking young, the fountain of the soul offers a path through its images and fantasies, if only we will give it our devoted attention.

Beside the gems to be found in religious writings and alchemy, many recognize mythology not as fairy tales, but as containing revelations of the Mystery. It seems that where we are ignorant and blind, like the alchemists trying to explain the strange behaviors of the substances in their laboratories or the ancients wanting to understand nature and its events, the void of not knowing is the ideal place for the Mystery to appear as myth, fantasy and “explanation.” We may find these quaint and technically incorrect in light of scientific knowledge, but we are foolish to toss these stories aside as having no value. We need not take them literally but as symbols of the deeper interior of the psyche in us.

This is why we must cultivate reverence for the Mystery, because it opens the “space” inside of us into which Mystery can pour its disclosures. It “moistens the dry earth.” We can see this in as simple a situation as when we are surprised that someone has not contacted us. Into the void created by the surprise and lost expectation of how it WOULD be, we find our imagination begins to create reasons, stories, fantasies as to WHY this is so. Sometimes they are right, but often they are more revealing of what floats unconsciously inside of us. So the simple thought “it’s because she doesn’t like me,” if not true, reveals an inner fantasy that is probably always lurking just beneath the surface.

Rather than dismiss it, our opportunity is to go with it, to want to know why it is there, to let it take us to its source, which may be a humiliation as a child, a loss of a friend years earlier, or some other forgotten memory of rejection. Into the empty space flowing like water comes the revealing fantasy, like the water into the parched earth in the alchemical tale of the Fountain of Treviso.

So after eons of development in which the primal atoms of star-matter have cooked themselves into complex organisms—whether by chemistry or divine intention capable of the most perverted behaviors and grotesque crimes, the time has come for humanity to take responsibility for our situation.

To do so, our first step is to honestly acknowledge where things stand: we are lost, heading in the direction of chaos and breakdown.

We are not without resources, but relying solely on our materialistic science and rational intellect has brought about our crisis. These are not necessarily the direct cause, but are largely responsible for the way things are because they are not balanced by the other side of human nature: the irrational, intuitive and mysterious.
We have too much:  We need more:
Rational Logic  Irrational Intuition
Objectivity  Subjectivity
Materialism  Soul
Literalism  Symbolism
Outer Appearance  Inner Quality
Physical Science  Depth Psychology
Ego  Deeper/Higher Self
Conscious  Unconscious

Things are out of balance. Sickness bears witness. Talk radio is the sound. Corruption is the smell. Emptiness is the Way.

Our Ariadne’s thread to find our way out of our maze is the Mystery—to restore Its Presence at the center of our lives.

We begin by acknowledging our orphan state, lost and in the dark, yearning for our parents and a real home.

Our story is the tale of the “Hymn of the Pearl.” In it are contained our forgetting and our awakening, our mission and its Pearl, and particularly, our return to our Home.

What follows in Part Two is a sort of travel guide. On your journey in and down you will gain recognition of the desire process, the pairs of opposites, the shadow, projections, and much more.

We will also briefly cover the possibility of “outside” assistance on your path. The use of oracles and divination (like tarot, I Ching, runes or astrology) to open dialog with the unconscious is often helpful. It is highly recommended that you use a journal as a private “space” in which to ponder your dreams, observations, and anything else that helps you to “contain” this process. Remember, the first opening is often a symptom, catastrophe, compulsion, addiction or defeat. “Talking to yourself” in a writing process in a journal will often, over a period of time, develop into a sense that you are now talking to someone or something else, something other than “yourself.” This means you have progressed into a relationship with the mysterious “Companion” Who accompanies you on your journey.
Notes

3 Matthew 18:3.
PART TWO

FINDING OURSELVES

The experience of the Self is always a defeat for the ego.\(^1\)

There is in the unconscious a transpersonal center of latent consciousness and obscure intentionality. The discovery of this center, which Jung called the Self, is like the discovery of extraterrestrial intelligence. Man is now no longer alone in the psyche and in the cosmos. The vicissitudes of life take on new and enlarged meaning. Dreams, fantasies, illness, accident and coincidence become potential messages from the unseen Partner with whom we share our life.\(^2\)

After calling for restoration of the Mystery as the Center of our lives, and painting a broad and brief evolutionary context for our current crisis in Part One, we have argued that we need to take our collective (and individual) next step. For those who are ready, the authority of the ego must be challenged by accepting our WHOLE personality, including those elements which have previously been rejected or ignored. Using the “Hymn of the Pearl” as our own story, this would mean leaving the “home” of our familiar and habitual ego identity. This leaving and a helpful attitude is the theme of Chapter Four.

In Chapter Five we discuss fate, sacrifice and imagination, as well as divination tools, all of which may be seen as provisions for the journey beyond ego. Our entry into the underworld can be through a mood or a feeling as portrayed in Chapter Six.

Chapters Seven and Eight focus on the important theme of the opposites and the shadow. We reach the crux of transformation in Chapters Nine (Alchemy) and Ten (Initiation and Letting Go). In Chapter Eleven we provide a map through which the complex subject of desire can provide a greater context for our taking our next evolutionary step.

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Chapter Four
Leaving Home

HOME. WHAT IS HOME? The Oxford English Dictionary provides word origins signifying “dwelling, village, world, safe dwelling, to dwell secure.” Try saying the word to yourself a few times and feel it. You may want to write about your associations and feelings.

We were all born from a womb. We can speculate as to whether our original home was the Big Bang, Eden, where we grew up, or our mother’s womb, but deep inside of all of us there is a memory and a yearning for our Source or Origin from which we came, a place where we once unconditionally belonged.

Our dreams sometimes remind us of our home, not necessarily a physical location, but a psychic one. Nostalgia, which we think of as home-sickness, has its roots in two Greek words, one meaning “return home” and the other meaning “pain” (“a form of melancholia caused by prolonged absence from one’s home”).

Just as life forced us from our origins “out” into the alien world, it continues to do so.

Move forward.

Walk on.

Put one foot in front of the other.

Life pushed you out of the womb and life’s pushing you now.

Pull on the push let it pull you push you.

It wants you to live.

Don’t fear it.

Be it.

Don’t fear it.

Be it.

Bear it.

Let go.

Home is what is known and familiar. Even a chaotic dysfunctional home is still home. We are collectively being forced out of our home, our womb. This has always been our plight, as portrayed by the biblical story of Eden. Some are already homeless and some of us are being forced out now. Many are still asleep. From times that were smaller and safer, we are facing a world increasingly hostile and cold, trying to make for ourselves a “secure dwelling.” Many cannot do this and find themselves struggling to survive without
safety or warmth, without love or contact. In such a state, they will become more and more dangerous and endangered. Many will not survive, and are not surviving.

For some of us, home was our family and our religion. Religion means to “bind back”—religio—to God, or our Source, or the Mystery. As the mythological foundations of religion and God have been undermined by scientific discovery, our belief in God has become hollow, as coincidentally so have we. Likewise, as long as we reject the orphan soul within, we will continue living as rejected orphans in a godless universe.

Many struggle to maintain faith, but faith in what? A bearded old man as in the illustrations of Doré or Blake was imagined to watch over us with a Plan. Now this seems childish and hardly worthy of our faith. But the Mystery which we could not see or understand, and for which our childlike imaginations projected the image of the heavenly Man as a symbol, remains.

It is perhaps too awesome and terrifying to confront that Mystery without some more humane and reassuring face, so we have turned away entirely, looking for the same kind of security in laws, scientific and political, and in authority. This endeavor has failed and is failing badly, as it must.

So we have lost our home, except for those of us who still cling faithfully to the old version, as some must always do. For some this is right and their church serves the purpose of providing security. The Mystery is our home, not any religion that seeks to interpret and justify. How do we bind our selves back to the Mystery if our religion no longer fulfills?

The Mystery is our Home, and it is always with us. There are always holes in what we know, entry ways leading us back to the Mystery. But to follow them means to give up what we know, to lose the security of certainty and to have to make our way blindly through the dark, risking wrong turns and dead ends. And most of us would rather be sure than to know. Premature closure on perplexing questions in order to dispense with the discomfort of uncertainty can be observed everywhere in the “rush to judgment.”

Our culture is addicted to certainty and Mystery is taboo, except for the mysteries of detective stories, which always guarantee a killer in the end. Our authorities—political and scientific—cling to the certainties of what has been proven, and deny the significance of those questions we cannot answer.

The Mystery is not honored nor respected for What It is. We cannot help but be conditioned by this prevailing attitude, as well as by our own desire for security which is shaken when we cannot find the answers. When someone suddenly dies or is stricken, our first question is “Why?” Many of us become depressed and disheartened by the fact that answers are often not there.

Such a time asks us to honor the Mystery, which is what religion often still tries to do. But even when the rabbi or priest or minister offers Mystery as the reason, it is rarely done in the spirit of awe and respect, only as a surrendering before the impenetrable, which instead of feeding the spirit within, makes us feel diminished and powerless. The Mystery is assumed to exist “out there” and we are not led to dwell on the Mystery that each of us is.

The ancients understood and acted accordingly. When the power of the Mystery was manifested in unexplainable events—personal or collective—it increased the awe and respect (and fear) accorded to the unknown. We are always living in relationship to the unknown, but now we do not want to acknowledge it, because we have nothing to reassure us. Our own inevitable death is the surest measure of how we feel about the Mystery. We don’t know when or how we will die, just that we will. And even that irrefutable fact seems in doubt when you examine the plans and choices people make. So often we live as if we have all the time in the world.

Nothing is any more enigmatic to us than death, the end of what we know, replaced by what we cannot know while we are alive. The certainty with which people reassure the bereaved with their own fantasies or beliefs about the afterlife can be shocking. How do they know? What makes them so sure?

What many of us need in a time of mourning is only for someone who can say that they do not know either, as we struggle to understand things we may never be able to.
Why do things happen? There is a great difference between saying “they just do” and pursuing the question no further, versus accepting the Unknown but wondering anyway and trying to feel the presence of the Unknown in the unexplainable event.

We didn’t leave Home and our Source when we stopped being certain and sure we had the answers; we left when we became sure that we did have the answers. If our Home is in the Mystery, then it is in the mysteries of the unknown and our uncertainty that we will rediscover our Home.

So every day in countless ways the door is open to us to enter the Mystery through the cracks in our certainty and the perplexing questions we cannot answer. But we have lost this option, not because we have lost the ability, but because no one shows us this as an alternative to depression, passivity or frustration. People just see a dead end. Instead of “I don’t know” meaning “I give up,” we must imagine “I don’t know” means “dive in.”

Try it now: search yourself for something that is confusing to you, something you do not understand. Rather than follow the reflex that demands to fill that void with an answer (it is the mind that abhors a vacuum), enter into the vast and seemingly empty space behind your not-knowing. This can be quite disturbing, partly as a threat to your survival (the ego) and largely because of the conditioning you have had since childhood.

Don’t fear panic. Do not be afraid of anxiety. Reassure the nervous parts of you and take them with you, like you would accompany a young child into the dark.

If you can settle there in that empty space, and quiet your feelings of concern, then you can try to remind yourself that this is your Home, the Home of the Mystery that we are. If you spend time here, it will begin to feel more like your home, a place you vaguely remember but cannot name and cannot describe precisely. Like the hero of the “Hymn of the Pearl,” asleep in Egypt, our error is in mistaking our narrow certainty and the authority of “experts” for our home. We have constructed a false home on weakening supports as a reassurance that we ARE in control. The supports are collapsing. Awakening means realizing that the “home” we thought could protect us is really a temporary resting place, and that to return to our true Home we must leave its shelter and hang out with what we don’t know.

It is here we must go if we are to renew ourselves and to survive the chaos in which we live. Even if we fight it with our knowledge and experts, this hole will grow and grow. More and more we will collectively be confused and bewildered, as is already happening now. In an enlightened world our religious and political leaders would be spiritual leaders, guiding us into this place, as they once did. But that is past. Now it is up to us to find our way in and the courage to sustain us as we remain and explore.

So there is a Home from which we have come, and It is still with us and in us and all around us. But we have forgotten It and now we fear that Home and are afraid to go back, and yet we must. It calls to us, just as the orphan within does, and It awaits our return, not as regression to the past, but as renewal for the future.

In that place where we know nothing, we are empty, and so we can begin to be filled.

The Attitude of Consent

The hero of the “Hymn of the Pearl” leaves his home and parents voluntarily. We may not be so fortunate. We have forgotten our original Home and so have made our familiar identity and habits its substitute. When we are evicted from our accustomed expectations by events out of our control, whether external or internal, it is easy to feel victimized or resentful. After all, what did you do to deserve this accident, affliction, or loss? At this critical moment, like standing at a crossroads, the road taken may be chosen by your attitude.

So let us say that you have been confronted by a disappointment, a failure or defeat. Maybe someone you thought loved you turned out not to. Maybe your commitment to stop drinking or compulsive sex doesn’t
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seem to be something you are strong enough to achieve. The ego cannot bear defeat easily since it implies limits on its power. Often spiritual teachers focus on desire as a key to growth; not the desire to grow, but the way we are trapped if we identify with our desires. Buddhism in particular teaches that continuing to pursue desire keeps us on the treadmill of habit and suffering. Detachment is liberation [see Chapter 11 Sex — The Coniunctio].

The Tao-te-Ching says:

Free from desire, you realize the Mystery.
Caught in desire, you see only the manifestations.¹

If you observe your desires, you will probably see that desire is bipolar—it pursues whatever seems to bring pleasure and satisfaction (even if it’s pain), and avoids whatever is experienced as a negative. You seek food and avoid hunger, seek comfort and avoid uneasiness. The point is not what we seek, but that desire exists in a world of opposites. One person desires what another flees.

As we mature from infancy, some of our innate traits are praised and others meet with disapproval. Pressure from our parents, teachers and peers subtly or harshly forces us to choose which of our natural instinctive behaviors we will allow, and which cause too much pain, disapproval or embarrassment and so must be let go. We form our persona, our outer mask in order to adapt to our world. Some of this mask is hopefully authentically who we truly are, and some is fake or pretense. However with the passage of time we tend more and more to identify with this mask, and to forget who we really are at the core of ourselves.

The qualities that have been forgotten or driven underground—both pleasant and unpleasant—come to form a hidden alter ego, a personality in many ways the opposite of who we think we are. This opposite self, or shadow, is the first form of the Other, or the Companion. It is understandable why we have so much resistance to opening ourselves to meeting the inner Companion Who can bring us back Home, because it appears at first to be largely composed of rejected traits and behaviors that have not been developed, and so remain immature, because unused. In addition we carry all the judgments that formed around this other self as being unlovable, unwelcome, repulsive, shameful or dangerous.

In our desire to adapt to our surroundings we have had to cast off much of who we really are, unless we are enveloped by an atmosphere of unconditional love. Thus the inner other self or shadow feels like a cast-off or reject. In order to accommodate this other self we must be willing to experience the shadow’s painful feelings of rejection and shame. But if we do not, we become increasingly crystallized in our false self, which eventually brings us close to a state of death, of emptiness. In this state we may even seek out pain as a way to feel we are alive, or we may feel the need to inflict pain out of our own desperation and suffering. We are then the “hollow men.”²

So the first steps of recovering our true Nature can be unpleasant and lonely ones. Starting with an admission of powerlessness and leading to what the 12 Steps call an honest inventory of ourselves, it is easy to see why we usually avoid this. In alchemy for example, the beginning of the process by which gold (or the true Self) is made takes place in chaos, and starts with what was called the prima materia or primary material, consisting of low and filthy matter like dung and decomposing flesh.

There is in our chemistry a certain noble substance, in the beginning whereof is wretchedness with vinegar, but in its ending joy with gladness. Therefore I have supposed that the same will happen to me, namely that I shall suffer difficulty, grief, and weariness at first, but in the end shall come to glimpse pleasanter and easier things.³

In order to grow beyond the limits of the ego, we have to face death. We have to go through our own death and give up what we thought we were—usually quite a terrifying prospect. Letting go of what we know, of who we were (our false home), and for a time being groundless and without a self, we need something that can “carry” us across the threshold from one state of being to another.

This could be psychotherapy or belief in a religion or philosophy in which such a death is seen as an initiation leading to rebirth. Rebirth is rarely perceived when we are deeply into our “decomposition” or what the
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alchemists called the putrefactio. What will carry us through this dark and lonely time, which can last much longer than we might imagine? We need something that says it is all right, it is natural and meaningful to be passing through what can be an agonizing experience.

There seems to be very little in our culture that can offer us anything like this. Instead, if we are unable to avoid this natural breaking down we again find ourselves at the pharmacy counter at the urging of our friends, family or doctor. Anything to suppress the pain, and calm the terror that it will not only get worse but will go on forever. When it starts, it looks like a long straight road to hell. There is nothing to reassure us that eventually it will turn of its own accord and that we will begin to see a dim but growing light, other than the testimony of those who have passed that way before.

Even this reassurance does no good unless we are able to muster enough faith. “Not my will, but Thy will be done.” Instead, for example, of reading the trial and crucifixion of Jesus as something one must blindly believe in if one is Christian, we can once again try to penetrate more deeply into the story without prejudice to hear the voice of the Mystery that speaks. When faced with the realization of what he must suffer in order to fulfill his dharma (the true innate purpose for which he was born), Jesus bends his will into a voluntary acceptance, a sacrifice, which literally means “to make whole or holy.”

This is a lesson for all of us, and at one or more key moments in your life, you too, like Jesus, will be faced with the question of whether or not you can accept what seems forced on you as the only alternative, far different from what you would choose if you could. Are there such moments in your life? What have you done then? Is there one now? What will you do?

In the novel The King Must Die the young boy, Theseus, who will someday be king, must witness his beloved grandfather performing the horse sacrifice. The most beautiful and noble horse in the kingdom, for which the boy has much love, is put to death by the king. The boy is heartbroken with shock and despair, having no possible reason for such an apparently cruel and heartless act. His grandfather explains to him:

Listen, and do not forget, and I will show you a mystery. It is not the sacrifice, whether it comes in youth or age, or the god remits it; it is not the blood-letting that calls down power. It is the consenting, Theseus. The readiness is all. It washes the heart and mind from things of no account, and leaves them open to the god. But one washing does not last a lifetime; we must renew it, or the dust returns to cover us.

The limits forced on us by life are what was known as “fate,” or necessity. There has always been in myth a boundary, a “ring-pass-not” beyond which one simply cannot go. Why this is so and who or what is enforcing it, we do not know. But sooner or later, if we don’t surrender at the start, we will probably encounter this barrier. It is crucial how we react, because at this time we are meeting the Mystery and from this event we will cast our attitude as to how we will be in relation to that Mystery.

Consent and sacrifice honor the Mystery; bitterness and refusal to yield are prideful and will only lead to one’s downfall. The difficulty is in being able to tell the difference between a temporary obstacle that can be overcome, and that which cannot be budged, like death. Yielding to any and all challenges is not likely to lead one very far either.

If we believe that there is a pattern or a design or a flow to our life, then we will seek to attune ourselves to it. This is what the Chinese Tao seems to be about. The Tao or Way is between the opposites—the Middle Way. It is so difficult in our extraverted and out-of-control world to be able to give serious attention to our invisible interior landscape, as well as to find the time for its contemplation.

Concepts like “Tao” and “kingdom of heaven” and “dharma” and alchemical solutio are not easily or quickly grasped, and their great power as maps of the interior is largely lost on our ADD culture. What would it take for us to realize that these ideas are worth our attention? How much further out of control must we be, must our children be, before we begin to realize that the answers to many of our problems do not lie in tasks and activities, but in quiet consideration of who we are?

It is indeed tedious for you and for me to keep reminding us of our difficulties. Why not just have another donut and curl up in front of Entertainment Tonight? Why bother anyway? Who knows if life has a purpose
at all? The more chaotic things get, the harder it is to believe. However, the more crazy things are, the more
desperate we really are for something to provide a sense of order and sanity. These ancient inner ideas can
help us to navigate, just as our atlases and computer programs help us land on the moon.

As you set out on your solitary journey, whether voluntarily because you feel called, or because you have
been forced out of your familiar setting by circumstance, it will ensure the best possible outcome if you give
some thought to preparation.

Provisions are supplies and the foresight that can meet contingencies. What can you expect when you leave
the known and move into the unknown?

You can expect to get lost, and to have no idea of how far, how difficult, or what type of destination you
even hope to reach.
Notes

1 *Tao Te Ching*, 1.
2 T. S. Eliot, “The Hollow Men”.
3 Michael Maier, *Symbola Aureae Mensae* (1617).
Chapter Five
Provisions for the Journey

Leaving for what may be the most important trip of your life, knowing so little about the itinerary, what should you bring with you? How can you be prepared? The ancient Egyptians used to put a little ladder in the tomb for the dead to climb into heaven.

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” is a much-quoted observation from the Tao-Te-Ching. “It is precisely at the beginning that serious concentration is important, because the beginning holds the seed of all that is to follow” says the I Ching, which also says elsewhere, “Exceptional enterprises cannot succeed unless utmost caution is observed in their beginnings and in the laying of their foundations.”

With your first step, consider carefully your attitude towards the Mystery, your life, and your passage.

Fate, Destiny and Sacrifice

Sometimes it seemed the days would never end; and when night came, I would lie watching the stars, to count the hours till morning. I thought of my life, the good and evil days; of the gods, and fate; how much of a man’s life and of his soul they make for him, how much he makes for himself. What if...? What man would I have become? What if...? Fate and will, will and fate, like earth and sky bringing forth the grain together; and which the bread tastes of, no man knows.¹

Free will is the ability to do gladly that which I must do.²

If there is something precious inside you—inside your body or inside your mind—which you have lost (forgotten) and yet which is a vital core of yourself, imagine how different life could be for you if it returned.

Like a lost orphan, the Mystery we may refer to as “Self,” “Buddha-nature,” “Christ within,” “Krishna,” or by any other name, awaits us, having been cast out from the center by intellectual repudiation of religion. Now our minds identify someone by their sectarian beliefs: “Oh he’s a buddhist; she’s a Christian; they’re psychologists.” In doing so, we have lost sight of the fact that all of these names and belief systems are just that: labels and conceptual systems which people either choose to believe or inherit from their parents.

Like the zen “finger pointing at the moon,” these “Masks of God”³ have become literalized because we have lost our sense of connection with the real Mystery they only “point at” or cover. We take everything literally now, rather than as a façade or symbol for a hidden Mystery. Is this book about religion or psychology, spirituality or survival? Someone will have to make that decision in order to know which shelf to place it on, which subject keywords to put on its cover. But it is about the Mystery of existence and who we really are. The Mystery is contained—but not confined—in every field of thought and each one of us.
To espouse one belief system as better or more true than another is to miss the point of the Mystery altogether. As long as we continue to break things down and label them we may be able to organize, but we will never see the Mystery that we are. And it is this loss of this sense of Mystery that is costing us so much.

You are Something more than your habits, dreams, physique or belief systems. You are all those and yet something greater which contains and infuses all these. You narrow your identity too much if you only identify with any partial aspect of yourself and are unable to see the central Mystery from which they all arise. Each comes directly from the Mystery we truly are, and points back to It. Therefore each partial aspect of yourself is a doorway into the Mystery if only you are able to keep that door open with curiosity and uncertainty, wondering what else is there, rather than being closed by taking any one part as the whole.

We have a fantasy of what kind of body we have, habits that are part of our nature and difficult to change, and beliefs that give us a certain sense of how things really are—hard and pragmatic, rosy and full of promise, cynical and mistrusting, alive and full of joy. Any of these beliefs is only one of the infinite facets of the Mystery. No one of them is necessarily more right than any other, none are wrong, and each is incorrect in its partialness if mistaken for the totality.

Teachers throughout history have always struggled to articulate the Mystery because any attempt to name It or describe It always leads to opposites and contradictions. We’re talking about Something that is everything—young AND old, clean AND dirty, wealthy AND impoverished—and nothing. You can see how this could pose a problem for rational communication. If you leave something out, that’s not the Mystery.

If in fact we are, at our core, Something other than our personality and personal will, then we have to take into account that this Mystery may be Something we need to organize our lives around. It may contain our unique life purpose and deepest potential. To live a life in which we believe, on faith, that there is Something mysterious inside of us that contains our purpose is very different than believing we are in charge, can do whatever we set our mind to, and that “the sky’s the limit.”

It is understandable if the human ego in its exuberance from breaking free from superstitious taboos and obedience to the tribal norm has become filled with a “can do” attitude. The Rolling Stones said it: “I’m free, to do what I want, any old time.” But how realistic is it to believe we are free of limits and obligations when our entire life is bound by the inevitable limit of our death?

The prayer of AA:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{God grant me the serenity} \\
\text{to accept the things I cannot change;} \\
\text{courage to change the things I can;} \\
\text{and wisdom to know the difference.}
\end{align*}
\]

acknowledges the truth that anyone can see. There are some things we just cannot change. The limits within which we must live were sometimes called “fate.” When we attempt to live a life that is in opposition to our core Self and Its purpose, we find that we either fail or pay too high a price for succeeding. Isn’t this what the literary theme of “selling your soul” means? Some psychologists believe that a good deal of depression, guilt, and other mental illness is the consequence of refusing to live within the boundaries of the life that is ours, which we could call the “purpose of the true Self.”

When we set our minds on a goal and invest it with great emotional value, we stake our identity upon it. Say I want to be a great artist, or ballplayer, or so-and-so’s lover. Ego in me says I can do this if I just try hard enough. But what if, no matter how hard I try, I fail? What if I do not reach the goal, achieve my desire? If I respect that at the core of my being there truly is a mysterious purposeful Something, then I can see my failure may be caused by my heedlessly running into a limit built into who I am, contrary to my True Nature. The result will be a refinement of how I see myself, a humility which embraces the fact that I am not the only one in charge of who I am.

But lacking this respect for, and awareness of, a Mystery at my center, as most of us do now, I am more likely to react either with bitterness, anger, loss of self-esteem or self-confidence, leading perhaps to cruelty.
to myself or others, increasing drug or alcohol abuse, and/or depression. Such is the portrait of life in our times.

Fate is such a distasteful concept today. At one time, it brought a sense of security and reassurance to know that our lives were in fact bounded by limits that both held us back but also gave us a sense of being held in, of being contained. It helped us to feel that our lives were in fact on a meaningful path going somewhere, even if we had no idea where. At least there was a path, and this was called our destiny or fate.

Now the closest most of us come to experiencing this feeling is in falling in love. So often when we meet someone and fall into romantic love we cannot escape the feeling that it was fated, meant to be, bashert. It is quite likely though that the same feeling can be found in many other life circumstances if we are open to it. For example, I discovered my “calling” to be an astrologer when I walked into a public library many years ago and felt that a book over on the shelf “yelled” at me. Something happened to make me stop in my tracks and walk over and examine this book, which was about astrology. From that moment came a rapid education in the subject, in which it largely felt like I was “remembering” how to do it, rather than learning something new. Was that fate or destiny? It certainly felt like it, though I did not believe in fate at the time.

In losing our connection with, and awareness of, the Mystery at our core, we have lost the humility and reverence which allows us to accept the limits in our lives that earlier times would have labeled “fate.” This term offends us today because of its implication that we do not have free will, and therefore are not in control. And this is anathema (“one that is cursed by ecclesiastical authority; someone or something intensely disliked or loathed”) to the ego.

At times of failure or compulsion, addiction or catastrophe, we are brought face to face with our lack of control. This is our opportunity to surrender, to yield to Something greater than our personality and to say as Jesus did: “Not my will, but thy Will be done.” The same thought is at the conclusion of the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy will be done.” Nowadays politicians talk about God’s will, but often this seems to be nothing but a code word for their own agenda.

We are not talking here only about the Christian Jesus, but about the Mystery by any name that resides in us and contains the blueprint or DNA code for our soul. When we reach the limits of our personal power and control and hit the wall of the limits of fate, the crucial determination will be what this does to us, how we assimilate the experience and what our attitude will be as a result. Here is the opportunity for a metanoia, or turning-around, repentance or reversal (See Chapter 8 on Cycles). The Greeks portrayed such reversals as the result of the turning of the Wheel of Fortune, or fate.

Suddenly up or suddenly down—who is really in charge?

At such a time, perhaps the appropriate response is one of consent, which to the ego sounds like giving up (which it is) and weakness (which it is not). Surrender is only abdicating responsibility when there is no higher Power to surrender to. But if there is truly a Mystery which we serve and which we are, then surrendering to It only makes sense. To do otherwise seems both prideful and foolish, as well as destructive. Yet all you have to do is watch drivers today at a Yield sign. Yielding and surrendering are almost obsolete.

We are in awe of the heroic person who sacrifices his or her life for the good of another or for the greater whole. This has long been considered the most noble of acts, worthy of remembrance into eternity. Jesus is remembered by the Christian world for his sacrifice in which he is believed to have given his life for the sake of humanity, to redeem it from the original sin of Adam and the suffering that was incurred as punishment. Sacrifice means “to make whole or sacred,” an act of offering something precious to a deity or the greater whole.

When the ancient Greeks celebrated their victories or good fortune with a feast, they would toss the juiciest meat into the fire, as a sacrifice in grateful acknowledgment of the supremacy of the gods. They knew that they depended on uncontrolled and mysterious higher Powers for their good fortune. Where is that attitude now?

When something precious is taken from us—a dream, our health, or possessions or a loved one—then we have the opportunity to align our attitude with the Mystery by voluntarily accepting it as a sacrifice we are
being asked to make, a price to pay. What can teach us this today? We are willing to give up nothing, and resent when we are asked to pay. Why wouldn’t we feel this way when the only greater whole we usually are asked to sacrifice for is our government? There are no gods anymore to make our sacrifice—even if it is painful—meaningful and worthwhile.

In our inner life, when we are faced with the need to give something up—a belief, a cherished value or security, as well as a pleasure—we can choose to offer it willingly as a sacrifice. In doing so we still sustain the loss, but we also affirm our allegiance to and respect for the Mystery which we serve.

So sacrifice and consent are common attitudes in someone who respects the Mystery. It is also a way to begin to build a relationship with that Mystery, acting as if there is Something other than you that deserves your respect. Such a spirit acknowledges the fated aspect of life (the things I cannot change) and bears witness to the Presence of the Companion or True Self in our lives. In such a life, hardship is borne with patience and goodwill. Complaining is ok. Our lot is not only to get what’s ours but also to pay the debt that keeps things in balance (karma). And we may often have no idea of what caused the debt to begin with.

\[
\text{Much of your pain is self-chosen.} \\
\text{It is the bitter potion by which the} \\
\text{physician within you heals your sick self.} \\
\text{Therefore trust the physician, and drink} \\
\text{his remedy in silence and tranquility:} \\
\text{For his hand, though heavy and hard, is} \\
\text{guided by the tender hand of the Unseen.}^5
\]

Karma, which we brought up earlier, is a well-known Sanskrit term popularized in the 60’s, which means balance. The belief that bad things happen because of karma, meaning one did something equally bad in a past life, is a somewhat trivial expression of the idea. But in karma yoga all actions are undertaken with the attitude that they are to balance previous actions and their results. Thus when we hit the wall of our fate and experience loss or failure, we undertake to do that as well as we would do our successes and accomplishments, because in doing so we are balancing the universe which gives and takes, rewards us and also asks for sacrifice. And in addition, it centers the “I” in a more authentic place, aligned with the True Self or Mystery.

The family curse is another example of the presence of some greater Power in our lives that was once called fate. How do we account for the problems and challenges that are the result of being born into our particular family? The family curse is the stuff of Shakespeare and the Greek playwrights, of a time when fate was acceptable. Though we want to believe we are more “enlightened” now, the very same dynamics continue to be played out through the wounding of incest, alcoholism, drug abuse, or misdeeds committed by ancestors that are still carried in the souls of descendants. And without self-examination and the willingness to pay the debt, we can see ourselves and others passing on the same “curse” to our children, until someone can finally undergo the necessary healing/suffering (paying the “debt”) to put a stop to it.

**Imagination, Dreams and Fantasy**

\[
\text{Then I fall asleep} \\
\text{To dream my dreams of you} \\
\text{In dreams... I walk with you} \\
\text{In dreams... I talk to you} \\
\text{In dreams... You're mine} \\
\text{All of the time} \\
\text{We're together} \\
\text{In dreams...}^6
\]
Try sometime to listen to the lyrics of love songs and to consider them as poems from the soul expressing our yearning for the deeper Self, for our original Home.

If we can acknowledge, or even just entertain the possibility that there IS in fact a Mystery underlying our universe, and that we do not know everything and may never do so, AND that what we don’t know may very well be valuable, then our eyes are opened, not to a sudden understanding and solution of life, but opened to imagining and considering without having to be confined by the limits of literalism.

If someone is depressed or obsessed with guns or sex, then besides the literal explanations of biochemistry and childhood trauma, we will be open to other causes, causes that once were called “gods,” but which now need new names since we no longer believe in such things. As an interim solution those open to non-literal causes have coined terms like “complexes” (a group of repressed desires and memories that autonomously exerts a dominating influence upon the personality) and “archetypes.” These are not literal “things,” not even clearly defined causes, but at least they are not restricted to the material and concrete.

In this intermediate step we have at least freed ourselves for now from the need to track down all dysfunction with the microscope. Even so, we still often believe the only treatment, even for a “complex,” is the prescription of a substance to eliminate or lessen the symptom. It is rarely considered that a subtle and non-material cause may best be treated by a subtle and non-material therapy, perhaps using imagination in visualization.

If there is a Mystery, an inner Companion which we have attempted in our times to locate in “the unconscious,” then we need to accord it the proper respect by finding ways to hear this Mystery on its own terms before leaping to materialistic conclusions. To do so requires a special trust, which is so lacking today. Freud may have popularized the unconscious by referring symptomatic behavior of hysterical women to causes buried there, but his early description of the unconscious resembled that of an internal combustion engine, a concrete system of levers and pulleys, based on equations of force and attraction, and motivated only by animal instinct.

This mechanical level of functioning can be observed in the dynamics attributed to the unconscious, but that does not mean we have understood the unconscious. We can measure and predict the effects of gravity, but that has not given us any kind of definitive understanding of what gravity truly is. It is a Mystery. So is the unconscious. And since the unconscious is by definition shrouded in enigmatic mystery, it is there we must look if we wish to re-establish a relationship with the Mystery which stands at the core of our being, and which is truly Who or What we are.

Imagination is the Star in Man, the Celestial or Supercelestial Body.7

How does one begin to commune with the unconscious? Does it want to communicate with us? It would appear so because of its endless pouring forth of dreams, symptoms and fantasies. But this is not so obvious today, because little attention is given to the imagination as anything but a way of avoiding reality. The imagination has become vestigial like the appendix, considered useless by most people, although admired by teachers of creativity and seekers of inspiration.

How often do we hear that imagining is a waste of time? “You were only imagining things.” What of any value can be found in the activity of imagining? In fact it is there that the treasure can be found. But how treacherous it can be. We can be so deluded, so misled by what we imagine. It is no wonder that people would rather rely on the authority of medical tests and diagnoses found in books. Even when dealing with the products of the imagination, people often rely on the kind of interpretation books that tell us a dream of a cow stands for the mother, a mountain for a goal, etc.

One can hardly hope to develop a meaningful relationship with the unconscious when its utterances are taken to mean only what they “stand for.” It would be like trying to understand someone speaking Italian when you know none, and looking up each word in a dictionary to see what is being said. The idioms, the nuances and the subtle aspects of language are all missing, and these may contain the essence of what is being communicated.
No, it is a much longer and trickier process to learn to establish communication with the unconscious. Proceeding humbly and with caution, expecting many dead ends and misunderstandings, it is more like a playful attempt to catch a fish with one’s hands, being happy to have one while a thousand get away. There can be great joy in the discovery of a single small meaningful hint contained in our world of dreams and fantasies and coincidences.

The unconscious works toward the expression of [your] potential the way a sculptor works toward releasing the statue held inside a rock. To ignore dreams is to hide the sculptor’s tools, to tear out pages from our own stories, to drive with our tailpipes dragging on the ground. If we ignore dreams we cut ourselves off from the place from which calls emanate.

If you truly find you want to work at it, then you can begin by tracking your dreams and other imaginative moments. It takes a great leap for our 21st century minds to consider the possibility that there is something actually meaningful contained in the constant stream of imagery that flows beneath our waking attention (and inattention!). With the attitude of a Sherlock Holmes you can begin jotting down in a journal your dreams remembered on waking, fantasies caught passing through your mind at any time, and unexpected coincidences. Expecting nothing in particular, only closely observing in order to see what if anything you might find there, holding off on conclusions and quick interpretations, you can accumulate the stuff of your imagination and strengthen the ability to catch these subtle messages before they disappear.

Often people do not believe they dream, and so the challenge of recording and observing one’s dreams becomes all the more difficult in their minds. But we all dream; we just don’t all remember. Yet if you make a commitment that you do want to find out what the unconscious has to say to you, and you manifest that commitment in the acquisition of a journal or notepad which you keep beside your bed, and in the willingness to sit up at 3 AM and write down what you have dreamed, soon the floodgates may open. It is often quite amazing how much dreaming becomes available to us once we are determined to pay attention.

Once you’ve caught an interesting dream, even a small fragment or image (which may be easier to handle at first) or a momentary fantasy, the suggested approach is less like a direct attack and more what the alchemists called a *circumambulatio*, a walking around it patiently in order at first just to see how it looks from different angles. In fact, the motion of circumambulation is usually described as the most effective approach to exploring the unconscious. This is an unfamiliar attitude—to be indirect—in an environment characterized by impatience, immediate gratification and “go for it!”

We let our fantasy or dream imagery “cook” in the imagination. Holding back the impatient desire to “figure it out” and come to an interpretation, the imaginary fragment is sometimes better observed as if it were something we had never seen before, and as if we want to observe it in detail in order to report on it to someone who has never heard of such a thing. A table is a “flat square board made of dark wood, resting on four thin posts of the same wood and attached at the four corners, allowing the flat board to stand a few feet above the floor and parallel to it,” rather than just a “table.”

**DREAM WORK**

**Working with Your Dreams and Fantasies**

(The following suggestions are not meant to be complete or final in working with your dreams. You may find many other methods that work for you, either from other sources or from your own experimentation.)

*What are dreams?* Human beings have seen dreams in a variety of ways: as messages from a spirit world, as meaningless phenomena generated as side effects of brain activity, as foretelling the future, uncovering past and present motives hidden from our conscious view, or as a form of telepathic communication between the unconscious of two or more people. Perhaps all of these and other definitions as well have truth in them in differing particular situations.

Or maybe dreams are one of the many mysteries that make up the evolutionary stage of being human. We do not know what dreams are, but we can know from our own experiences that
dreams often convey meaningful messages by means of a fluid symbolic language. This language really defies attempts to capture it in dictionaries or rigid rules of dream interpretation.

Dream interpretation is an art, not a mechanical process of translation. There should always be enough open space in your attempts to “capture” your dreams and their meaning for you to be surprised. For example, how can we even assume that our dreams are meant to be “captured” or “revealed?” Dream work is typically based on these assumptions, but are they valid?

Perhaps it is best not to view our dreams as mental phenomena to be revealed, but to take them just as they are. Just as we meet our outer experiences in life and react to them as they present themselves to us, it is possible that the same approach is valid with regard to our dreams and fantasies. What if we take the green-colored horse in last night’s dream to be simply the green-colored horse that lives in our dreams, without attempting to penetrate, interpret or manipulate it? Then we wait for it to show or tell us what it’s all about within our dreams, rather than operating upon it with our conscious mind with its beliefs and assumptions.

Dream work is a process, an attempt to find a proper way to be with the dream while it works on you. We can think of it for example as “cooking” the dream, allowing it to ripen or carry on its impact upon us that began in our sleep. The following suggestions are ways of simply spending time with the dream—a circumambulatio, walking around it—and allowing it to work on us, without trying to force ourselves into its hidden meaning or to compel it to yield to our will.

Guidelines for Dream Work

Part of the subtlety of working with your dreams is in being able to see dream images in two contexts. For example, consider that the dream is referring to an inner state. Look at the dream through that lens. Then consider that the dream is referring to your outer life. What do you see then? Also, try viewing a dream-content both objectively and subjectively. For example, if you dreamed about a horse, what do you know objectively about horses? They are graceful, strong, can work hard, can be wild or domesticated, etc. And what do you know subjectively about horses? Do they scare you? Inspire you? Awaken a particular memory?

Rather than trying to apply the following suggestions to each and every dream you may have, you may find it more useful to choose a particular dream that seems interesting or important for you and to focus on just that dream for the time being. You can use a fragment of a dream if you wish; it doesn’t have to be a long and detailed dream. Enjoy yourself. Try being a detective, patiently practicing objective observation, looking for clues, overlooking nothing.

In the dream you have chosen to work with, take the time to explore and write about each of the following areas:

Setting: Examine the location in physical space and the time in which the dream is happening. Imagine then that you are being called to such a physical space and time within you. For example, if you dream you are in the kitchen of your childhood home, you might consider that this dream refers to a “place” within your psyche, a place in memory perhaps, that was formed in, or refers to, that particular period of childhood, and in the place within you where food is prepared, where experiences are put together and mixed, cooked or transformed, and even eaten, or incorporated. The age of a person or object in the dream may also refer to something in your life that has been existent that long.

Characters/Objects: Who or what is portrayed by the dream? Do not try to figure out who they stand for or symbolize, but describe in detail what you can discern about their gender, appearance, characteristics, nature, demeanor, function. Do not pay attention yet as to what these things mean, just gather and write the information. This is helping you to be with the dream and to allow it to work on you.

Action: Create a brief synopsis or summary of the action within your dream. What is the central theme or story? What if any crisis, tension, conflict, drama, etc. occurred?
Outcome: What, if any, resolution occurs at the end of the dream? Resolved or not, what state does it leave you in?

Feelings: What can you remember of how you felt during the dream? At the end of the dream? Now, as you recall the dream?

Associations: Do the setting, any of the characters, the action, or especially any of the feelings from the dream bring to mind any memory, associated thought or feeling, anything (even a movie, book, story you heard, etc.)? These may be important. Add these to the material presented by the dream as you consider it. Also consider anything that seems to be a coincidence, connected to the dream even if not causally or rationally.

History: Is there a dream history here? Do you remember having dreamed of the setting, any of the characters, or a similar action or outcome previously? Repeating or evolving dream themes can be very important, often occurring over considerable lengths of time. Perhaps you may have dreamed about a particular childhood friend four times over the past 5 years. Consider that you are witnessing a single theme or progressive development having to do with whatever that friend represents in your psyche.

Playing with the dream: Feel free to play with any of the material from the above stages of consideration. “What if...??” “Could this be saying...??” Pay particular attention to any internal reactions you may be having that feel like an “aha!”—an insight, a shock of recognition. Also be open to any apparent coincidence that occurs during or after your consideration of the dream and that seems to you, however illogically, to be connected to the dream. Consider that this is somehow tied into the meaning of the dream for you. Another way of playing is to imagine yourself to be one or more of the characters within the dream and to write or speak about yourself as that character. Or perhaps you may carry on a written or spoken dialog in your imagination with a character from the dream to see if any more information is elicited.

All of this takes devotion and time. It is sometimes demanding enough just to be willing to record your dreams, without spending the additional time exploring them. Do what you can, without expecting to deeply explore every dream you have. Try to keep an open mind, even when something seems “right” to you. And consider that the dream may have more to tell you than what you may already have discovered. Who can say when is the right time to put away a dream and to consider it either a dead-end or fully cooked?

The imagination is the fluid frontier between our waking attention and the mysterious and hidden world beneath it. Even in that statement I am imagining the position of the hidden world as “beneath” my waking consciousness. This idea of location is something to be observed and wondered about. It defines nothing and rests on no solid knowledge. It is just my fantasy of where the unconscious is located. In fact I believe the unconscious is everywhere, but in portraying it as underneath my everyday world, I am attributing to it an underworld quality, like that of Hades or the world of the dead, also the place where seeds sprout and roots drive downward. It is this kind of observation and thinking that we are trying to practice in our attempts to explore the hidden world of the unconscious, which reveals itself through the imagination.

The imagination communicates in fantasy.

What is a fantasy? Like the word “imagination” (“the act or power of forming a mental image of something not present to the senses or never before wholly perceived in reality”), it is another term that in our times is used to devalue, to label as wasteful and not-real. Yet if you think about it, EVERYTHING you see around you that is made by human beings originated as a fantasy in the imagination. Before something tangibly can exist, it must first appear in the mind of its creator, in the imagination as an image. Many theologians of various religions have imagined their God’s creation of the universe as proceeding in the same manner, first conceived in the imagination of God and only from there being manifested or built as the material world.

Of course, most fantasy remains disembodied, and whether or not it accurately reflects our outer reality, it is showing us something about our inner world. The imagery of fantasy is not, as the word “imagery” seems
to imply, restricted to visual pictures. The fantasy of having a brain tumor is also an image, as is the sudden rush of anxiety for no apparent reason, or the imagined voice in one’s ear when no one is around. Our understanding of fantasy and its images needs to be expanded, consisting of all forms of imagined material, whether imaginary body sensations like pain or an erection, moods and feelings without pictures, smells, sounds or voices with no apparent literal source, as well as visuals.

**Fantasy** (“a creation of the imaginative faculty whether expressed or merely conceived: as a fanciful design or invention”) can be seen as an almost constant flow of imagery going on most of the time just outside of our perception. At first we may only be able to deduce a fantasy from our feelings or actions, seeing that our activity is based on assumptions we did not know we had. As an example, our civilization’s tendency to believe and to act as if progress is unlimited and growth will never end, even though we are faced with the obvious presence of limits and even death everywhere around us.

This, like all activity, rests on fantasy. Somewhere in the collective imagination bubbles a fantasy that creates the context and even the necessity for this behavior. What is that fantasy? If we cannot catch a glimpse of it in our own mind, then we can at least deduce backwards toward the source of the behavior. What fantasy is it that sees unlimited growth and expansion? Isn’t this the same fantasy that accompanied the rapid exploration and pioneering spirit which founded the USA? That original impulse has been tempered by the reality that land is not infinite and gold runs out.

But unconsciously we are still stuck in that fantasy, probably because we are so fearful of the death at the end of growth. What is it when growth stops? Stagnation and death. The belief that the stock market and western economy will always grow is no different than the gullible fantasy that participation in a chain letter will never leave anyone with a loss. No matter how many times we read that people lost their savings in such schemes, there are always people who think that this one will really work and benefit everyone at no one’s expense.

If you think something is going to happen, but have no actual proof that it will, then you are in a fantasy. We all do it all the time. The belief in the apocalypse, the success of a chain letter, the ultimate golden age of wealth for us all from unlimited economic growth—these are all fantasies (any of which may really turn out to happen, or may not). The fantasy itself is real, as it is really a fantasy. This has nothing to do with whether or not what is fantasized turns out to manifest concretely. And if enough people are in the same fantasy, no one questions it and no one realizes it is a fantasy.

Until…

**The Emperor’s New Clothes**

by Hans Christian Andersen

Once upon a time there lived a vain emperor whose only worry in life was to dress in elegant clothes. He changed clothes almost every hour and loved to show them off to his people.

Word of the Emperor’s refined habits spread over his kingdom and beyond. Two scoundrels who had heard of the Emperor’s vanity decided to take advantage of it. They introduced themselves at the gates of the palace with a scheme in mind.

“We are two very good tailors and after many years of research we have invented an extraordinary method to weave a cloth so light and fine that it looks invisible. As a matter of fact it is invisible to anyone who is too stupid and incompetent to appreciate its quality.”

The chief of the guards heard the scoundrel’s strange story and sent for the court chamberlain. The chamberlain notified the prime minister, who ran to the Emperor and disclosed the incredible news. The Emperor’s curiosity got the better of him and he decided to see the two scoundrels.

“Besides being invisible, your Highness, this cloth will be woven in colors and patterns created especially for you.” The emperor gave the two men a bag of gold coins in exchange for their promise to begin working on the fabric immediately.
“Just tell us what you need to get started and we’ll give it to you.” The two scoundrels asked for a loom, silk, gold thread and then pretended to begin working. The Emperor thought he had spent his money quite well; in addition to getting a new extraordinary suit, he would discover which of his subjects were ignorant and incompetent. A few days later, he called the old and wise prime minister, who was considered by everyone as a man with common sense.

“Go and see how the work is proceeding,” the Emperor told him, “and come back to let me know.”

The prime minister was welcomed by the two scoundrels.

“We’re almost finished, but we need a lot more gold thread. Here, Excellency! Admire the colors, feel the softness!” The old man bent over the loom and tried to see the fabric that was not there. He felt cold sweat on his forehead.

“I can’t see anything,” he thought. “If I see nothing, that means I’m stupid! Or, worse, incompetent!” If the prime minister admitted that he didn’t see anything, he would be discharged from his office.

“What a marvelous fabric,” he said then. “I’ll certainly tell the Emperor.” The two scoundrels rubbed their hands gleefully. They had almost made it. More thread was requested to finish the work.

Finally, the Emperor received the announcement that the two tailors had come to take all the measurements needed to sew his new suit.

“Well, we’re at this stage,” the scoundrels said. “Prepare your clothes and we’ll come back to take them.”

“Come in,” the Emperor ordered. Even as they bowed, the two scoundrels pretended to be holding a large roll of fabric.

“Here it is your Highness, the result of our labor,” the scoundrels said. “We have worked night and day but, at last, the most beautiful fabric in the world is ready for you. Look at the colors and feel how fine it is.” Of course the Emperor did not see any colors and could not feel any cloth between his fingers. He panicked and felt like fainting. But luckily the throne was right behind him and he sat down. But when he realized that no one could know that he did not see the fabric, he felt better. Nobody could find out he was stupid and incompetent. And the Emperor didn’t know that everybody else around him thought and did the very same thing.

The farce continued as the two scoundrels had foreseen it. Once they had taken the measurements, the two began cutting the air with scissors while sewing with their needles an invisible cloth.

“Your Highness, you’ll have to take off your clothes to try on your new ones.” The two scoundrels draped the new clothes on him and then held up a mirror. The Emperor was embarrassed but since none of his bystanders were, he felt relieved.

“Yes, this is a beautiful suit and it looks very good on me,” the Emperor said trying to look comfortable. “You’ve done a fine job.”

“Your Majesty,” the prime minister said, “we have a request for you. The people have found out about this extraordinary fabric and they are anxious to see you in your new suit.” The Emperor was doubtful about showing himself naked to the people, but then he abandoned his fears. After all, no one would know about it except the ignorant and the incompetent.

“All right,” he said. “I will grant the people this privilege.” He summoned his carriage and the ceremonial parade was formed. A group of dignitaries walked at the very front of the procession and anxiously scrutinized the faces of the people in the street. All the people had gathered in the main square, pushing and shoving to get a better look. An applause welcomed the regal procession. Everyone wanted to know how stupid or incompetent his or her neighbor was but, as the Emperor passed, a strange murmur rose from the crowd.
Everyone said, loud enough for the others to hear: “Look at the Emperor’s new clothes. They’re beautiful!”

“What a marvelous train!”

“And the colors! The colors of that beautiful fabric! I have never seen anything like it in my life.” They all tried to conceal their disappointment at not being able to see the clothes, and since nobody was willing to admit his own stupidity and incompetence, they all behaved as the two scoundrels had predicted.

A child, however, who had no important job and could only see things as his eyes showed them to him, went up to the carriage.

“The Emperor is naked,” he said.

“Fool!” his father reprimanded, running after him. “Don’t talk nonsense!” He grabbed his child and took him away. But the boy’s remark, which had been heard by the bystanders, was repeated over and over again until everyone cried:

“The boy is right! The Emperor is naked! It’s true!”

The Emperor realized that the people were right but could not admit to that. He thought it better to continue the procession under the illusion that anyone who couldn’t see his clothes was either stupid or incompetent. And he stood stiffly on his carriage, while behind him a page held his imaginary mantle.

We live now in the collectively held fantasies that science will solve all our problems, that we are nothing but matter, that growth never ends. But we are living also in the time when these fantasies are breaking down. Our problems are growing no matter what science does, and in fact we have new bigger problems being created by science. Being nothing but matter drains life of its possibilities and reduces us all to random atoms in the universal pinball game of life. Growth that never ends is just another form of cancer.

Answers will not be found in books—including this one—nor in science. Answers will only come from the Source of everything, the Mystery which we have abandoned and yet which has never abandoned us. But as our imaginations dry up and our world is medicated more and more, the day approaches when perhaps no one will remember the Mystery. This is a moment in time, a crucial moment in which we have the opportunity to turn back to the lost Source in each of us in the hopes that if we listen and are open, enough of us will not be misled and deluded, not be inflated by thinking we are God or the Messiah, but will be inspired to new ways of living, or at least to do a better job of overseeing the breakdown and destruction of western civilization for this cycle.

These are the signs of our times:

Obesity as a major health threat, expectations that fully one third of our children will be at risk for Type 2 Diabetes. Overweight adults driving overweight vehicles, guzzling gasoline and polluting the atmosphere. “Through the heaviness of their nourishment I sank into deep slumber,” says the “Hymn of the Pearl.” We’re all obese in some way, overdoing something to our detriment, to make up for…

Who cares? WHO CARES? ADD children, parents massively abdicating responsibility for their children, letting their role as parent slide as money making, career advancement and acquisition of toys takes precedent. Adults in general avoiding our social responsibilities for those who simply cannot make it on their own. Children at younger and younger ages shooting up schools and killing children. Road and air rage in which adults act like infants with no self-control. Corporations bilking investors and enriching the few clever enough to screw everyone else. WAKE UP! Do you think you are witnessing the crowning triumph of our civilization? What do you think you are watching happen in front of your eyes?
Meditation and Divination: Astrology, Tarot, Runes, I Ching

If we are to recover the capacity to “see” the world around us and inside of us as the movement of the Mystery, then we need to learn to break the life-long habit of seeing as we were taught to see. Our conditioning to overlook the obvious and to believe that a name or label gives us understanding cuts off curiosity and wonder and further exploration.

Children can teach us by their openness and wonder. They see objects and behaviors of others with fresh eyes, and their comments or reactions often can shock us into realizing how blind we become once education “teaches” us what things are.

The learning of concepts like “tree” and “season” insulates us from seeing a tree or the seasons as they are, naked in front of us. If we believe, as the ancients did, that all manifestations are the work of the gods (or God), then we would seek to divine the deeper hidden intent or meaning. But today we laugh at anyone who thinks an object “means” anything. An intuitive type of person may still seek hidden meaning, but they are in the small minority in a world of “sensates,” people who take only what their senses show them to be the whole of reality—“What you see is what you get.”

Once you have begun to question your habitual ways of perceiving and are learning to observe with fresh eyes, two things will help develop your insight into hidden meanings. First, learning to meditate—to still the mind, shut out distractions, and concentrate on the subject at hand—brings your mind to a focus. Much like the development of an atrophied muscle, holding the mind steady for a few moments each day, focussing on either your breath, or a word or sound, an image or idea, even a candle flame, will strengthen your ability to see and then to penetrate. After gaining skill in steadying and focussing the mind, receptivity to insight and inspiration can follow. Ideas will just appear, not through logical thought, but often as sudden “aha!” experiences.

Second, in order to open channels of communication between the mysterious unconscious and your conscious mind, you may wish to use some form of divination. In this practice, you would use a method such as tarot cards, runes, the I Ching, or astrology. Before briefly describing each one (and there are others), we can say that what they all have in common is that they have been devised (by whom or when is not certain) in order to provide a “reflection” of unconscious forces to the conscious mind. The wind cannot be seen, but swaying trees and ripples on the water can. Whether by cards, coins, yarrow stalks, tiles or horoscopes, the patterns of unconscious movement can be read or revealed by these and other divination techniques.

These are quite foreign to our western intellect, and their theoretical basis is completely contradictory to our rational cause-and-effect assumption of how the universe works. But if you’ve come this far, you have already had to suspend rational judgment, at least temporarily. We have been trained to believe that everything that appears or happens in our universe is caused by something else—is the effect of some material cause—and is perhaps the cause of some other effect.

While there is no doubt that cause-and-effect is a major element in our lives, it may not be the only way things work. If science derives its effectiveness and power from its assumption of cause-and-effect as the predominant law of the universe, divination rests upon another principle, one that Jung defined as “synchronicity.” Synchronicity implies that there are events in this world that are connected meaningfully but that neither one is cause or effect. We call these coincidences, but we do not attribute meaning to them. The fact that two things occur with enough similarity or with a timing that draws our attention makes us notice and label them a coincidence. But synchronicity means that there is a meaning to the connection, and therefore a good reason for us to try to penetrate the surface in order to divine that meaning.

So when you draw a tarot card, or a rune, or toss coins to arrive at an I Ching hexagram, or look at an astrological chart for yourself or a given moment, synchronicity provides the rationale for using these patterns and images to discover the hidden meaning or purpose of the moment. A belief in synchronicity is a quick ticket to the psych ward in many circles.

**Tarot:** Briefly, the tarot consists of a deck of 78 cards made up of 56 minor arcana cards of four suits (cups, wands, coins/pentacles, and swords), which include royalty (kings, queens, pages and knights) plus an ad-
ditional 22 major arcana cards. It is believed that our 52-card playing cards originated from the tarot. Some believe the tarot originated in ancient Egypt. The symbolic pictures on the tarot cards feed the imagination and bring ideas to mind which can reveal underlying meaning. In cases where a “spread” is being used, a pattern or layout involving more than a single card, meaning is derived as well from the position of any particular card in the spread.

For example, if you choose to draw three cards in sequence representing the past, present and future, then the symbolic meaning of the first card has the additional significance of representing somehow the past, while the next card signifies the present, and so on.

**Runes**: Runes are tiles made of ceramic, stone, glass, or any other material on which there are simple linear symbols, each with a particular meaning. They are often considered to have originated from Norse culture. Usually there are 25 runes in a set. These often are sold in bags accompanied by an interpretation book. By drawing a rune from the bag while thinking of a problem or question, you receive an indication of its underlying significance.

**I Ching**: The I Ching is a method of divination originating from China, using either 3 coins (even pennies will work) or a bunch of 50 yarrow stalks. The coin method is simpler and easier, and the stalks are the more traditional method. With a question or situation in mind, the coins are tossed or the stalks are counted a total of six times, and each time translates into a “line,” which can be either broken (yin) or solid (yang), changing or not changing. Once the six lines are recorded as a hexagram, the result can be looked up in a book and the image it symbolizes can be considered as a meaningful statement on the question.

**Astrology**: Astrology probably originated before recorded history, as human beings sought to find order in the heavens that could reassure them in the midst of chaos on earth. Because astrology and the tarot have been known to Western culture for so long, they bear the additional burden of prejudice as being superstitious foolishness and the tools of fortune tellers. But serious consideration will usually reveal a deeper and more earnest aspect to these subjects.

Astrology is the attempt to artfully read meaning from the particular moment of origin of a person, a question or any entity, using the positions of celestial bodies. For our purposes, astrology can be very useful because it depends upon the symbolism of the planets, and since they bear the names of ancient deities, we can imagine their patterns as revealing the activities or intents of the gods. Like the other approaches we have been discussing, our literal cause-and-effect prejudices and narrowness of thought demand that astrology prove its validity on the basis of these assumptions, which it probably cannot do and should not try.

Astrology’s strength is that it represents a long-standing system of thought that rests more on intuition and synchronicity, and any attempt to defend it on scientific grounds only tends to castrate its true power. By learning to interpret the symbolism of the planetary patterns present at the moment of your birth, you can find great insight into lifelong issues and traits. And by tracking the movements of the planets against the background of this original chart of your birth, cyclic ups and downs, challenges and opportunities can be understood in their deeper intent and meaning, and your timing can be much improved as you learn to cooperate with deeper rhythms operating in your life.

In all these divinatory methods, learning is facilitated by immersing yourself in the subject (astrology takes much longer to learn). For example, buying a deck of tarot cards or a set of runes and engaging in pretty constant dialog as an experiment will familiarize you with the symbolic meanings and the “voice” of the cards or runes will gradually become more well-known to you. It is not necessary to wait until you have a momentous question. A great way to learn is to ask your chosen method at the beginning of each day what this day is about, what matters most, and then at the end of the day to meditate upon the result as compared to your actual experience.

In all cases, the purpose of learning to use and to understand these methods is, once again, to open the door to the unconscious so that rather than being completely caught up in your daily activities and habits, you are made to pause and consider the deeper meaning of your life, the active presence of unseen “forces”
or patterns, and in this reflection you create a space for unconscious insight to be recognized. All these methods foster greater openness, imagination, and fantasy, unless they are applied literally.

But as we said earlier, without the practice of some form of meditation, it is difficult to hold the mind steady and focussed long enough and with enough penetration for a dialog with the unconscious to happen. These techniques are not quick and easy games, but do demand an ongoing sense of commitment and discipline if they are really to prove their value. Through them you may find yourself realizing a deeper and more intentional background to your surface life, and with that comes a greater appreciation and respect for the Mystery that you truly are.
Notes

2 C. G. Jung.
4 Yiddish, for “fated” or “destined”.
5 Kahlil Gibran, Excerpt from *The Prophet*.
6 Roy Orbison, “In Dreams”.
In our ordinary life we are limited and bound in a thousand ways—the prey of illusions and phantasms, the slaves of unrecognized complexes, tossed hither and thither by external influences, blinded and hypnotized by deceiving appearances. No wonder then that man, in such a state, is often discontented, insecure and changeable in his moods, thoughts and actions. Feeling intuitively that he is “one,” and yet finding that he is “divided unto himself,” he is bewildered and fails to understand either himself or others. No wonder that he, not knowing or understanding himself, has no self-control and is continually involved in his own mistakes and weaknesses; that so many lives are failures, or are at least limited and saddened by diseases of mind and body, or tormented by doubt, discouragement and despair. No wonder that man, in his blind passionate search for liberty and satisfaction, rebels violently at times, and at times tries to still his inner torment by throwing himself headlong into a life of feverish activity, constant excitement, tempestuous emotion, and reckless adventure.¹

When you leave the familiar “home” of what you know and who you think you are—your certainty and your pet beliefs and cherished traditions—you are like the European explorers who were willing to sail off the “edge of the world” in order to see what was out there. Except they had no one to tell them from experience what they could expect, no one who had been there already. We are more fortunate.

We mentioned at the opening of this book that our outer world and the objects found in it are commonly agreed upon by most of us as existing in “real life.” We have names we share to label these objects: “book”, “woman”, “skunk”, “truck”. When we cannot agree on the label, trouble can ensue—even warfare. We consider the objects of the outer world to be made up of atoms and of substance, material substance that can be measured, weighed, analyzed and agreed upon.

We so commonly undervalue the deeper aspects of the human psyche that we hold self-examination or preoccupation with ourselves to be almost morbid.²

You and I are bipolar—not like the “disease,” but we exist as dual, not singular beings. You are an individual, separated from others by your skin and your inner thoughts and feelings. And you are a participant, united with others possibly as joint members of a couple (two), a family (more), a neighborhood, community, race, nation and species. As a participant you share common values, goals, and activities with the other members. You have a common identity. Life is the challenge of maintaining both poles without having either one consume the other, and the balance is a moving one, dancing from one pole to the other depending on the moment and the circumstance.

Some of us spend more time around the individual pole and others around the collective or communal pole. If we get too attached to either pole, the other one can start to appear threatening. Or perhaps the other pole already is threatening because of some kind of early trauma and we find our favorite pole more secure. For
example, the individual pole when too strong makes belonging to groups seem dangerous, as if they might swallow us up and engulf us (including a group of two). Intimacy becomes too much.

If the communal pole dominates to an extreme degree, we are terrified at the prospect of separation or being alone. We suppress our anger or assertiveness, fear saying “no” or disagreeing because it threatens to rupture the bond between us and others. Some of us prefer to live by values and ideals that are communal. As valuable as this can be, it does endanger our ability to have our own mind, to stand alone when in the midst of group delusion or an unhealthy environment.

Others of us are mavericks or outlaws, preferring to rely on what feels right as individuals. This is the source of heroism, but it also can be the source of mental illness, including schizophrenia. It can be very scary to find yourself the only one who thinks a certain way. What do others call it? Quite often: “crazy.” But we all know many stories of amazing individuals whose solitary vision and courage to stand alone have brought about most of what we call human advancement. Strangely the collective advances through its individuals, while those who live primarily as collective beings shore up the status quo, and often resist to the end the potential for progress.

A collective person is highly unlikely to brave the very individual challenge of exploring his or her inner world. There is no authority present inside of us at first to tell us what the rules are and what is real and what is not. It seems that perhaps our human evolution is meant to take us from the security of the tribe (which does not require any solid sense of individuality) or group $^3$ to the security of being a separate individual. The danger of this individualism is that one can get caught in that stage and refuse to rejoin the collective.

The tribal or collective person is not yet really an individual, but rather a member of the herd. It would be dangerous and probably disastrous for this person to suddenly think that what they feel on the inside is always preferable to collectively held values. But the individual who has outgrown the religion and belief system of their family or community has to forge their own way at great risk, because the security of outer validation has been left behind. The only “group” left to rely on is the group of other individuals who have taken the same step already.

It is not certain that we will find such a “group.” The alchemists were a group of individuals, pursuing a common journey very much alone. The Hindu hermits in the forest were another such group, meditating after leaving most of the material world behind, discovering the secrets of the inner world. Teachers like Buddha and Jesus also are part of a “group,” teaching us the personal sacrifice necessary if we are to grow further into our True Nature. The tribal shaman (“a priest or priestess who uses magic for the purpose of curing the sick, divining the hidden, and controlling events”) is also a very individual member of a “group.” These “groups” may never meet, and their members may never know of each other, but the stories of the individual people who belong to these “groups” can serve as inspiration and reassurance to the one who is called by his or her soul.

No wonder that unearthing the psyche is like undertaking a full-scale drainage operation. Only a great idealist like Freud could devote a lifetime to such unclean work. It was not he who caused the bad smell, but all of us—we who think ourselves so clean and decent from sheer ignorance and the grossest self-deception. Thus our psychology, the acquaintance with our own souls, begins in every respect from the most repulsive end, that is to say, with all those things which we do not wish to see.$^4$

If you are ready to explore the inner world because you feel a call, or because you have become dissatisfied with only the outer world to sustain you, or if you are already probing WHAT you are, then let us look at what you are likely to find on your way inward and downward.

During the course of the day you have many visitors in your inner world. Perhaps the day begins with a dream, a vague feeling, a depression or feeling of well-being. At any time throughout the day you may experience a mood, a feeling, or a fantasy. These are things we all commonly experience. Everyone knows what we mean by having had a dream, feeling a mood or daydreaming. Yet you have made none of these. They appear unbidden on your inner “screen” and may go unnoticed. Or perhaps a mood or fantasy grips you and you cannot let it go. You feel yourself under its spell. You are “identified” with it. You think its
thoughts, see the world through its eyes. A tribal native would describe your being gripped by a mood as being “possessed.”

We find such terms quaint and naïve, but the truth is, you DO feel as if you are being possessed by something alien, something not you. You make an error, call the wrong person, place your keys someplace other than where you always do and then cannot find them. You do these things against your own will, and feel thwarted by them. What is going on? Who is really in charge?

The typical response is to say it’s nothing, just a slip, maybe you’re tired. But how can it be—if you are so sure you are the only inhabitant in your lonely inner world—that something other than you and your will can slip in and disturb you, operate against your wishes, make you feel ways you definitely do not choose to feel?

Admit it: you are not alone in there.

Which is really more troubling—to be so isolated and alone in the internal world of your dreams and feelings, or to realize that you are not alone and that there are inhabitants that you do not know, cannot control or understand, and that some of them seem not even to like you very much?

Consider what C.G. Jung, who coined the term “objective psyche” to describe the interior which we do not rule, articulated on this mysterious concept:

_Here, it [a vision or daydream] is a fact. It happens. Such a vision just comes to a person. That is the point of the whole technique [of dream and fantasy observation]. The psyche is liberated from merely arbitrary management and is given over to itself, to a factor no longer identical with our conscious will or with our conscious intention. We train the patient to let things happen so that he can see what his psyche is; otherwise he labors under the impression that his psyche is exactly what he wants it to be, that he makes it. But if his relation to it is such that he is able to experience it as an objective fact, then he will know about the truth and the value of psychical events. Such a vision just occurs; it is not made up, it is not sought for, it is not elaborated. It just happens in a form like this and has the character of objectivity…If you can train yourself to the point of being able to experience psychical contents as objective, then you can feel a psychical presence, for then you know that the psychical contents are not things you have made. They occur, and so you are not alone in the psychical world. You can be in perfectly good company, most entertaining company, if you will train yourself to take such things as objective…Naturally, all people feel alone in the world of the psyche because they assume that there is nothing there that they have not made up…Then one is all alone in one’s psyche…But through a certain training, a certain exercise—which is, of course, a yoga practice—something suddenly happens which one has not created, something objective, and then one is no longer alone…That is the object…to train people to experience something which is not their intention, something strange, something objective with which they cannot identify…This experience of the objective fact is all-important, because it denotes the presence of something which is not I, yet is still psychical. Such an experience can reach a climax where it becomes an experience of God._

This is a very important statement, central to our theme, and worth considering.

**A Mood and a Feeling**

What is more common than a mood (“emotional state; also, a conscious state of mind or predominant emotion, distinctive atmosphere”)? Yet where do they come from? You do not decide to have a mood. They are clearly not-you and come at will, able often to overpower you and your best intentions. You are going out on a date, looking forward to it for days. You have gotten new clothes and have a great plan. Can’t miss. Then your mother calls and chats innocently with you for a few moments. After that, you find yourself angry and depressed, though she said nothing discouraging. Where did this mood come from?

Moods—when we examine them—seem almost to operate the same way as spells and voodoo magic, as if they were sent as arrows or gifts (there are good moods too!) from someone else. We need to fully recognize
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and to acknowledge that this common experience shows that we are definitely open to being influenced by something totally contained within us yet which does not submit to our choices and control. Think about that. Either your mind is a tool of your will, or it is not. Sometimes it is, and you can choose to think about whatever you want to, and sometimes it is as if it thinks on its own, prompted by strange and alien thoughts and feelings that make you uncomfortable, or excited, and you have to wonder, “Where did THAT come from?”

Jung said that our feelings are like the weather, that there is nothing you can do about them. Rather than examining and engaging with a visiting mood, how often do most of us choose instead to falsely believe that we are in charge of our feelings? Can you admit that you ARE NOT your feelings? Are your feelings the same as you, or aren’t they?

When you choose to enter your inner world of subjective (in here) experience, as opposed to the outer world of objective (out there) experience, it quickly becomes apparent with any reflection that there is an objective (out there) realm IN HERE! Stop and think about that: you think that what is in here, i.e., subjective, is you, and that what is out there, i.e., objective, is not-you. Yet when you really look, you cannot avoid seeing that many of the things that are known only to you because they are part of your inner subjective world, are not really you, but “thought-objects” and “feeling-objects” that arise on their own and attract or attack or influence you.

Such a crucial fact, so obvious when you look at it, and yet the opposite of prevailing opinion.

So there is you here inside and not-you in the outer objective world, which everyone knows, but there is also you here inside and not-you in the inner subjective world, which everyone pretends not to know. This realization has made contemplatives throughout the ages ask themselves, “If I am not my mood, my feelings, this thought, that fantasy, then WHO AM I??” And the same contemplatives have responded “I am the one who observes.” The self as witness, nothing else. This is the goal of most meditation—to realize the self as being simply the witness and all else of inner contents to be objects of observation, and not-I.

Before this starts to sound too abstract and impractical, remember that we are discussing this because we are trying to learn more about the inner world, in order to gain access to some of its secrets and to experience the Mystery that lives within us and can serve as our Companion on our way back to our Home, our True Self or Nature, or original core Being. And we do that so that we may reconnect with our inner sources of vitality and guidance in order to find our way from the lost place we are now in.

What if you found yourself possessed by a mood, and instead of fighting it or becoming completely identified with it (identified means believing at the time that you are it, and it is you), you asked it “Who ARE you? What do you want?” To ask such questions is to imply that the mood is an “I,” that it too has a subjective self, just as we do. How strange is that! NOT ONLY ARE THERE THINGS INSIDE OF YOUR PRIVATE WORLD THAT YOU DO NOT KNOW AND CANNOT CONTROL, BUT THEY THEMSELVES HAVE CONSCIOUSNESS, GOALS, IDENTITIES, WILLS, AN INNER WORLD OF THEIR OWN!!!

Maybe you want to let that sink in a little. Sounds like I’m just trying to drive you insane perhaps, doesn’t it?

Perhaps instead we may want to re-examine our idea of what sanity really means. Sane: “proceeding from a sound mind : RATIONAL.” Now we’ve reached the crux. Somewhere along the way a sound and healthy mind became the same thing as a rational and logical mind. Where does that leave us when we want to discuss anything irrational? And surely we are fairly well into the irrational in our discussion at this point. If the definition of a sane mind is that it is rational, and our culture is based totally on the idea that rational is the only way to be sane, then where does that leave us?

Look around. Read the paper. Watch the news. How’s the rulership of rationality going? In our world of science and law based entirely on the rightness of logic and suspicious doubt of anything else, it should be working like clockwork, shouldn’t it? Of course the explanation is typically that in spite of our best intentions to live rationally there are primitive untamed jungles within the human soul as vestiges of our outgrown prehistoric past that just have not submitted to the wisdom of enlightened thought. Ask Freud:
our problems are the result of an attempt to pave over the wild vegetation of the animal soul within the human being with the civilized parking lots of uniform rows of parking spaces so that the world will be a better place—more order, less chaos.

But what do we have if we actually pave over every inch of our earth with concrete? A better world? The natural world of vegetation just won’t give it up and cooperate. The blade of grass grows up through the crack in the sidewalk. The world of logical mind just cannot win. And in you and me, this translates to the fact that the wild and uncontrollable side of our souls that is not-I remains, and must be dealt with. Our culture does not do this, other than to try to shock, medicate or incarcerate the irrational. Where it cannot do this, because someone does not voluntarily submit “for their own good,” our society simply marginalizes as eccentric, insane or mentally ill. This is not to say that some people AREN’T truly mentally ill. It is just a question of whether everyone who is labeled that way truly is ill, or maybe just not able or willing to fit in with the rational ideal.

The mood or fantasy or dream is that blade of grass, even in the most sane and logical of people. So let’s be up front about it: dreams, moods, feelings and fantasies A RE NOT RATIONAL—do not pretend to be, never were and should not be. We are left with the question: is there any value in the irrational? Is it just a primitive left-over threat to our sanity, or is it perhaps a valuable treasure that has been misplaced and overlooked, like the orphan? Is it perhaps like the fairy tale character, the rejected dumb one, ugly one, or foolish one who in the end saves the princess and marries her, while the handsome and clever brothers end up the fools?

Did you know that the word “rational” comes from “ratio” which means to calculate or compute? This means that the goal of rationality is to deal only with things that can be precisely measured. A worthy goal if calculation is your intent, but not necessarily a great way to evaluate the health of a human being. There are other valuable aspects to life besides just being able to measure, are there not? We sometimes call these other things “heart,” as compared with “head.” But not everything that is felt and irrational comes from the heart. Sometimes feelings and impulses come from the hungry belly or the lusting genitals.

So we are speaking here of the things that “do not compute.” You must be careful to realize how much of the above state of affairs regarding sanity and rationality has been conditioned into you since your first days. Remember being told to color only “inside the lines?” Remember what it felt like to imagine that you might be one of those people who went OUTSIDE the lines? There is a judge inside most of us doing daily evaluations on each and every thought to see whether it means we are certifiably insane. And as soon as you decide to consider the irrational (not rational: “not endowed with reason or understanding; lacking usual or normal mental clarity or coherence; not governed by or according to reason”) as something of any value, you know that soon after someone who wears an aluminum hat to foil(?) the CIA in their attempts to read his mind will be welcoming you to the fold.

But there is irrational and there is Irrational. Just because you think that there might be something worthwhile beyond that which is only logical and measurable does not mean that you will start wearing that hat. But of course, you could! It is definitely a step in that direction. And all the rational people will certainly see it that way, and the irrational ones will see you as joining their little party. So you can see, there’s a lot at stake when you start thinking about your moods as other subjectivities with minds of their own. If science can accept the fact of irrational numbers and imaginary numbers—and it does—then perhaps there can be value in irrational ideas as well.

But as we said before, to do so means that you need something other than collective opinion (which believes only in rational) to keep you from going completely off the deep end. What will do that for you? Perhaps a partner like a therapist or counselor, though many of them are already off the deep end. It’s a scary proposition. This is no easy thing, to delve into the unconscious, and some have gotten lost in the process. Disclaimer: Anyone reading this book who cannot find their way back has been warned. We need something like the thread that Ariadne gave to Theseus when he entered the labyrinth to hunt the minotaur, something that we can hold onto and follow back to the rational world after our journey.

So here you stand, face to face with a mood, and you dare to ask: “Who are you? What do you want?” As if that weren’t crazy enough, you actually expect an answer! And worse, if you wait, YOU WILL GET
ONE! The thread of Ariadne is woven from the aspects of your life that tie you to the “normal” world: your job, your family (if they are sane), hobbies belonging to the natural world like sports, collecting butterflies, hiking etc. These must be cultivated and continued in order to balance your expedition into the labyrinth of the irrational.

In a dialog with your mood, you may discover that this mood is the result of the presence in your psyche of a “complex,” an autonomous collection of thoughts, feelings and memories, even physical sensations and posture, that has been there all along, having been created long ago by an event or difficult situation which caused you to split or dissociate from it, to sever your conscious connection and to try to bury it (repression) so as not to feel its constant pain or threat to your survival. Yes, this is psychology, but psychology as study of the soul, not the feeding habits of rats as taught in universities. This is an endeavor to understand and fathom who you really are and what makes you this way.

In your first early forays into the underworld of the unconscious you can expect to find the most recently deposed inhabitants, just as if you were excavating an archaeological dig in Egypt. The most recent items will be found nearest the surface, and the more ancient treasures are deeper down. So what we find first in ourselves are the things put there most recently. These include aspects of self that have been rejected as undesirable (shadow) like feminine sensitivity in a man brought up to be only strong, dependency needs in an heroic individual, artistic sensibilities in an ambitious business person, and childhood traumatic memories like sexual and other forms of abuse, shame, or experiences of the “primal wound” when our caregivers treated us as if they did not really see us or really care, when we felt treated more like “objects” than a loved participant in a safe and empathic connection.

Because Freud was the pioneer who opened the way into the unconscious and because he did so solely from the study of pathological (something abnormal: “the structural and functional deviations from the normal that constitute disease or characterize a particular disease”) patients, he mistakenly assumed that the unconscious consisted totally of these buried memories and shadow qualities. But consider what his follower Jung had to say:

Yet if we are conscious of what we conceal, the harm done is decidedly less than if we do not know what we are repressing—or even that we have repressions at all. In the latter case we conceal it even from ourselves. It then splits off from consciousness as an independent complex, to lead a separate existence in the unconscious, where it can be neither corrected nor interfered with by the conscious mind. The complex is thus an autonomous portion of the psyche which, as experience has shown, develops a peculiar fantasy-life of its own. What we call fantasy is simply spontaneous psychic activity; and it wells up whenever the repressive action of the conscious mind relaxes or ceases altogether, as in sleep. In sleep this activity shows itself in the form of dreams. And we continue to dream in waking life beneath the threshold of consciousness, especially when this activity is conditioned by a repressed or otherwise unconscious complex. It should be said in passing that unconscious contents are by no means exclusively such as were once conscious and, by being repressed, have later grown into unconscious complexes. Quite otherwise, the unconscious has contents peculiar to itself which, slowly growing upward from the depths, at last come into consciousness. We should therefore in no wise picture the unconscious psyche to ourselves as a mere receptacle for contents discarded by the conscious mind.  

The emphasized portion of this quote represents the dividing difference that caused Jung to leave his association with Freud, who had hoped Jung would be his heir to the leadership of the psychoanalytic movement.

Since this is the chaotic state of affairs awaiting any of us when we enter into conscious exploration of the unconscious—rejected and embarrassing personality traits and painful memories—it is understandable how resistant we are to the task. At this stage we are often inundated with very unpleasant dreams of tidal waves and messes we have to clean up. We don’t always have a choice in this. Symptoms and anxiety often announce the upwelling of the unconscious, which, as we have been saying, can make moves on its own.

But our real purpose here is not psychotherapy—necessary as it may turn out to be if our early layers are hard to manage—but to discover the path to our Home. The Pearl which we seek is buried in “the middle of the sea” and guarded by the serpent which consists of our repressed material. With that Pearl, having
remembered our Origins and Who We Really Are, we can return to our Home. That Pearl is to be found in the deeper layers of the unconscious, which Jung refers to as “contents peculiar to itself which, slowly growing upward from the depths, at last come into consciousness.”

So when we encounter a mood, and we take it seriously and treat it with respect, asking who it is and what it wants, it can open up this archaeological world in our psyche. It may take years to do thorough investigation, which is healing. And on the way, we may have glimpses of something beneath or behind our personal tragedies and failures, our neglected gifts and partial self-images. Behind them all may shine a greater Light, a radiance emanating from the Wholeness of our Being, the Personality which can include contradictions and opposites, and which holds the Center for us, while it protects us from the disintegrating forces also within the psyche. That Center, that Light, that Self, is our Home and, most importantly, that Home is a Mystery. The darkness within us and around us is as much part of our path Home as is the Light.

Deeper Layers of the Unconscious

In several places we have used the term “unconscious,” either to describe a way of being unaware, or as if there were such a territory inside of us. People tend to think the unconscious is something only of interest to the psychologist. In fact, many are no more interested in exploring this realm than they are in investigating death. There are actually similarities between the two, in that they are both unknown and unknowable, a void into which we project our fears and fantasies.

But let us consider for the moment this idea of the unconscious which was only discovered in the 19th century. Once again, the use of a term with which we have become somewhat familiar tends only to mislead us into thinking we really understand something because we have given it a name. Where unexpected behavior such as compulsions and symptoms were attributed to the gods or spirits in ancient times, now we refer to them as being from the unconscious. Why can’t we see that wherever dreams and symptoms come from, the important fact is that they do come, not what we name their source?

Their source is a Mystery. We are not on speaking terms with the gods, nor can we “see” the unconscious. They may be one and the same thing, or misnomers for something entirely different. Our place should be where we stand, and there we are the recipients of strange messages and images in our dreams, our symptoms and fantasies. We should take these seriously, as much as we would take radio messages from outer space seriously even though we might not have any idea of their source.

We can imagine the “unconscious” like a repository of mysterious contents, revealing themselves to us in our sleep and mistakes, our fantasies and compulsions. Whatever the unconscious is, it deserves respect and consideration, because no matter how logical we may like to think we are, our thoughts have their source in the unconscious. Why do we think this and not that? Why do we suddenly remember an event or smell from 30 years ago? We like to think of ourselves as having free will, so we do not like to acknowledge that we really don’t know why we think what we do, or what causes this thought or that feeling or what our motives truly serve. What is going on when we ask “Why did I do/say that?”

So rather than worrying about whether or not there are gods, or God, or supernatural forces or a psychological unconscious, we should make it our priority to examine our relationship with our/the unconscious. Do we believe in its existence? Do we fear it? Respect it? Consider with any seriousness what it sends us?

Freud believed the unconscious was a garbage heap into which we had thrown all memories and behavioral traits and feelings we rejected by means of repression. If that is so—and Freudian psychology is our mainstream attitude—then engagement with the unconscious is the last thing we would want. But Jung’s view was more that the unconscious is like our “Companion,” and while some of it is like a dark and dirty basement filled with our refuse, there is more to it. Inspiration and spiritual forces were also seen as existing “in” and deriving from our unconscious.

Freud’s unconscious is like the “snorting serpent” of the “Hymn of the Pearl,” and Jung’s unconscious is that serpent BUT also the Pearl it encircles.
If that is the case, then an attitude of rejection towards our unconscious only serves to sever our link with our Source, the Source referred to in the “Fountain of Treviso” in the Appendix. The images which come to us in our dreams and fantasies are then not just polluted babbings of buried garbage, but may also be very helpful signs showing us the way to who we truly are. The more we reject and ignore these signs, the more hostile the unconscious seems to become. This can lead to a destructive cycle in which we perceive the unconscious and its messages as threatening (which they can be to the ego—the unconscious is also the source of mental illness and psychosis) and we become more closed and defensive, thus escalating the antagonism between the conscious self or “I” and the mysterious and unknown unconscious, whatever that truly may be. We end up back at the pharmacist’s counter for a new medication to quell our unease.

On the other hand, if we are willing to be receptive to our dreams and fantasies, our symptoms and compulsions, passions and obsessions, to take them as messengers with meaningful information for us to understand, then the unconscious becomes our partner, a more supportive ally.

The most accessible layer of the unconscious contains the thoughts and memories floating just beyond your awareness—your old phone number, a high school classmate’s name, memories of last year’s vacation. These are available when you shine the spotlight of your attention upon them. They are unlikely to disrupt your life or to cause symptoms.

But beneath that archaeological layer you will find the split-off or dissociated (“to separate from association or union with another”) memories of shame and trauma, and the shadow personality’s rejected qualities. These can form complexes around them, autonomous (“existing or capable of existing, responding, reacting, or developing independently of the whole”) and therefore capable of intruding in unwanted and potentially embarrassing or even destructive ways.

These independent inner “subpersonalities” are what you are likely to encounter if you feel called to explore the world within. If you meet an angry mood which has been disturbing your day, and you ask it, “Who are you? What do you want?” you may find that it wants your attention, wants you to listen to its complaints. You can even imagine a gender, an appearance, and an age for this subpersonality. Thus there are inside you actual “people” who are not you. They have feelings, agendas, values and desires which may be very different from your own. In fact, this is quite likely since their existence was probably created by your rejection of their pain or distressing habits.

Together, you and these subpersonalities make up your personality. You are operating under a delusion when you believe yourself to be only the conscious personality you wish yourself to be. It is humbling to encounter these other selves and, having recognized them, to listen and try to accept them. Other people who live or work with you may know them better than you do. But not accepting them only creates division in yourself, and “a house divided against itself cannot stand.” In such a condition, you lack integrity (“singular oneness”) and your decisions and commitments cannot be relied upon. You forget something important you had committed to do, you find your decisions undermined and constantly in doubt, leading to vacillation and inaction. The entire committee of inner inhabitants needs to be considered if your choices are to be on behalf of the whole personality.

As you proceed in sorting out these various subpersonalities (which takes some time), there may be occasional glimpses of another deeper layer of the psyche. This also is objective or “not-you,” but even more so. Instead of developing from your personal experiences of trauma and rejected parts of your personality, the components of this deeper layer have been inherited. Starting with the first elements as family traits, tribal, religious and national attitudes and assumptions, eventually you will encounter more universal factors that live within you simply because you are human.

This is what Jung referred to above when he wrote: “It should be said in passing that unconscious contents are by no means exclusively such as were once conscious and, by being repressed, have later grown into unconscious complexes. Quite otherwise, the unconscious has contents peculiar to itself which, slowly growing upward from the depths, at last come into consciousness. We should therefore in no wise picture the unconscious psyche to ourselves as a mere receptacle for contents discarded by the conscious mind.”
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As an example, you have, buried in your unconscious memories, the experience of your physical birth. The specific circumstances or your birth, whether it was difficult or easy, caesarian or natural or by forceps, lengthy or quick, breech or life-threatening, are all recorded somewhere in your psyche, and may be triggered by present-day events if they resemble those memories closely enough. So if you were born surgically by c-section, it may be that in a crisis today where you need to take a new step, to move in a new direction, you find yourself fantasizing being rescued by outside intervention. Another person with a different birth might in the same situation feel they were going to die. A third person may mobilize all energy to fight aggressively to make it. All three of you may be re-living the circumstances that attended your particular physical birth.9

In the deeper layer being discussed here, there exists “birth.” All of humankind has experienced birth, the coming forth from a state of peace (usually) in a “Garden of Eden” where all needs were taken care of and there was always plenty of nourishment, oxygen, and a sense of safety in being contained and protected. Psychologists are fond of interpreting the biblical expulsion from the Garden of Eden as a metaphor (or memory) of being born. Some claim that it is the collective memory inside of us that leads us to imagine such a fantasy.

So when you find yourself in any situation, it has the potential not only to trigger specific individual life memories from your past, but also this deeper level of collective human memories that we all share (the “archetypal”). On this deeper level, which Jung called the “collective unconscious,” you are no longer the individual, but a participant in collective human life. It is very important to recognize the existence of this deeper layer, because otherwise you may imagine yourself to be the carrier of humanity’s burden or the hero who can save the human race. This indicates inflation, where your personality has mistakenly identified itself with the total of human life and can very easily “fly too close to the sun,” forgetting your individual limits and flaws.

The Mystery Which is your Home, and toward Which your journey inward is tending, is largely on this collective deep level of the unconscious. As you approach, the language of mythology becomes more relevant, because myths represent human beings’ attempts to articulate the images and fantasies found there. That is why imagining the world as a place informed by gods and goddesses assists us in realizing the presence on this deeper level of the Mystery in our lives.

We will be discussing the opposites (Chapter 7) and their cyclic dance with one another. The pair of opposites we can call the individual conscious personality and the unconscious which is our bedrock and source need to recognize each other and to carry on a mutual dialog. This can begin and grow by your willingness to develop sensitivity and acceptance toward the messages from the unconscious—dreams, fantasies, moods, feelings, symptoms. By attributing an intelligence, an autonomy and will to these alien forces within you, you can begin to engage with them and to learn from them. And in this dialog you will be influenced, and perhaps so will they. This is evidenced by the fact that frequently the characters and images in our dreams and fantasies are seen to transform over time. So you change and they change. The unconscious becomes more conscious, and consciousness is enlarged (and humbled) as well in the process. This pathway for dialog has been called the “I-Self axis.”10

This is what must happen now if we are to be able to connect with our Source, the Mystery within and around us, the Mystery That we are. Out of this Mystery came all that is, and as we have lost sight of this Mystery, we have increasingly put ourselves in jeopardy, with our inner and outer world having lost its foundation, and chaos as a result. Chaos is necessary now, in order to undo the rigid structures we have built as defense against the very Mystery we need. But moving through chaos is very dangerous, especially without any compass to guide us. The Mystery is that compass, and from It will come the way through.

The artful denial of a problem will not produce conviction; on the contrary, a wider and higher [and deeper] consciousness is called for to give us the certainty and clarity we need... When we must deal with problems, we instinctively refuse to try the way that leads through darkness and obscurity. We wish to hear only of unequivocal results, and completely forget that these results can only be brought about when we have ventured into and emerged again from the darkness.11
This is not the time to cling only to the certainty of the conscious mind and its logic. It is time to restore the balance between rational and irrational. It is time to listen to what’s inside of us if we are to right the ship before it goes down. We cannot continue to cling only to what we already know, as we are doing.

What will make us, help us to take the plunge into the darkness, into what we do not know? Because if we do not willingly dive in, it will continue to rise over our heads as it is doing now. Sink or swim.

This image of venturing into the darkness and the abyss of uncertainty to find clarity appears in the ancient Chinese divination text of the I Ching, which:

...describes your situation in terms of a dangerous situation you cannot avoid. It emphasizes that taking the risk without reserve, the action of Gorge (dangerous place; hole, cavity, hollow; pit, snare, trap, grave, precipice; critical time, test; risky), is the adequate way to handle it. To be in accord with the time, you are told to: venture (risk falling until a bottom is reached, filling and overcoming the danger of the Gorge, like flowing water) and fall (fall down or into, sink, drop, descend; falling water; be captured).\(^{12}\)

Venture and fall. To be in accord with the time. A dangerous situation you cannot avoid.

Knowing and not knowing. Certainty and doubt. There are worse things in this life than being uncertain. As the poet T.S. Eliot said in the Introduction: “In order to arrive at what you do not know you must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.” And Theodore Roethke: “In a dark time, the eye begins to see.”

Conscious and unconscious. I and Self. Rational and irrational. Either-or. The Way is found between the pairs of opposites. The Middle Way. You are not this, not that. The mind thinks in opposites. Everything has its opposite. Yin and Yang.

It’s a stretch to embrace paradox and contradiction until finally...
Notes


3 See for example Dane Rudhyar, *Beyond Individualism*.


8 Abraham Lincoln; also Matthew 12:25.

9 An outrageous idea to western medicine, but see the writings of Stanislav Grof, M.D.

10 See Edward Edinger, *Ego and Archetype*.


Chapter Seven
Polarities — The Opposites

It is just man’s turning away from instinct—his opposing himself to instinct—that creates consciousness...As long as we are still submerged in nature we are unconscious, and we live in the security of instinct that knows no problems. Everything in us that still belongs to nature shrinks away from a problem; for its name is doubt, and wherever doubt holds sway, there is uncertainty and the possibility of divergent ways...Problems thus draw us into an orphaned and isolated state where we are abandoned by nature and are driven to consciousness.¹

Yes or no, pro- or anti-, liberal or conservative, good or evil, male or female, right or wrong. To be or not to be.

Why opposites? Because when you have a problem, a conflict, a dilemma (and who doesn’t?), or feel “split” between alternatives, then you are in the presence of the opposites. When you are, the pressure arising from the conflict will drive you to greater consciousness. The problem forces you to examine the opposites involved and to become more aware (though we’re all pretty good at ignoring them).

One way to read the story of the “Hymn of the Pearl” is as the dance between separation/division and unification/reunion. The hero lives in his homeland. The first division of this state of unity comes when he is sent away on his mission to retrieve the Pearl. Once in Egypt, he becomes further separated when he forgets his family and his home and his mission. He is now divided within himself.

The letter from home arrives and awakens him, starting him on the return journey, first taking in the Pearl, then returning to reunite with his parents, his home and his robe of glory.

If nothing else, ours is a world of opposites. We cannot stop splitting, dividing, dissecting. The strongest force for unification is evidenced when people rally around their pet polarity against the enemy, identified with the opposite pole.

Thus when the ego begins to develop, it polarizes against the compulsions of the instincts. The mind establishes itself against the body. The conscious “I” opposes the amorphous anonymity of the unconscious. Polarization is a habit hard to shake. The mind itself seems to function by splitting and comparing. It cannot conceive of hot without cold, up without down.

Our evolutionary journey to this point seems to have followed the Way of Division and Separation. This is probably necessary and correct. Otherwise we would never have left our original state. But can we not see where this path ultimately ends without any adjustment or reversal? Fragmentation and chaos, the “ten thousand things,” ten thousand beliefs, ten thousand religions, ten thousand truths, flying off in all directions to the infinite ends of the universe, unless a unifying Center is found, unless a “letter” calls us to awaken and reverse ourselves.
But any pole can tell only half the story. How can we reach wholeness, a totality of being, unless the natural tug-of-war of the opposites is somehow overcome? Before we can aspire to grand schemes of unity (God knows we’ve tried!) with any real possibility of actual achievement, our first task is to recognize and accept all the seemingly lesser and inferior halves we have rejected or proscribed.

This means facing our false sense of integration (that I am ONE single person and in charge of my consistent self), our illusionary ideal personality (my flaws are minor if they exist at all), being willing to honestly admit to who and how we REALLY are. As if this weren’t difficult enough—requiring humility, courage and enough self-esteem to stand naked and not so wonderful—there follows the equally challenging task of bearing the tension and conflict of opposing values and desires, a de-balkanized personality searching for its core.

As anything reaches its fullness and dominance, the pendulum inevitably swings back toward its opposite. In our time of growing chaos, we yearn for order.

Opposites and Shadow

More chaos leads to a greater hunger for order. Chaos brings fluidity and freedom; order holds security and constraint. We are told that, like the Tao, the path to enlightenment is the Middle Way, between the opposites. While Eastern philosophy has directed us to go between, Western mind seems intent on establishing the Winner over the Loser, the True over the False, Good over Evil. Opposites are everywhere—in us and around us. We can train ourselves to see them. There is chaos and there is order. Pure order does not contain chaos, and pure chaos does not contain order. Each is defined as the absence of the other.

Chaos: “a state of things in which chance is supreme; especially : the confused unorganized state of primordial matter before the creation of distinct forms; the inherent unpredictability in the behavior of a natural system [as the atmosphere, boiling water, or the beating heart] : a state of utter confusion; a confused mass or mixture.”

Order: “the state of peace, freedom from confused or unruly behavior, and respect for law or proper authority.”

Science has recently been fascinated with the hypothesis that chaos contains order (chaos theory). We can see that anywhere we look, whether at a basketball game, a flower, our bloodstream, the planets, or our ideas—anywhere—we can see a mixture of these two opposites.

So as not to confuse (opposite of to clarify/organize): opposites are defined as a pair of qualities, where each one by definition is the total absence of the other. But apart from their black-and-white rendering as being absolutely either one or the other, any and all situations contain a mixture of both. The opposites are purely what they each are, mutually exclusive, but they exist in all observable circumstances as a mixture, more of one, less of the other. The definition is an abstract ideal; the reality is impure.

Remember, the point is that the path to liberation or enlightenment is said to lie between the opposites. What does that mean? In order to tread the tao or path between the opposites, we must be able to see them, and seeing them, to find our way between them.

Continuing in our relentlessly abstract way (kind of makes you yearn for something a little more practical and concrete, doesn’t it?), life is a dance of the opposites, each one rising when its opposing partner falls, and falling when its other pole rises. The happier you get, the less sad you are. The more active you are, the less passive you are. We will get practical soon.

When it’s cold outside, it’s not hot. Of course, cold outside here is still hot compared to the temperature on Mars. How can we apply this relative way of seeing so that it helps us make sense of our lives and moves us along the path?
Well, at any moment you are somewhere in between many pairs of opposites. When you are unaware of all this, the natural tendency is to be controlled by the opposites as they playfully roll along, swinging back and forth between the two extremes. In addition, to whatever degree you are identifying yourself with one of the pair of opposites, you are unaware of the presence of the other, and being convinced that you ARE smart, happy, cool, active, whatever, you are equally convinced you ARE NOT dumb, unhappy, boring, passive.

The factors which come together in the coniunctio [conjoining, merging] are conceived as opposites, either confronting one another in enmity or attracting one another in love.

Since we are all both, because both opposites are ALWAYS present, then you have to project or imagine that the undesirable half of the pair exists somewhere else, most likely in someone or something you DO NOT LIKE. And why wouldn’t you, since you obviously have a preference for the half that you identify with?

Of course, if we are to follow this thought to its natural conclusion, then the above paragraph, which sees opposites as “confronting one another in enmity,” should be equally true in its opposite point of view, where they are “attracting one another in love.” The first perspective feels enhanced by its identification with something, and repulsed by its opposite. The second outlook feels diminished by its identification and (sometimes secretly) yearns for the quality it feels is missing. Thus to re-state it from the point of view that your qualities make you feel ashamed, degraded, of less value, etc. and not able to see the more positive aspects in yourself:

Since we are all both, because both opposites are ALWAYS present, then you have to project or imagine that the desirable half of the pair exists somewhere else, most likely in someone or something you DO LIKE, WORSHIP, RESPECT, ADMIRE, DESIRE. And why wouldn’t you, since you obviously have a preference for the half that you feel you are missing?

Stop. Breathe. Take the time to really think about this. Use it to look at yourself, both the qualities you are proud of and the ones you don’t like.

This may sound confusing, but if you stick with it, it really can make a huge difference. Our two points are—having established the idea that everything consists of pairs of opposites, not single qualities as it seems—first, their natural antagonism back and forth goes on until we realize it. Until we do, we are like a ping pong ball being bounced between them. And second, by identifying with only one and trying to escape the other, we set the stage for the rampant projection of disliked qualities onto others in our environment, and this is probably the primary psychic cause of so much of the difficulty that plagues us and our world.

So taking those two points one step further, learning to see the opposites gives us a potential middle space between them from which we can observe them but not necessarily be thrown back and forth between them. And second, recognizing unwanted qualities in ourselves as our own, and that we are identified with one half of the pair, we are less likely to project by imagining onto others and then to react negatively toward those others as a result of our confusion.

The ability to find this middle space depends upon learning to still oneself enough to create a “pause” between perception and judgment/action. At first this can be difficult, but the practice of meditation is a way to insert a stop between input and output. Pausing to reflect on what we receive from our environment or our inner world, before judging it and acting, we create a small space within, giving us greater freedom to choose our response. This is “soul.” Like the development of a long dormant muscle, practice will eventually enlarge this space.

Our ability to “contain” in this space, to consider our reactions before they break forth, gives us greater insight into our inner world and our unconscious motives and fantasies. We must try to realize that there is within each of us an entire world. It is not just one chaotic amorphous darkness, though it may seem that way until we begin to explore. At first the effort to create this containing space can be quite difficult, a kind of burning experience with its own kind of agony, similar to being passionately in love without being allowed to express it. But bearing the pressure created by inhibiting spontaneous response and enduring the discomfort will eventually yield a greater capacity to contain (not suppress) emotions and reactions, bringing a greater sense of balance and freedom.
This is one colorful description of that process, applied to arising desire and the temporary withholding of action (see also *Calcinatio* in *Chapter 9*: Alchemy):

*In this transformation of desirousness it is essential to take objects away from those inner devils. They only become concerned with objects when you allow yourself to be self-indulgent... On this subject the great religions come together. The fire of desirousness is the element that must be fought against in Brahmanism, in Buddhism, in Tantrism, in Manicheanism, in Christianity. It is also important in psychology. When you indulge in desirousness, whether your desire turns toward heaven or hell, you give the [soul] an object; then it comes out into the world instead of staying inside in its place... But if you can say: Yes, I desire it and I shall try to get it but I do not have to have it, if I decide to renounce, I can renounce it; then there is no chance for [being possessed by your desire]. Otherwise you are governed by your desires, you are possessed... But if you have put your [soul] into a bottle you are free of possession, even though you may be having a bad time inside, because when your devil has a bad time you have a bad time... Of course he will rumble around in your entrails. But after a while you will see that it was right (to bottle him up). You will slowly become quiet and change. Then you will discern that there is a stone growing in the bottle... insofar as self-control, or non-indulgence, has become a habit, it is a stone... when that attitude becomes a fait accompli, the stone will be a diamond.*

There are many “selves” in there. We have allies and enemies within us, forces that would tear us apart, and elements that guard us and heal us. There is as much to be discovered within the subjective world of “I” as in the outer world around us. Most challenging of all, the psyche, with its dreams, moods and fantasies, is an objective “outer” compared to our inner sense of being “I”. It is not all “me,” but I must recognize my relation to “it.” Our troubles start when we identify with the things that arise in our souls, thinking they are “me” when they are not. “I” am observing them, encountering them, and have a relationship with them, for better or worse.

Think for a moment what this means. We grow up in a world which gives us the false impression that everything that occurs inside of us, that cannot be tangibly and materially held on the outside as an object, IS us. This is not true. “I” am the one who observes, but what I observe is NOT ME, it is “inside” me, whatever that means. If you believe that what arises in your mind and feelings IS you, then you have identified with something much greater than you, and in doing so, you have violated a boundary within the soul, and inflated yourself to a much greater size and significance than you truly are. You have also become blind to all else that IS in you that is incompatible with whatever you are identifying with. You become simultaneously more AND less than what you are.

This inflation leads to the false assumption that there is no Mystery within you, because you believe that you ARE everything within you. And how many of us think of ourselves as a Mystery? We are simply more or less thinking apes, who scratch ourselves and go to the bathroom, drive a car and have conversations, are called by our name, and buy groceries. Anything beyond that, for most of us, is considered a waste of time: to be thinking about who am I? What am I? How did I get here? Why am I here?

By recognizing a thought or feeling as being outside of whom you take yourself to be—like a symptom or obsession, or any fantasy—you may realize that things come to you, as if from the outside of who you are. We are the receivers, not the originators. Can you stop and realize how profound this is and how upsetting to the illusion that you ARE your inner world? It is understandable if you resist this conclusion because it is like suddenly finding out someone else, a stranger, has been living in your house with you all along. In fact, many times this realization is portrayed in our dreams in exactly this way—a stranger is found to have been living in our basement or attic.

Naturally our usual first reaction would be to get them out! But what if we were instead free to be surprised and curious? Who is this? How did I never notice them before? What are they doing here? Are they friendly or dangerous? And more to the point: all this time I thought this was MY house and now I find them as a fellow occupant, what if the truth is really that this is THEIR house, and I am the intruder or guest?

So to return to our theme of the opposites, with this new addition—that there is a way to uncover and expand a more neutral observation place within us so we are not unconsciously bounced back and forth in
the dance of warfare and attraction generated by the opposites—we can explore further how the dynamics of opposites work and the presence of cycles within their interactions.

Ultimately, for those having a hard time sticking with this abstract discussion, we will end up talking about sex. For what is sex, if not the dynamic intercourse between opposites? What is it that drives two opposing forces or beings to come together (or at least to try), this Mystery called “sex?” [see Chapter 11 on Sex and the Coniunctio]

We were saying that opposites are everywhere, that everything really is composed of opposites. For example, there is up and down. If something is going up, it is not going down and vice versa. That again has to do with the definition of up and down. Up is never down, and down is never up. Yet in anything we observe, we see a mixture of these two mutually exclusive things. When a plane takes off, we think of it as going up. But the truth is that up is dominating, but gravity is also mixed in and keeping the plane from just going vertically straight up forever. So the plane shows a blend of up and down, with up being the stronger. Same with landing: we think of it as coming down, but thank goodness for the presence of up which keeps the plane from just crashing vertically into the earth.

So to try to make it clear: we have the presence always of two opposing elements or principles, each of which is defined as absolutely not being its opposite, but present to us as a blend or mixture of each, the experience of which is determined by their proportionate balance.

Let us try to make this more relevant and practical (to bring it “down” so to speak from its lofty abstract place so far). We think of everything as having certain qualities or traits, but in doing so, we are misleading ourselves, often with disastrous results. It is one thing to feel water at 120° and to call it “hot,” even though it contains “cold”—enough to keep it from being 200° or 1000° (and no longer water but vapor). This particular oversight will not cause us problems.

But if you think of your father as quiet, because he rarely speaks, then you exclude the fact that sometimes he is not quiet. He is mostly quiet, sometimes not. If you think of yourself as generous, then you do not see when you are selfish. If you think of your partner as cold, you do not see when they are warm. Everything and everyone is reduced to a single dimension rather than our having to cope with the fact that it’s not that simple. We prefer simplicity to complication and contradiction. But life is not simple.

We have to live with perplexity and confusion, with a tension, if we are willing to see the contradictions in ourselves and others. In our natural desire for harmony and balance, we try to eliminate the tension with these simpler categories and labels. But at what cost?

How, for example, would it be for you if someone observed you in a moment of selfishness (are you able to admit they occur?) and decided that you are selfish? How would it feel to have that label put on you? You probably would not like it, and if the tag spread around to others, so your reputation was now “selfish,” how would that feel?

Everyone needs to be selfish to some degree. We are all BOTH individuals and also participants in groups—family, partners, community, nation. Though we are conditioned to believe that generosity and self-sacrifice are commendable and selfishness is destructive to the group (who is actually doing this conditioning to us but the group?), we must at times devote ourselves to protecting, developing or nurturing ourselves as separate individuals. If we do not, then there is very little truly individual to contribute to the group. We are left with an anonymous collective of sheep.

On the other hand, if you are seen as generous, then in the same one-sided way, but with very different consequences, you are under great pressure to avoid any appearance of selfishness in order to preserve your flattering image. This could mean that you never can say “no” to anyone, because to do so would harm your image. That would lead to situations where you had to go against yourself and your true feelings (“I don’t want to; I’m too tired; I have something else I’d rather do”) because you have become trapped in your generosity. Being authentic and true in your nature means accepting your complexity and contradictions. How difficult is this to do when everyone around you cannot do the same and wants to put you in a box with one label?
From this example, it is not that far to turning it around and realizing that in your own desire to avoid the tension of complication with its lack of certainty, you mistakenly see others in the same way and unknowingly try to confine them with one-dimensional labels rather than see them as they more truly are. The truth is that so-and-so is being this way right now. In the next moment they may be the opposite way. This does not just refer to the possibility of duplicity. Even people with great integrity (integer: one, single) contain complexity and are not always going to behave in the same way each and every time.

So if we desire the freedom to be authentically who we are with others and in our own eyes, we must accept the lack of predictability that comes with allowing others to be confusing and changeable in each moment. What does this do? It makes each of us much more of a Mystery, with questions and greater possibilities for surprise. By sacrificing our need for simple answers and one-dimensional definitions, we create opportunity to be more present to Mystery. And in that situation, we are likely to be more aware, more attentive to what actually is in front of us, and less likely to be asleep in our world of prejudices and habitual stereotypes.

Before considering the previously mentioned dynamic of projection, let us briefly pause to recall one of the greatest of opposites in each of our lives once again—the opposition of me/ego/I/self and unconscious/Companion/Mystery. By refusing to accept the innate complexity of yourself because of the great tension it would entail, and instead imagining you are simple and singular, you are inflating yourself to outrageous proportions because unconscious and Mystery are then considered to be the same as you.

If there is no “other,” only you living inside of you, then this is really equivalent to believing that you are God. And here we are in the early 21st century: what better describes the behavior of people now than that they have lost the sense of awe (everything is now awesome, but without awe), respect and humility that comes from recognizing the Presence of some kind of God or Mystery in life, and that they act as if they in fact are not modest or unassuming at all anymore, but only have to submit to someone who is physically stronger or politically more powerful than they are?

Now, as mentioned earlier, when you consider yourself as not possessing one half of a pair of opposites (like selfishness) and only identify with the other half (like generosity), you contribute to what has been called your shadow, which is made up of unacceptable and undeveloped traits you have rejected as not-you. Since this shadow exists whether you like it or not, something has to be done about the presence of its irritating qualities so as not to continually confront you with the partial and false image you have created of yourself. We need to maintain the partially false image or persona for ourselves so our sense of security and permanence is not threatened, and we also need to do this with regard to others so we will feel ideally loved or respected (though many who have given up on this will settle for being feared by others). So we unconsciously imagine that the unwanted traits aren’t really ours. If we find another person or group or nation displaying this shadow trait we cannot accept in ourselves, then we feel a heightened sense of repulsion and antagonism toward them. They become our enemy and we can comfortably judge them for the unwanted characteristic instead of doing the much more difficult and painful work of owning and being responsible for our own shadow.

It is not wrong to perceive that they have such traits, only to imagine that in seeing theirs, we have none of our own. The key to noticing this projection is in our inflamed emotions toward the other. We cannot stand them, we want to wipe them out, we see them as evil or nothing but contemptible. On the path toward Home, back to the Mystery that we are, we must accept ALL of who we are or else how will our whole being make the journey? So one of the first and most difficult stages on that path is the recognition and acceptance of these shadow traits in ourselves.

The only thing that will typically force us to do this is increasingly disruptive and difficult relations with others, caused and fed by our rejection of our shadow. When the leader of a group or nation refers to another group or nation as “evil,” we should know it is time to do some courageous and honest self-appraisal of our shadow, painful as it may be. The breakdown of our cherished self-image that results from this acceptance of shadow is followed by the reconstruction of a truer, more honest and therefore more sturdy sense of self.

We can begin right now — ask yourself: “who is it I cannot stand to be around? Who just makes my skin crawl, or annoys me, or who would I absolutely never want to be trapped in an elevator with? Why is that,
what is it about so-and-so that particularly rubs me the wrong way? What simple word or phrase describes their attitude or behavior or appearance that bothers me?"

Can you say, “I also am (that way) or have (that trait).” Is that hard to do? Do you feel the resistance to even saying or considering such a thing? The more the resistance, the more likely you are hitting shadow stuff here.

Make a list of three of your most prominent qualities or traits. Then next to that list the three opposite qualities. Ask yourself—for each one of these— “When am I this way?” If you say “never,” you’ve got some work to do. Never? Think about it. If you are able to admit that you can also be the ways listed in your second list, take some time to remember or to visualize yourself those ways. Watch your reactions or resistance.

As an example, let us look for a moment at one of many classic pairings from our world: the religious fundamentalist and the new-age believer. These two groups have typically been on opposite sides and view each other with mistrust and often as a cause of the “problem.”

The fundamentalist considers the new-ager to be immoral, gullible, and foolish for expecting the dawn of a glorious time of prosperity and love. The new-ager sees the fundamentalist as rigid and dogmatic and bound to outmoded black-and-white religious “patriarchal” teachings in a very literal way.

Yet put them side by side and what do you have? Each group is focused on an expected outcome—the new-ager on a glorious joyful time of redemption, the fundamentalist on the apocalyptic destruction of all that is sinful (for example the new-ager) in a storm of fire. The new-ager’s idealistic acceptance of apparently everything as good, without discrimination and concern for black-and-white good-and-evil really rankles the fundamentalist. And the rigid judgmental beliefs of the fundamentalist turn off the new-ager.

Almost all antagonisms hide a secret common identity binding the protagonists. In this case the absolute dogmatic mental certainty of everything by the fundamentalist and the ability to interpret every tragedy as a result of karma or prenatal intention of the highest order by the new-ager reveals the complete absence of the Mystery, of the realm where “things happen” and we just have to deal with them without knowing why they do, because they are a Mystery.

What is happening here? It would appear that the new-ager may have a shadow of black-and-white judgmental thinking, and the fundamentalist a shadow of indiscriminate acceptance without judgment. And if we are outside of this, we can certainly see that the new-ager is exactly applying black-and-white judgmental thinking toward the fundamentalist, and the fundamentalist is practicing indiscriminate acceptance of the traditional dogma that sustains their beliefs. Each is a “believer” but unwilling to see the amount of non-discriminating emotion behind their beliefs.

One other indication of the secret common identity can be found in the very high incidence of cult abuse among both groups. New-age groups in their zeal to soar to the heights and leave the messiness of pain and suffering behind are notorious for their tendency to self-destruct as the result of unexamined shadow. Leaders are first worshipped and followed blindly, and very often the result is sexual manipulation and misappropriation of funds, an abuse of the trust indiscriminately given. The leader and followers have no interest in keeping an eye on the darker side of their motives, and so end up in great disillusionment or confusion, feeling betrayed.

Fundamentalist groups are equally notorious for their abuse of women and children, using cruel physical punishment for imperfections or disobedience and sometimes the same kind of sexual manipulation found in new-age groups. This is not to say that all such groups of either kind are without their benefits, or that members or leaders are not sincere in their efforts, or that one is any better than the other. This is only to point out the dangers of addiction to certainty or to the light, and how the neglected shadow, hiding behind these kinds of defenses where one tries to “rise above” darkness and mess, cannot be banished or avoided.

What would happen if each of them examined this shadow side of their own behavior? What if they could admit that they were each clinging to a reassuring belief system in order to satisfy an emotional need for
safety and security? What if they could openly feel their vulnerability in the face of the fact that neither of them really KNOWS what will come in the future? That it is in fact a Mystery? Their antagonism toward each other is a sign of their shadow involvement, and their passionate certainty in their beliefs masks the buried emotional shadow quality of doubt, fearful uncertainty and insecurity.

Don’t talk of the Light unless you praise the Dark. Don’t reach for the heights unless you can feel rooted in the deep. Absolute certainty reveals hidden fearful doubt. The underside of a world of only Light and Angels is hidden depths of darkness. All that we achieve by trying harder and harder to embrace only one half of any totality is to become more and more estranged from our own piece of the rejected half, and our wholeness.

Is there a God or not? If there is, is that God loving and compassionate, or angry and judgmental? What if it’s both? Where does that leave us? Very uncomfortable. We want God to love us, but in case He’s more the righteous Judaic type, we better side with him so that when he wreaks his vengeance it won’t be against us.

Truth is, we can never know with absolute certainty of the kind upheld by law, science and materialistic measurement whether there is a God or not, and if so, what Kind. Perhaps a more sensible approach would be to say, “I don’t know if there is a God or Divine Power or not, and probably never will in this lifetime, so if that’s the case, my choice is rather whether to live my life as if there is in fact such a Being, whatever That may be, or to live as if there is not. I know that my life will be [happier, more fulfilling, more meaningful] if I live as if there is some kind of Intelligence and Purpose, than to live as if there is none. So that is how I will choose to live, and perhaps at the end of my life, I will finally learn for sure which way it truly is.”

When we live “as if,” we are not undermined by a fear-fed zealous true-believer attitude, because “as if” includes the openness of uncertainty and the humility of not being God, a curious desire to know and yet a capacity to doubt or wonder.
Notes

3 C. G. Jung, *The Visions Seminars*, Book I, p. 239.
Chapter Eight
Cycles — Opposites in Motion

I am not a mechanism, an assembly of various sections.

And it is not because the mechanism is working
wrongly, that I am ill.

I am ill because of wounds to the soul, to the deep
emotional self

and the wounds to the soul take a long, long time, only
time can help

and patience, and a certain difficult repentance

long difficult repentance, realisations of life’s mistake,
and the freeing oneself

from the endless repetition of the mistake

which mankind at large has chosen to sanctify. ¹

A CYCLE IS CONSIDERED TO BE A PROCESS over time containing a repeating sequence of observable
events that allows a structure to be articulated. Though the actual contents of a given cycle may
greatly vary, its structure does not. We have, for example, many kinds of summers or winters, but
summer always comes in summer, and winter in winter.

The cycle is a key to a deeper understanding of the workings of astrology, and the movements that carry us
unknowingly through the ebbs and flows of our lives.

In every cycle there is a moment of beginning, a chaotic release of potential energy; a crisis of emergence,
in which the new impulse acts to free itself from the confines of its origins and its ties to the past; a crisis
of reversal in which its original outward movement away from its past mysteriously turns toward an inward
movement toward the cycle’s conclusion (a reversal we have been calling metanoia); and a crisis of surrender
in which the original impulse offers itself to the ultimate and final end of this particular cycle.

There is a time to “go for it,” and a time to “go with it.” Knowing which is which can be critical. You can
actively plant something, but you cannot make it grow. And you cannot harvest until it does grow.

We have looked at how an awareness of our world—inner and outer—as consisting of pairs of opposites
provides a valuable key to our journey back Home. In the beginning of most myths describing how the
world was created, the separation of Heaven and Earth presents the first splitting of an Original Unity into
two opposites. The Chinese Tao-te-Ching, the writings of the medieval alchemists on the coniunctio [see
chapter 11], the *I Ching*, the Genesis story of heaven and earth, and the recognition by depth psychology of the opposition of conscious and unconscious all articulate the foundational significance of polarities. Western religion’s emphasis on good versus evil, and spirit versus body, also portrays the world as the interplay or “battle” of opposites.

As we seek to find our way back to what we have been calling our “Home,” to our True Selves, our authentic Nature, the Buddhist “face before you were born,” from our present chaotic and dangerous crisis, the concept of the opposites provides a way of perceiving the dynamics at play and of envisioning corrective or healing pathways.

As we have seen, by developing the ability to see ourselves and others as expressions of pairs of opposites we are greatly helped to become more whole, more well-rounded, by recognizing and accepting qualities we have rejected in ourselves. In this acceptance, we enlarge our identity from partial identification with favorite or habitual traits to include the less desirable but still real and present “other half” of ourselves. This entire other half we have been calling the *shadow*.

Often this collection of immature and rejected qualities appears in our dreams as another personality, usually of the same gender as ours. Perhaps it hounds us, attacks us, chases us, haunts us. It demands our recognition, in order that we and it may join and become healed or whole. In doing so, we reduce the likelihood that we will *project* our shadow qualities onto others and pollute our relations with inappropriate fantasy and false impressions.

> To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the sun;
> A time to be born and a time to die;
> A time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
> A time to kill and a time to heal;
> A time to tear down and a time to build up;
> A time to weep and a time to laugh;
> A time to mourn and a time to dance;
> A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together;
> A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing;
> A time to lose and a time to seek;
> A time to tie up and a time to untie;
> A time to rend and a time to sew;
> A time to keep silent and a time to speak;
> A time to love and a time to hate;
> A time for war and a time for peace.

(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

In addition, the understanding of opposites allows us to examine another ever-present feature of our existence which is largely overlooked, again at our own peril. This concept is the *cycle*, a recurring and dynamic movement with predictable structure and stages, the result of the interaction over time of any pair of opposites. There is a rising and a falling of the influence of each opposite over time.
This movement is obvious in the phases of the moon, the alternation of day and night, and the changes of the seasons. If you can really stop for a moment and peel away the conditioned habitual perception of these very central phenomena which are completely interwoven with our lives—to such a degree that we are like fish in the ocean, unable to perceive the water because it is everywhere—you can see that certain vital pairs of opposites are truly the very substance in which we live.

Light and dark, day and night, waxing and waning moon—try to imagine your life without these. They are constant, always present, always one or the other and always in movement, shifting dynamically from one pole to its opposite. In the dead of night, darkness reaches its peak, light is almost completely absent (never totally). At the very moment when darkness peaks, something mysterious happens—a reversal. Darkness suddenly reverses itself from growing to shrinking, while light does the converse—it stops shrinking away and begins imperceptibly to grow, until... half a day later, the same mysterious process occurs again, only now in the opposite direction. Light reaches its peak at mid-day, and darkness is difficult to find.

Sounds almost too obvious, doesn’t it? It’s such a common occurrence—every day for your entire life—that we take it for granted, as if it has no real significance. The same process applies to the monthly alternate waxing and waning of the moon, which is just another name for the alternating dominance of light and dark once again. And our seasons, caused by the revolving of our planet around its Sun, again reveal the same exact structure: the peak of darkness at the winter solstice in December (northern hemisphere, shortest day), a mysterious reversal, which was honored by the ancients in solstice festivals in which they celebrated the enigmatic birth of the light which would bring greater warmth and the growing season.

In fact, the rebirth of the light at this time of year coincides with two religious festivals with the same theme: Hanukah (the festival of lights) and Christmas (the birth of the redeemer who brings light). Then at the
Summer Solstice in June (northern hemisphere) the light reaches its peak at the longest day, and though it begins summer, the days begin to wane as darkness begins its ascension, foreshadowing autumn and death.

Using the seasons or the phases of the moon as a model, we are able to articulate a simple yet powerful structure of the cycle. We could just as easily use our daily 24-hour cycle. Beginning with the peak of darkness (we could also begin with the peak of the light) and the low point of the light, we can call this **Phase 1**. We can apply our model to any cycle, and here we will use it to understand a human lifetime. **Phase 1** would therefore be a person’s birth, in which unconsciousness and instinct dominate infancy.

Following the winter solstice or peak of darkness for the seasons, or the dark New Moon, (or midnight) the next significant turning point—**Phase 2**—occurs when the light has gained equivalence with the darkness and overcomes it to become the dominant factor for the first time. This is what we know as the Spring Equinox, the first day of spring (or dawn). Just as the First Quarter of the moon, this occurs at one fourth of the way into the cycle. In the human life cycle, this would be approximately the age of 18-21. And as the light breaks away from the first quarter of the seasonal or lunar cycle in which darkness ruled, the young person is ready to break away from the family matrix which gave that person birth and shelter, and to attempt a more independent (and conscious and less instinctive) life.

At the mysterious halfway point in any cycle, a reversal occurs, turning around the only trend that had existed during the first half of the cycle. For the seasons, this **Phase 3** would be the Summer Solstice (or noon), and the reversal is shown by the fact that light has been increasing since the cycle’s beginning (Winter Solstice), and now for the first time it begins to wane and the darkness ends its retreat and is reborn. The same reversal can be seen in the Full Moon. For our hypothetical person, we have reached midlife. Something that has dominated since birth now faces a turning around; a growth in consciousness and pursuit of accomplishment is met with the necessity of facing mortal limits.

Three quarters of the way through the cycle we mirror the critical point we signified as **Phase 2**, only this time it is darkness that has caught up to the light and passed it to dominate. This is our Autumn Equinox (or sunset) when the days become darker, or the Last Quarter of the moon when the face of the moon becomes more than half dark. This is **Phase 4**, and in our example it would occur around age 60-65, the time we know as retirement. A weakening body and a withdrawal from the daily grind of labor, we are meant to surrender with dignity and wisdom to the coming close of our life.

But we have lost our balance and no longer know how to live the cycle in its full meaning. We are attached to the light and fear the dark. We want to live forever in the first half of the cycle when light is on the rise, and cannot face the last half of life in which darkness is the growing rule. And as Jung is quoted in the following pages: “Whoever carries over into the afternoon the law of the morning… must pay for so doing with damage to his soul.”

These are regular and predictable rhythms—whether moon, day/night or the seasons. They have the same flow and structure, the same turning points, highs and lows and mysterious reversals. They reveal to us in a very simple yet profound way, if we give them our attention, the underlying structure of the dynamic interplay of all pairs of opposites. We can use this insight into the cycle to gain much greater understanding of ourselves and our times.

**Astrology and the Rhythms of Cycles**

Originally—it is believed—astrology derived from the human experience of the cyclic and repetitive movements of nature. As we said, the seasons of the year, the alternations of day and night, and the lunation cycles are inescapable and fundamental influences of human experience. We humans are highly sensitive to intuitions the presence of cycles in our lives, because they offer the possibility of predictable **patterns**, which in turn enable us to feel more secure about surviving in our sometimes hostile environment.

These repetitive rhythms occur because of the motion of the Earth spinning on its axis every 24 hours (day/night), the revolutions of the Earth around the Sun every 365.25 days (the seasons), and the revo-
olution of the Moon around the Earth every 29.53 days (waxing/waning). We simply cannot escape from the presence of these cycles no matter where we go on our planet.

Astrology is another concept we probably need to scrape the prejudices from if we want to see it as it is. Scientists have actually organized and published attacks on astrology, warning the uninformed public of the dangers of following such superstitious nonsense, all the while lacking any experience or expertise in the subject. The irrational is not welcome.

It is certainly understandable that astrology might not be taken seriously given its portrayal by the media as fortune-telling or sun-sign entertainment. And many astrologers have hurt the image of astrology as well in their attempts to garner publicity by making rash predictions, as well as neglecting to be accountable for the poor record of such prognostication.

But the fact that astrology is still as popular as it is after the ascent of rational thought and the passage of eons since its inception should lead the inquiring mind to wonder.

The value of astrology for us here is in its art of identifying the underlying characteristics at play at any time, the dynamic quality of the time in the context of the entire cycle—recognizing points of crisis and times of birth or renewal and being able to articulate the timing involved—and in providing the imagery that nurtures fantasy.

In the continual interplay of opposites astrology can help us identify, for example, when an individual is in a crisis caused by the increasing crystallization of thought, or the need to experience one’s separate identity apart from others, or a full-fledged death/rebirth initiation. It helps us to understand what a crisis means.

This is not the place to go deeply into the subject of astrology, and it was mentioned earlier as one of the possible provisions for our journey Home. In this chapter I emphasize calling attention to this largely discredited art as one of great potency and potential insight into ourselves and the timing of our movement inward.

At this particular moment you are living many different cycles, and without the capacity to sort them out and to identify them by theme and timing, they are experienced more as a kind of “white noise,” blending together without clarity. When a particular cycle of unfoldment reaches a critical stage in your life, then the characteristics of that cycle—the opposites involved—stand out and demand your attention. That’s what a crisis is.

This particular moment is one of many in the passage of the seasons, the movement of the day and the monthly lunar cycle. If you needed to make plans, to decide on a schedule, it could be quite helpful to be able to know that it is exactly 23 days after the spring equinox, and 3 hours after noon. We don’t rely on the lunar cycle as much as we once did, but it is still part of our experience. By knowing the underlying structure of the seasonal and daily cycles, you can know what to expect and approximately when.

In this example, knowing it is 23 days after the spring equinox tells you days are lengthening, and in the northern hemisphere, it is getting warmer. Knowing it is 3 hours after noon allows you to know how much daylight is left and whether it is probably going to get warmer or lighter or darker later. So in this simple example, we can see how knowledge of the overall structure of the cycle allows you to know what to expect and where you stand right now.

It is the same with the application of astrology to your birth chart (horoscope). Awareness of many different cycles and their “schedules” brings you more understanding of where you are right now and where things are likely to go. This is not anything like concrete predictions like “your wife will leave you” or “you will win the lottery.” You are more likely to hear “for the next 6 months it is time to spend some time in solitude so as to clarify what you want from relationships, because this is the right time to do so” or “at this time and for the next 18 months you are likely to face the dissolving of your mental clarity and most cherished ideas, because now it is time to open up your mind to a more inclusive and universal understanding of things.”
The study of astrology is particularly valuable in the way it makes us aware of the presence of many cycles and as we have said here, their structure. In our study of the Pearl within, our focus remains on the particular stage at the midpoint of the cycle (Phase 3) where a reversal is what is called for.

Reversal and Humanity’s Midlife

Comparing the daily course of the Sun to the life of a human being, Jung wrote:

*At the stroke of noon the descent begins. And the descent means the reversal of all the ideals and values that were cherished in the morning... It is as though it should draw in its rays, instead of emitting them. Light and warmth decline and are at last extinguished... we cannot live the afternoon of life according to the programme of life's morning—for what was great in the morning will be little at evening, and what in the morning was true will at evening have become a lie... Whoever carries over into the afternoon the law of the morning... must pay for so doing with damage to his soul.*

Is increase always good, decrease always bad? Cancer and obesity say otherwise.

There are certain important opposites that have become quite out of balance in our time and which need to be restored to their proper proportion because our resistance to doing so is putting us in great danger. We are at the turning point of reversal, an enantiodromia (“In accordance with the principle of compensation which runs through the whole of nature, every psychic development, whether individual or collective, possesses an optimum which, when exceeded, produces an enantiodromia, that is, turns into its opposite.”) or metanoia (“change of mind, remorse, regret, repentance from evil to good, a reversal or turning around”).

Take for example high and low, or up and down. Our emphasis in modern times with our bias towards intellect and “higher” learning has been toward height, and away from depth. The crash of the shuttle Columbia on the day this writing began—a painful tragedy—reminds one of Icarus, the mythological son of Daedelus who flew too high near the sun against his father’s advice, and crashed and burned. Our scientific pursuits can be seen as hubristic, as prideful and knowing no limits.

It of course takes such an attitude to dare to explore beyond the previous limits of human knowledge. It was right in its time. But pressure is increasing on us to find a way to honor the potency of depth (the underworld). Our increasingly shallow culture resists the pull downward, and the habit of upward ascent and the fear of the below are creating pressure. “A time for going up, and a time for going down.” If these opposites are truly out of balance, we should be able to see the growing tendency of this downward pull around us, however unwelcome it may be.

Certainly one of the most noteworthy manifestations of this downward trend appears in widespread depression. Our manic addiction to ever higher peaks can be seen in our attitude toward economic growth. The economy is ALWAYS supposed to be growing and if not, corrections must be applied to continue its upward trend. Sound a bit like Icarus? If your mood is not cheerful and UP-beat, then people want know what’s WRONG with you.

We are trying to continue the trajectory of our amazing technological ascent from the depths of the Dark Ages and superstitious ignorance, but we are in grave danger of losing our foundation. Our disrespectful treatment of the very earth that provides our substance and nourishment is a stark reminder of how little we honor the DOWN-side from which we’ve come, and—as much as we resist admitting it—how much we are still dependent upon it for our survival. It becomes more obvious each year how our one-sided upward pursuit of technological advance is destroying our ground beneath us.

We can expect an increasing trend downward in the times to come. It is time for the metanoia, the turning around in order to return to our roots beneath us. Signs of this trend have appeared in the depth psychology movement, the attempt to resurrect “Mother” religions and worship of the feminine aspect of divinity as the Goddess, and the growing weight of heavy depression. As we have mentioned frequently, if depression
is simply treated as an annoying and debilitating symptom with medication, then we will of course miss the point and prolong our agony, with harsher and harsher results.

Of course depression is seen as an injury or weakness through the eyes that only see height and progress upward as “good.” But what about a vision that includes both poles of up AND down, and the awareness of Ecclesiastes that there is a proper time for EVERYTHING?

Then going downward, either voluntarily or by depression, is the natural thing to do, because it is TIME for us to do so. Not as an extreme self-annihilating movement (though that is where we are heading in our blindness) which suddenly rejects all upward progress, but as a quieting, a still seeking of depth, of the bottom. The increasing amount of addiction in our world also leads to the same bottom. Ironically, what most addictive behaviors—whether drugs, alcohol, shopping—are expressly for is “to get high.” It is recognized that in order to recover or to begin wanting to recover from addiction, one must “hit bottom.”

Our culture needs to hit bottom. But we are not even close, becoming more manic, more distracted and blind to our own predicament, addicted to information and entertainment which goes nowhere except into further denial of how much at risk we are.

Our example for our cyclic model of opposites and the crucial turning point where reversal occurs is midlife. For the first half of our life, our path is outward and upward as we leave the family and go out into the world to make our way as individuals, seeking progress and advancement, promotion, ascension, and success. Those who cannot are treated as so much debris.

If our model is valid, then somewhere in the middle of our life should come a reversal of this trend, and a growing movement in the opposite direction. What does happen to many as they reach their 40’s and what we call midlife? Certainly a great deal of depression, a time in which the death or breakdown of parents, the loss of heroes, the decay of the body, and the witnessing of the aging of our peers and partners forces upon us the recognition of our mortal limits, of death grinning while we feast at our banquet.

The imagined ever-growing progress which spurred us on in the first half of life is replaced with the sobering recognition that everything dies, nothing is permanent, and putrefaction is what awaits us. Certainly a cause for depression! But depression can take us down, out of the skies, to our roots in the physical and mortal body, to encounter our own death and the fact that EVERYTHING around us dies. From this grounding in reality, the second half of life can take on new, even richer meaning that we may have missed in our pursuit of success.

But our youth-obsessed culture certainly is not ready to face this fact. We run from the unavoidable truth, and to run from the truth can only take you to one place: falsity and illusion. We do not face our limits, both individual and mortal, as well as the limits on scientific achievement or economic growth.

Some have imagined our collective position as having reached midlife and entered decline, while living in denial of this truth in our crazed pursuit of progress. Certainly no politician will ever state that the West is in decline. They must always promote unlimited growth, or they will not be in politics very long. The discrepancy between what they say (or have to say to appease the voters) and the obvious breakdown in the world around us is only certain to grow, until we “hit bottom” and have to face and admit that it’s time to reverse our thinking and accept what is in front of us.

When an individual faces his or her death—whether in old age or because of terminal prognosis, or an accidental brush with death or loss of a loved one—one usual result is the desire to live life in a way that has greater meaning given the now recognized limit, that time is running out and “life is too short.” Can we even imagine ourselves as a nation or collective facing such a truth and making these kinds of adjustments? I hope so, but see little sign of that up to now. A collective can only make that kind of effort if the individuals within it do so first.
Notes

1 D. H. Lawrence, “Healing”


3 C. G. Jung, Modern Man , pp. 106-109

Chapter Nine
Alchemy, Transformation and the Soul

THOMAS MOORE, ELOQUENT WRITER OF THE SOUL, has this to say about the mysteries of alchemy and the psyche:

A psychological attitude does not come about through escape from the tangles and problems, or the joys and pleasures, of ordinary life. Like the clouds, psyche remains close to earth but not embedded in it. It has the moisture of mist, feeling and passion leading not simply to action but toward deep reflection.

Heating, cooking, boiling, and baking are alchemical procedures—literally and figuratively. Dense, solid substance can be cooked with thought and reflection until its subtle elements, trapped within, escape. Under the heat of passion, knotty problems in life rise into consciousness in the forms of images and moods. As a person ‘stews over’ predicaments and plans, life may become less productive but its soul-value deepens. In therapy, or in any psychologically moving situation, what has been stagnant and heavy begins to bubble. Dormant memories of the past rise to the surface, and feelings formerly kept covered and quiet break through. On the ‘hot seat’ of confrontation with formerly neglected issues, memories and feelings begin to loosen and move about. What has been allowed to settle as sediment, causing heaviness and immobility, under the heat of alchemical attention becomes unsettled and unsettling.

At various times in psychological life it seems appropriate to boil, bake, roast, fry, or just keep warm. Sometimes a fantasy needs incubation—warmth and containment. The alchemical vessel was seen as both womb and tomb, a place for birth and a place for decay, but always a place for containment. In us the retort is the vessel of memory and imagination, holding events and fantasies where they can be subjected to the heat of passion and feeling or to the simmering of thought and reflection. In this retort, events of life decay, losing their literal form, but they also ferment, acquiring taste, bite, and body. A good cook of the psyche knows the best combinations of temperature and time, when to let things simmer and when to bring them to a boil.¹

The “Hymn of the Pearl” is our story which tells how we left our home on a mission while still a child: “When thou goest down into Egypt and bringest the One Pearl which lies in the middle of the sea which is encircled by the snorting serpent, thou shalt put on again thy robe of glory and thy mantle over it and with thy brother our next in rank be heir in our kingdom.”

What is this Pearl, this One Pearl?

On our journey to retrieve the Pearl, we forget who we are while visiting a foreign land (Egypt):

Egypt as a symbol for the material world is very common in Gnosticism…that is, the world of matter, of ignorance, and of perverse religion.²

At an early stage of development Egypt serves as a nourishing, protective mother. Later she becomes bondage and tyranny from which to escape.³
After journeying “downward,” partaking of the foreign food found there, “I forgot that I was a king’s son and served their king. I forgot the Pearl for which my parents had sent me. Through the heaviness of their nourishment I sank into deep slumber.” Through the partaking of the purely materialistic and literal view of the world, that of Egypt, we have forgotten our royal heritage and mission. We have forgotten the Pearl. A pearl is a precious gem that is formed from layers which grow abnormally because of an irritation. Is our Pearl also grown in this way, and if so, how differently does this portray those irritating facets of personality which trouble us, the very things we wish would go away? We will return to this idea shortly when we take up the alchemical prima materia or massa confusa.

Because our royal parents have somehow perceived our situation, “…they wrote a letter to me, and each of the great ones signed it with his name:

> From thy father the King of Kings, and from thy mother, mistress of the East, and from thy brother, our next in rank, unto thee, our son in Egypt, greeting. Awake and rise up out of thy sleep, and perceive the words of our letter.

> Remember that thou art a king’s son: behold whom thou hast served in bondage. Be mindful of the Pearl, for whose sake thou hast departed into Egypt.

> Remember thy robe of glory, recall thy splendid mantle, that thou mayest put them on and deck thyself with them and thy name be read in the book of the heroes and thou become with thy brother, our deputy, heir in our kingdom.

“Remember that thou art a king’s son or daughter.” Remember that you are descended from royalty, and so your rightful heritage is to rule in your kingdom. You are endowed with the birthright of (co-)rulership over your inner world, on behalf of and in cooperation with your Father and Mother, the mysterious King and Queen who gave birth to you, your Source and Foundation.

“Be mindful of the Pearl.” “Be mindful of the Pearl.” This book is about being mindful of the Pearl, the Mystery that must be retrieved and brought Home. It seeks to articulate the relationship available to you with the underworld of the unconscious; its message is like that letter, sent by “the great ones.” It says, “Awake and rise up out of your sleep.” Remember. Remember your robe of glory (“praise, honor, or distinction, a distinguished quality or asset”), this part of you that is your most praiseworthy asset. Your True Self may be covered over with years of conditioning and prejudice, veiled by desire for approval and wealth, but it still remains, waiting like the Pearl to be rescued.

Remember. Be mindful of the Pearl.

> Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. 4

The King and Queen did not send their entire kingdom to retrieve the Pearl, not even the other brother, just the one son whose dharma was to fulfill this mission. Each of us has also been sent here to complete a task; we each may be called.

Try to realize the moment has come to remember, and be mindful. We are here to live a life that has meaning and substance, to embody the best in us (as well as the rest). In our desire to fit in, to be acceptable, we must not lose sight of the core part of our nature that has something unique to offer and which may only be realized through the courage to follow our mission.

Using ideas from the fields of psychology and religion, assuming they are different names for the same thing, we have tried to describe this journey as one in which you recognize and engage with the Mystery under the name “unconscious,” which truly describes nothing other than that which you do not know. To find who you truly are, you must encounter and accept that part of you which has remained in the shadows, and which holds the key.

This is of course a great risk, because you cannot know at the outset what you will find. Not knowing, most do not make the effort, afraid that what they will find will confirm their shameful memories, revealing them
as not worthy. Not worthy of what? What is it that we unconsciously fantasize we will be unworthy of? Isn’t it our “robe,” our “mantle?” Our heritage and calling? Yet because we remain unconscious of this, we fulfill our fears and doubts. Holding back from we know not what, we ensure that we will in fact not carry out our true calling. The way to break this cycle of failure is to recognize your fears and their source, and to realize that YOU WILL DIE, and are dying.

With the fearlessness of the terminal patient or someone brought back from death, you know you have nothing to lose anymore. Because not risking fulfilling your True Nature is death itself anyway. Bringing yourself to face the true reality that your life will end, may end today, is the way to let go of the provisional “soon,” “when I’m ready,” “someday” that holds us in prison and keeps us asleep.

And what shall thy soul say when it wakes and knows
The work was left undone for which it came?
Or is this all for thy being born on earth
Charged with a mandate from eternity,
A listener to the voices of the years,
A follower of the footprints of the gods,
To pass and leave unchanged the old dusty laws?
Shall there be no new tables, no new Word,
No greater light come down upon the earth
Delivering her from her unconsciousness,
Man’s spirit from unalterable fate?
Canst thou not down to open the doors of Fate,
The iron doors that seemed for ever closed,
And lead man to truth’s wide and golden road
That runs through finite things to eternity?
Is this then the report that I must make,
My head bowed with shame before the Eternal’s seat, —
His power he kindled in thy body has failed,
His labourer returns, her task undone?

Imagine your funeral, your obituary—not as a morbid exercise, but as an opportunity in fantasy to reconsider your life. Life can only be weighed at the end. Until then, you make it and its worth with your choices and actions.

In the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the soul of the dead is brought before the goddess of Justice and Truth, Maat, who wears a feather on her head. Beside her is Ammut, Devourer of the Dead, a beast part crocodile, part lion, and part hippopotamus, ready to destroy the deceased if his heart should be full of sin (“sin” means “missing the mark”). The heart of the deceased is placed on one side of the scales, and the feather of Maat on the other. The truth in the heart, the living of one’s truth, is the crucial factor that determines the destiny of the deceased after life.

What if you faced such a weighing of the truth lived in your heart during your life?

We live in a time which is largely neglectful and therefore ignorant of these things. Our education and upbringing offer almost nothing to help us to examine and become familiar with ourselves. We are largely on our own and without support as we try to remember and be mindful. How many of us have even heard the term “mindful” used?

Imagine living in a land where being mindful and living your inner truth were what mattered most.

So the underworld of the unconscious is full of treasures and demons, and we are so strangely without resources to find our way. It is as if we live on the edge of a jungle filled with terrifying and wonderful creatures, but we have no way of knowing their natures and which are which. This leaves us starved for psychology, the modern term for mapping the soul. The psychology of the university is totally unequipped because it only dares to address the quantitative and measurable. The unconscious is treacherous and tricky enough without our having to go into it blindly and unprepared.
Yet go into it we must if we are to recover our Pearl. Our authentic thoughts and feelings emerge from there, our motives and values live there. Even if we are completely programmed since birth as to how to feel and think, what choices are right, then those scripts are in the unconscious. And how can another person, no matter how loving and concerned, ever know with certainty who we are and what we are, and what will fulfill our destiny? How can a church or synagogue, a school or teacher know? We need to be shown how to find our own way, not which way to follow.

But lacking this psychological knowledge, our world has no faith in inner guidance, and we stand little chance today of knowing that it is inside ourselves that our answers may be found. And even if we intuit this, as many do, there is so little to help us understand how to find them.

We are calling the unconscious part of the “psyche.” We don’t know what this is, nor do we know what the unconscious is. We can only observe its existence from the effects it has upon us by means of dreams, fantasies, symptoms, obsessions, compulsions, passions, mistakes. We know that something influences us, often against our will, but lacking any insight into what that “something” is, we may project our fears onto it. Thus people largely imagine the unconscious is something dangerous and destructive, to be walled out and suppressed, avoided at all cost, if they consider it at all. But we avoid it at such a cost! Because it is in there that our soul is at home, and it is from there that our inspirations and longings and callings arise.

The study of the psyche or soul has mainly been for psychologists, philosophers and theologians, and abstract theory and intellectual speculations are poor food for the soul. We are starved, many of us, for soul food, for ideas and images and practical ways to make the journey inward. The “letter” from our royal parents calls upon us to do so.

The soul may be a Mystery, but it does not have to remain out of our reach or out of our minds. If our journey Home means that we must explore the inner world that has largely been taboo for so long, then we must search like the hungry tiger of the I Ching:


*Observe: see and inspect carefully; gain knowledge of; compare and imitate. To see an omen, taking account of what you see.*

*Glare: stare intensely. To look and hesitate, staring without acting.*

*Appetite: drives, instinctive craving; wishes, passions, desires, aspirations; long for, seek ardently; covet.*

*Pursue: chase, follow closely, press hard; go, chasing fortune.*

Wherever we can find them, we must covet and hold onto clues and signs about the inner world of soul. There seem to be three main external sources for such insight:

1. The **testimony** of those who have learned from their own explorations;

2. The **myths** that have been imagined from the deeper layers of the unconscious and which have passed down to us through recorded history;

3. The projections of the psyche into dark and obscure areas by the imagination of individuals (much like myths, only individual and on a smaller scale), producing **fantasies**.

Where we lack any clarity or understanding and see only into a void, it is our imagination that fills the empty space. But what is the imagination, if not the image-making capacity of the psyche? So the myths that arose in answer to the questions of how the world was created, why we are here, and so on, were from the psyche. They are not ridiculous or unfounded, nor necessarily childish (some are incredibly sophisticated) just because they were imagined. Myths must have something that strikes a chord if they are cherished and repeated by generations of human beings.

The “foolishness” has only been in taking them literally, which must happen if people have no concept of the psyche as a real “thing” which exists in its own “objective” reality. The myths speak from the deeper
collective layers of the unconscious and so resonate in humans. When articulated, they reveal the contents of our collective unconscious, and therefore they reveal our deeper layers to ourselves. So if we don’t take a creation myth as literally describing how the world was made, we can still receive it as the psyche symbolically explaining how it—the psyche—was created. It was “as if…”

In much the same way, individuals pursuing mysteries will imagine explanations for what they observe. This is how scientists develop hypotheses. This is how the wealth of great imagery known as alchemy was derived. Men in laboratories and in meditation observed behaviors of materials that they could not explain, since chemistry had not yet been born. So they imagined.

Our concern here is not with how true or factual their fantasies were, but with what the fantasies they imagined reveal about the workings of our souls, the unconscious realm where we seek our Home. In familiarizing ourselves with their fantasy images we can develop greater understanding of the hidden Mystery inside of and all around us. We just need to take care not to be literal. If you hear a graduation speech in which the speaker refers to the graduating youth as “seeds” that will grow into “trees,” do you think the speaker a fool: “can’t she see these are people and not seeds?”

Metaphor is acceptable as a form of speech. Scientific language strives for literal precision. We are not doing science here, except in the true spirit of the word, (“the state of knowing : knowledge as distinguished from ignorance or misunderstanding; something that may be studied or learned like systematized knowledge or a system of knowledge covering general truths or the operation of general laws”).

One has to wonder why the word “alchemy” (“a power or process of transforming something common into something special; an inexplicable or mysterious transmuting”) has become so popular in the last few years. It occurs with great frequency in articles, titles, healing techniques, not to mention the number of books recently published on the subject.

Is it possible that this is a sign of the attraction of the unconscious psyche, pushing itself forward so as to gain our attention, inviting us to explore and thus to find our way Home? Is it fantasy to imagine that the unconscious psyche, the place of Mystery, can behave in such a fashion, as a partner or Companion, signaling us, calling to us? This is very much the attitude that can be inferred when we devote ourselves to observing our dreams. The unconscious that is feared, ignored or despised seems to present an unfriendly face, but the inner world that is attended to and observed becomes increasingly helpful.

Three alchemical themes can be relevant for our purposes here:

- The fantasy of the transformation of lead or other cheap and base materials into gold or other precious objects, including the “philosopher’s stone” or healing elixirs or medicines;
- The composition of the world as having developed from and being composed of the four elements (fire, earth, air, water);
- The processes by which the transformation from base to precious was accomplished (putrefactio, mortificatio, calcinatio, solutio, sublimatio, coagulatio).

Transformation

What if it really were possible to change the more primitive and objectionable aspects of your personality into something of value? Do you believe that people can change at all? And if people can change, is it because of their efforts or is it something that is conferred by “grace?”

The alchemical point of view—not that it was a uniform code, since the alchemists were isolated individuals and not a group—seems to have been that great effort and concentration, as well as a moral personality, were necessary to accomplish the Work (called the opus). But many said that an upstanding character and devotional attitude were not enough; these could only take the practitioner so far. Something else had to
Alchemy, Transformation and the Soul

occur outside the control of the alchemist—a kind of “grace” which at least partly depended upon it being the “right” moment. This attitude is descriptive of the approach that seems necessary to reach our Home:

Therefore if any man desire to reach this great and unspeakable mystery, he must remember that it is obtained not only by the might of man, but by the grace of God, and that not our will or desire, but only the mercy of the Most High, can bestow it upon us. For this reason you must first of all cleanse your heart, lift it to Him alone, and ask of Him this gift in true earnest, and undoubting prayer. He alone can give and bestow it.²

Understanding this, the opus was a project demanding the greatest patience, a life project that entailed living one’s life in the spirit of the Work, not a simple task. It really is a partnership between the alchemist and God, or in our terms, between you and the Mystery.

By subjecting the prima materia, the messy material one begins with, to the appropriate procedures, one hopes that this matter will transform. The materialist interpretation is that real gold will be produced, leading to great wealth. But many alchemists scorned that goal and those who sought it, saying that this literal reading missed the point. It is the inner soul of the alchemist that is to be transformed, and the procedures were not to be performed literally in the laboratory, but in the inner experience of the alchemist.

The prima materia was described in various ways, but it was to be found everywhere in great quantity, was vile and disgusting, multiple yet one, and as a massa confusa it threatened one with fragmentation and disintegration. The literal alchemists gathered feces and urine, blood and intestines, filth and rotting flesh. But for our purposes, we can apply this description to the inner world of our own psyche.

The necessary beginning material which we hope to transform (and which we actually need if we are to undertake this project) can be found everywhere in our confusion, habits, complexes, moods, errors, and shadow. By accepting this psychological material as our own we begin the transformation process.

Our attitude toward this material is usually one of rejection, disgust or shame. The pieces of personality necessary for the opus are felt to be “vile and disgusting,” not desirable or acceptable to the ego, cast off into the “dung heap” of the unconscious. It is exactly this material that Freud believed made the unconscious necessary as a “place” to hold it out of our sight and awareness. Later Jung put forth the argument based on his own work that there was more to the unconscious than just rejected personal material. He claimed that the unconscious also held positive growth potential, undeveloped gifts, and even more, the collective history of the development of our human consciousness.

But we must first encounter and confront the “dweller on the threshold,” as it was called by occult philosophy and mysticism. In order to avail ourselves of the treasures to be found in the deep vault of the unconscious we must first come to terms with the most accessible layer—our own shadow. We are like the fairy tale character who must kiss the ugly face of the toad in order to reveal the handsome prince hidden beneath the repulsive surface.

The multiple nature that was ascribed to the prima materia while it was actually also a single “one” reflects our experience in working with the shadow in order to heal the personality and make it whole. At first unwanted traits and shameful characteristics are seen as unrelated and a nuisance, but as we become more familiar with them and begin to accept them as part of who we are, they gradually coalesce into a single shadow—the rejected one, the loser, the Cinderella who is poor and homely.

This massa confusa threatens us with disintegration because it represents a split in our nature. We are split from this unwanted self, and it consists of the cast-off halves of the opposites that were refused in our development of personality. So the illusion of unity that defends the ego is of course threatened with fragmentation if we truly face ourselves and have to admit inside our walls the “enemy” that we have projected onto others.

What is the “gold?” The “philosophers’ Stone?” The “elixir” or “tincture” described as the ultimate outcome (if successful) of this work on the prima materia?
We do not know. The descriptions are notoriously contradictory and paradoxical. They sound like religious attempts to capture “God” in words: “it is hot, but it is cold; it is love but it is vengeance; it is high but it is low...” This suggests that the goal is indescribable, like our Mystery. But inability to describe it does not make it non-existent nor unworthy. Perhaps the difficulty in articulating the stone or the gold or the tincture is descriptive in itself, because from this process of transformation comes a unity and wholeness which finally embraces the pairs of opposites that have torn us apart. The outcome is “both... and” rather than the “either... or” that we live with as egos. It is a Mystery, but it is also the Home to which we are returning.

The Elements

Alchemy and most other belief systems (including science) have held that our universe was originally a primary Unity, All One—One substance, One God, one Mind. It is hard not to imagine everything at the earliest point of its origin to have been a single Thing. Many myths attempt to describe this Original Mystery or at least to name It. In some way, aren’t these myths of creation also describing our fantasies of our own beginning? Is there not also some imaginary single state of unity and oneness from which each of us has come forth? Is it in the womb? Or is it the Big Bang? It certainly is the Mystery; it is unconscious, not known to us.

The act of creation is often characterized as the original splitting of the primary Unity into Two: Heaven and Earth, Above and Below, the first pair of opposites from which all other pairs followed. And out of these philosophical prototypes came the foundation of our world, a foundation that seems based on the number four. Our lives are bounded by four seasons, four directions, the four critical points described earlier in our discussion of opposites and cycles (like New Moon, First Quarter, Full Moon and Last Quarter; sunrise, noon, sunset, midnight). Why is it that we cannot as easily describe the lunar cycle as consisting of three or five stages? Why don’t we locate ourselves by three or six directions? Four is mysteriously intrinsic to our everyday experience.

Our world was seen by the alchemists and others as consisting of four primary elements: fire, air, water and earth. This interesting foursome is also fundamental in the subject of astrology. The prima materia would therefore be composed of these four elements, as would you or I, and everything else. Fire and water were opposites—one dry and one wet. And air and earth were opposites—air being considered as hot and earth as cold.

In the middle ages character types were described as being based on a dominant element. People were melancholic, phlegmatic, choleric or sanguine (see Shakespeare for example):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humor</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Personality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sanguine</td>
<td>hot, moist</td>
<td>air</td>
<td>Optimistic, red-cheeked, corpulent, irresponsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choleric</td>
<td>hot, dry</td>
<td>fire</td>
<td>Short-tempered, red-haired, thin, ambitious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phlegmatic</td>
<td>cold, moist</td>
<td>water</td>
<td>Sluggish, pallid, corpulent, lazy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melancholic</td>
<td>cold, dry</td>
<td>earth</td>
<td>Introspective, sallow, thin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is of value here for our purposes is the consideration that if the inner world (and outer) can be imagined as consisting of these four elements, then our dreams and fantasies may be communicating with us using this language, and if we are unaware, then we miss the point. These same four elements are very significant in the alchemical procedures we are about to consider.

As the unconscious, or our soul, seeks to aid us in our becoming more aware of ourselves and healing imbalances by confronting and integrating shadow, it frequently will use the symbolism of the elements. It also appears to use the number four to refer to making something complete or whole, like a table needing four legs to be sturdy.
Often dreams and fantasies involve images of height or of depth, crashing to the earth, flying, climbing. These can now be seen as possibly referring to the air and earth elements and their natural opposition to one another. Dreams of water, tidal waves, drowning or bathing, or of fire and burning and heat can be references to the water-fire opposition.

Consider your personality as it presently expresses itself. What “humour” do you see as prevalent in your nature? Are you fiery? Earthy? Moist? Airy? What do you lack?

Someone with a lot of earth and little or no air would be very pragmatic, at home with physical tasks, probably handy with tools, “grounded,” but not very interested or comfortable with abstract ideas or intellectual pursuits. It has nothing to do with being more or less intelligent, but with the kind of aptitude shown. “Can’t see the forest for the trees.”

A watery person needs empathic connections with others and is usually sensitive to feelings. Like water, they often have a lot going on beneath the surface. Fire has enthusiasm and zeal, intuitive ideas for possibilities, and warmth, but is hard to sustain without burning out.

A lack of fire may not be easily stirred. No earth may not attend to practical necessities or be in touch with the body. No water can find it difficult to sympathize or understand another’s feelings.

As a practical matter, if you are out of balance you can find activities that feed the weakest element. You can try gardening or hiking in nature or physical sensuality if lack of earth is indicative of a life not grounded. Certain kinds of music or drama facilitate a watery sensitivity, as does trying to really listen to another. Spicy foods and hot climates are one way to stimulate your fire. Trips to the mountains or open spaces or on an airplane emphasize the air element.

Emphasis of an element may indicate a strength or natural gift, but at the same time it suggests greater possibility for lacking or suppressing its opposite. Fire in its passion and knack for sensing possibilities may easily overlook sensitivity to feeling (water) and empathic connections with others to run roughshod toward its goals. Water’s sympathy and need for closeness can limit individual expression and the capacity for passion and self-dramatization so typical of fire.

Air can get lost in its own world of thought and abstract concepts and forget to pay the rent or buy groceries, while earth may become so immersed in everyday tasks and attention to body and things that thinking for its own sake and for perspective rarely happen.

If you dream of being lost at sea, what might that mean? Is the element of water becoming too much, or is the dream saying you need more water in your life? The intent of the dream may not be obvious, but a little self-assessment may reveal the message. That is why familiarity with the elements and their symbolism can provide one basis for interpreting images from the unconscious.

Alchemical Operations

As the alchemist described his laboratory work, either literally or as metaphor for inner work, certain “procedures” were followed. These operations struck Jung in his study of alchemy as being identical to what he observed going on in his patients and their dreams during their growth and individuation (“to give individuality to; to form into a distinct entity, i.e., to become who you really are, the True self”). As you seek to become more acquainted with the ways of the unconscious or soul as it partners with you on your journey Home to your True Identity, you will find yourself going through crises of transformation, critical moments in the growth process (see next chapter on Initiation), which are uncannily similar to the “chemical” operations described by the alchemists.

Our purpose for this brief examination of alchemical ideas is not to acquire an appearance of “secret” knowledge (which the ego loves) or to get lost in antique philosophy. It is relevant because as we said at the beginning of this chapter, if you seek to follow your inner Partner and to realize who you really are beneath
the conditioning and the need to fit in, then understanding and recognizing the psyche, the soul, the inner “orphan” who has been abandoned and neglected is crucial. The surface world of concrete material objects is part of who you are but not the heart, and it is misleading if it is not seen as the outer appearance of an inner Reality.

Since our conditioning and prevailing cultural attitudes are so estranged from any depth or internal/hidden presence, we are largely naïve and ignorant concerning the ways of our foreign inner “underworld.” The underworld had a primary place in Greek times, as did the world of the “ancestors” in China. We do not have anything like that anymore, any imaginary space which would allow the inhabitants (our “complexes,” subpersonalities, the Mystery) a valid place in our thoughts. The “underworld” has been paved over with concrete (“They paved paradise and put up a parking lot” —the literal interpretation of all events and experiences as arising from material causes alone.

So recognition of the processes of the psyche, of the ways it appears to operate, in the alchemical laboratory procedures, which were of course intended to produce transformation of lead into gold, provides a rich fantasy language revealing the soul doing its work on its lead, our personality and its densest and most opaque elements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operation</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mortificatio/</td>
<td>death of form</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Death</td>
<td>Letting go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putrefactio</td>
<td>breakdown of form</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Decomposition</td>
<td>Breakdown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcination</td>
<td>burning, heating</td>
<td>fire</td>
<td>Baking, cooking</td>
<td>Desire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solutio</td>
<td>dissolving</td>
<td>water</td>
<td>Sugar in coffee</td>
<td>Confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coagulatio</td>
<td>solidifying</td>
<td>earth</td>
<td>Water into ice</td>
<td>No escape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sublimatio</td>
<td>evaporating</td>
<td>air</td>
<td>Clouds</td>
<td>Abstraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separatio</td>
<td>splitting or dividing</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Cell-splitting</td>
<td>Separation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coniunctio</td>
<td>merging/joining as one</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>H2+O = Water</td>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Alchemical Operations

These alchemical operations, which occur in no special order, may sometimes be particularly related to one of the four elements, as you will see.

**Mortificatio, Putrefactio**

The problem of crucifixion is the beginning of individuation; there is the secret meaning of the Christian symbolism, a path of blood and suffering—like any other step forward on the road of the evolution of human consciousness. Can man stand a further increase of consciousness?... I confess that I submitted to the divine power of this apparently insurmountable problem and I consciously and intentionally made my life miserable, [To pay attention to the unconscious does mean to deliberately make oneself miserable in order that the autonomous psyche will be able to function more freely. It has nothing to do with masochism but is rather a conscious participation in the process of actualizing the Deity.] because I wanted God to be alive and free from the suffering man has put on him by loving his own reason more than God’s secret intentions.¹⁰

Mortificatio (mors = death; puter = rotten) is the process of dying, of the breakdown of form and structure, imagined to free the spirit contained within. In our literal world, death is a terrifying prospect because we have no fantasy of any life beyond the physical body. Mortificatio is present in these images: corpse, death, exile, mutilation, dismemberment, castration, grave, rotting, excrement, slaying, blackness, defeat, wounding, humiliation, sacrifice, suffering, crow, skull, lameness or sickness.¹¹

So when you encounter these images in dreams or fantasies, or in real life, you are experiencing the presence of the mortificatio. The first stage of the alchemical process was sometimes called the nigredo, or blackening.
That which does not make black cannot make white, because blackness is the beginning of whiteness, and a sign of putrefaction and alteration, and that the body is now penetrated and mortified.  

The blackness also refers for us to the shadow, its lack of visibility in our awareness, and the mortificatio or wounding of the ego image we have of ourselves when we face the actual presence of our shadow side. Awareness of shadow is wounding to the ego personality. So if you set out to examine your shadow, or are forced to by the damage resulting from its unconsciousness, you WILL sustain a wound. You may dream of rotting corpses, skulls and graves, or other distasteful images. It helps to know about mortificatio.

One of the pieces that make up your shadow is the infantile level of your history. The desire for immediate gratification, power over your environment in order to get your needs met, hunger, greed, or outbursts of primitive emotion are imaged in alchemy often as a dragon or serpent. Think of the serpent that guards the Pearl in the “Hymn of the Pearl.” This dragon (“a personification of the instinctual psyche” 13 ) must be slain if we are to bring control of the personality to the ego or even to the Self, because otherwise we are dominated by our instinctual desires and demands, remaining on a primitive level. It is not that our instincts need to be destroyed, but their controlling power over us must be overthrown. When this idea is carried too far, then people DO set out to “kill desire.”

Mortificatio is nevertheless a powerful form of transformation in which a body is broken down, returning its components to their source. If that “body” is a personality with which you have identified, say as a heroic can-do subpersonality, a victim, or competent expert, and the natural growth process takes you beyond the safe and familiar boundaries of that identity, then you can expect the transformation to lead you into potentially scary territory, the mortificatio.

As an example, as a child I was praised for being bright and having the quick answer, but otherwise I was often either ignored or made fun of, making for some humiliating and shameful memories. These painful experiences inflicted what we have called the “primal wound,” 14 in which the environment lacked empathy and safety, and so a “survival personality” formed which organized around the feelings of worth and attention that arose when performing my quick wit.

The feelings of vulnerability and exposure that brought so much pain were split off from this survival personality and avoided and defended against. So any situation in which I might find myself exposed and vulnerable was very threatening. I would tend to try to cope with these situations with the only thing that worked for me as a child: appearing to be knowledgeable and certain, a competent expert. But this subpersonality has very real limitations—as they all do—especially preventing me from learning and growing because all real learning begins in ignorance, and this part of me could not bear to appear as lacking answers.

But life brings us circumstances in which we really do lack experience and knowledge. Something about this situation matters enough that we cannot avoid it. At first I found myself having very intense emotional reactions, as the buried feelings—pain, vulnerability, shame, exposure—started to bubble to the surface, having been triggered by the spot I found myself in. My habitual defenses would mobilize but were just not adequate to protect me, and so they would break down. So did the image of competent expert that had provided me with a cover. It can be very helpful to realize that this uncomfortable experience (or any similar one arising from other different identifications) is finite and will end, and that it is natural and worthy of your submission.

The mortificatio of the king (or sun or lion) is another alchemical image portraying the end of the rulership of the ego and its desire for power. This must happen if another center within us is to assume command, the center we are calling Self, the Mystery within. Just as the discovery by Copernicus, that the Earth is not truly the center of our solar system or universe, brought about a revolution in science and our idea of where we stand (not at the center), it foretells a similar inner revolution that must take place when the ego discovers the presence of the mysterious Self which is Who and What you truly are. The ego is not the center; it is only the center of your consciousness. When we begin to acknowledge and to respect the hidden world of the unconscious with its mysteries, to see that it is autonomous and purposeful, a new center emerges, one which is both conscious and unconscious, and which can integrate and bridge between both.
**Mortificatio** represents the transformative process that must be undergone by these previous defenses, attitudes, and behaviors that have made up your “expert” (or any other) subpersonality. This can be a very painful or fearful experience, and a great deal depends upon how you understand what is happening. As we have been repeating, in our culture, with little or no understanding of inner movement, only the symptoms will be seen, and medication will probably be prescribed to remove or relieve them. By doing so, the opportunity to outgrow a childhood wound and its limiting defenses may be thwarted. In the end, is this a good thing for you? Not likely. Comfort is not the ultimate value, except in a world that knows no better, a world in which infantile desires rule.

But if you understand that growth brings change, and that crises of transformation are normal and to be expected—even sought after if you value growth of consciousness—they appear as opportunities to become more fully who you really are and less a fraud hiding behind defenses. You are likely to be more willing to submit, to consent to what is being asked of you as a kind of payment, if you wish to find greater inner peace and fulfillment. In addition, if you have learned not only that these crises are normal opportunities but that the actual experience has been described by the soul in the fantasy of the mortificatio, then the fear of being out of control is somewhat alleviated because you have a type of map of the territory. Yes, it is terrifying and does make you feel like you are being crushed or dismembered or dissolved, but you now know somewhere in your mind that this is how it is supposed to feel.

If you went to the dentist and had never heard anything about what to expect, then the first time the dentist stuck a novocaine needle into your gums or started to drill would certainly send you right out the door, and you’d probably never go back. But if you have heard it will probably feel like this, and sound like that, and that this is how it is for everyone having dental work done, you have a much greater chance of going through what may still be an unnerving experience. It is the same with the inner process of dying, decomposing, and eventually being resurrected. But what do you have in your education, formal or otherwise, that can prepare you for the inner metamorphoses that are completely natural to the psyche?

These fantasy images from the alchemists are teachings from the soul or psyche about how it works and what you can expect. These images will appear to you in dreams and fantasies, as your inner Companion tries to help you to cooperate with what fate requires if you are to fulfill your destiny. These will foster a cooperative attitude of surrender or consent. How are we to know that this kind of experience is common, has been the lot of human beings for centuries, unless they tell us? And they have, but we don’t read their words or know about their history because it is not considered important enough to be passed on. How can that be?

At the moment when you are deep into the very real struggle to stay with your experience and not run to escapist distractions or regress back to the now outdated defenses that got you here, this information will be like water to the thirsty desert traveler. How sad for us that this kind of nourishment, freely available and freely given, has to be so difficult to find. We have buried the soul and so its treasures are not valued. This is the lost orphan, without parents or protection, without a place in our world, but still there waiting, with so much to offer.

To continue through the mortificatio process means to face loss of self, like standing on the edge of a cliff and staring into the void. This moment will come up again in our discussion of initiation. In order to pass from one state of being to the next, you have to cross over some kind of initiatory territory and you cannot do so while trying to hold onto what is passing on. Legend says the soul of the dying person cannot go on to the next world if it cannot release its attachment to the living. This is the same theme we are discussing, but it applies to us in other moments besides our physical death at the end of life.

This moment of leaping into the void is full of the Mystery. Understandably, in a world which has no cognizance of this Mystery, it is much more difficult to make such a leap. As a result, you hold on, because the other alternative seems to offer nothing but annihilation. You have no way of knowing that you will survive your leap. To know so, you would need to have had the experience of falling until you hit bottom. That’s the only way to learn that there IS a bottom. At some point in life, you must let go of everything, give up, surrender and jump. Then you will find the bottom, the foundation that holds you even though invisibly. This is the “hitting bottom” spoken of in the AA recovery program. Once you have hit bottom in
your life, you know on some deep level that it will be ok when you have to let go again. This does not mean that it will not be terrifying, only less so.

This is the territory of the mortificatio. It is a normal part of living, though we are not told. We are so ill prepared for this. Witness that fact in our collective situation: our culture is unwilling to see the need for change and holds onto unfulfilling activities because we have no picture of the leap of faith anymore. We desperately need to let go and allow ourselves to hit bottom. We don’t know what this means—perhaps an economic collapse, environmental catastrophe, or loss of political direction (which we obviously do not have anyway), invasion by aliens from space, a new “plague,” or just the increasing deterioration of respect and safety in our lives. We have only the illusion of political direction created by a mindless reactionary swinging back and forth between the opposites like liberalism and conservativism.

But we will need as a culture to face the same mortificatio that the alchemists described, just as we must in our individual lives. Only if you and I go through this necessary initiation in our own lives will the number of people grow to what is necessary to allow us as a society to make the leap. The opportunities to practice for these critical moments are available every day. When you awaken at 4 AM in a sweat, with thoughts about how something in your brain could trigger a stroke in the next moment, or feeling a tightness in the chest, or thinking about someone you know who unexpectedly died recently, what is it that allows you to move on, knowing that each day means one less to live, and that your time is coming, as surely as you breathe one more breath right now?

You have a finite number of breaths in your body, and each one means one less is left. In this realization you will find the courage and consent that allows you to move ahead, even though your ultimate destination has always been known, just not the way there or the schedule. These moments, which we all have in some form or other, if deeply lived and felt, prepare you for the mortificatio’s—big and small—so necessary to life.

But what encouragement or examples do you have for living these moments intentionally and voluntarily? Instead you are told it is morbid to think about such things—don’t do it. Have a drink, look for some sex, buy another car. Fill that emptiness with something because otherwise it will swallow you up and you will not have the strength to go on. That is what one believes who has not seen the Mystery, who has not hit bottom. When you have, you can say in the face of your death, “I cannot control you, Death, but since I must go with you, I ask for the strength and courage—from my soul, from my ancestors, from the gods—to do it well and with dignity.”

This attitude will take you through the necessary mortificatio’s.

What is it going to be? How do you want to live? Do you want to grow to your full potential, to fulfill your destiny? Is life lived in avoidance of the void and of death a real life at all? Is a life of defense and self-protection what you want to model for your children and others? Think about those you have admired. What is it that makes you feel admiration toward them? How do you imagine they faced their mortificatio moments?

There is a bottom. It is ok. You can do what is necessary in order to leave behind the safety of your personality built on survival needs, and to really live on the edge.

**Calcinatio**

*Calcinatio* (calc = lime) refers to the image of heating and cooking, transforming through the burning away of moisture, like when you bake a cake. It is present in the imagery of refining, burning, purging, sacrifice, testing, ordeals, judgment, drying, extracting water, hell, cleansing, frustrated desire, purifying by suffering, rage. This would be transformation in the psyche by fire.

In the process of slaying the dragon of infantile desires, the calcinatio would describe those experiences where you want something so badly, *have to have it*, and cannot. We often experience this ordeal when compelled by sexual desire or romantic love for an unavailable object. The suffering “burns” and if we
endure... and endure... we eventually find ourselves transformed, with a much greater capacity for patience (means “to endure suffering”) and acceptance of the things we cannot change (see quote on page 78).

The moisture removed by the purging of fire may represent these infantile desires, or emotions or fantasies. When the ordeal is over, our fantasies of what we want and whether or not we can have it will have changed. This “drying out” process seems necessary for the development of the soul.

Again, this is not a pretty process. It has been described as agony by many writers or artists. But if you find yourself going through a necessary calcinatio, it sure can help to know it has a purpose and, once again, is a natural movement that many have gone through before you. It calls for that same attitude discussed above, the ability to consent to the necessity of what you are going through.

**Solutio**

The *solutio* is change through the element of **water**. While fire burns away moisture in the *c calcinatio*, here water dissolves the structure and substance of some aspect of your life. *Solutio* is found in the imagery of melting, floods, the sea, drowning, water, intoxication, dismemberment, devouring, tears, sex, dew.\(^{16}\)

It becomes apparent that the *c calcinatio* and the *solutio* are both variations of the mortificatio, because they involve the necessity of letting go of what existed up until now, and passing through a transitional stage until arriving at a new and transformed state. This is the “rebirth” so often mentioned in alchemical texts.

Implicit in alchemy and in the journey to your Home—the True Self you originally were and which it is your destiny (“make firm, establish; place for which one is bound”) to be—is the idea of rebirth and renewal. None of these transformative deaths is final. Think of the losses you have experienced in your life: a marriage ending, a career over, a friendship lost, a role finished. You survived them all, even when the letting go experience of the death of what was passing may have felt as if you were being annihilated. It is the nature of the deaths we go through that we cannot see what will come after. If we could we would be reassured. This is where faith comes in.

*Faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen.*\(^{17}\)

The message of the soul as reflected in the fantasies of alchemy is a life-affirming one, encouraging us to take the leap by portraying transformation in all its agonies yet promising renewal and rebirth.

*The state of imperfect transformation, merely hoped for and waited for, does not seem to be one of torment only, but of positive, if hidden, happiness. It is the state of someone who, in his wanderings among the mazes of his psychic transformation, comes upon a secret happiness which reconciles him to his apparent loneliness. In communing with himself he finds not deadly boredom and melancholy but an inner partner; more than that, a relationship that seems like the happiness of a secret love, or like a hidden springtime, when the green seed sprouts from the barren earth, holding out the promise of future harvests. It is the alchemical benedicta viriditas, the blessed greenness, signifying on the one hand the “leprosy of the metals” (verdigris), but on the other the secret immanence of the divine spirit of life in all things.*\(^{18}\)
The fantasy of the *solutio* probably came from the alchemists’ observation of what happens when a solid substance dissolves in a liquid, just as their *calcinatio* was derived from perceiving how a solid turned black, or to white ash, or a liquid evaporated when heat was applied.

In your experience of the *solutio* you will find yourself “drowning,” or turning to a kind of mush or primary substance like that which the caterpillar becomes before it emerges as a butterfly. This is not a painful burning like the *calcinatio* where desire is frustrated. Instead you feel immersed, in over your head, and like you’ve lost the feeling of the solid ground under your feet.

Dreams of tidal waves, being at sea, swimming pools, bathtubs, puddles and other liquids may signify the presence of the *solutio* in your life. It is a time when structure dissolves and plans and goals are fluid. This is a good time to make uncertainty your ally. Remember how it is said that when someone is struck blind, their other senses become more acute. Your usual sense of orientation and direction are temporarily submerged as you melt from one form into another, and in this transitional lost space, look for ways to orient yourself other than those you are most accustomed to relying upon.

Once again in this transformation you are called upon to let go, let the waters of change go over your head and to lose your previous sense of self, of identity. Trust in these same waters to bring renewal and rebirth, to wash you clean of your errors and limitations for a fresh start.
Coagulatio

The *coagulatio* is the materializing process in which something gaseous or liquid becomes dense solid substance. Associated images such as lead, body, clothing, incarnation, binding, being nailed, eating, flesh, imprisonment, weight, earth, house, or crucifixion offer some sense of this procedure. This is the place of the earth element.

Many alchemists believed that the soul was imprisoned in the material body, and that their *opus* was to liberate the soul. Other myths and philosophies including Christianity have portrayed human life in a similar way. This fantasy implies that within us is a deeper, subtler and more spiritual aspect of ourselves that has become lost—been forgotten, like the hero of the “Hymn of the Pearl”—in the material world. While other alchemical procedures like *calcinatio*, *solutio*, or *sublimatio* represent the breakdown of the material prison and the escape of our essence, *coagulatio* portrays the process by which something subtle is brought into contact with matter in order to manifest.

In the *calcinatio* desire is thwarted, and the resulting frustration raises the psychic heat to a sometimes agonizing level where we can feel like we are “burning up.” But in the *coagulatio* desire is not thwarted; instead it draws us in and leads to our capture. Hindus believe that the real purpose of marriage and family life is to draw the soul down into this world so that it will stay because of its ties to loved ones.

When the unconscious or psyche needs a transformation to occur that will bring greater substance and solidification, the experience of desire—for the richness and sweetness of life, for the satisfaction of appetite—brings the soul into a deeper involvement and grounding, into the earth, which is the element that is the essence of *coagulatio* symbolism. This is so important, because in our current culture, where ideas of soul and consciousness and spirituality are allowed, frequently they are one-sided and portray spirit as the opposite of matter and physical life. Thus many seekers of enlightenment are poorly grounded in the routines of daily life and therefore provide a flimsy “house” in which to clothe spirit.

In dreams our clothing, our house, the food we eat and the attraction to another all may occur during the *coagulatio*. While this process may not sound as difficult as the *calcinatio* or *solutio*, for a person who lacks earth in his or her elemental makeup, it can be terrifying. The desire to stay above, to remain in the noncommittal and abstract world of ideas and free flight, views the *coagulatio* as much like a death as may another, participating in the *calcinatio* or *solutio*.

Here the experience is more related to suffocation, entrapment, being tied down or imprisoned, unable to move. These are all alchemical processes by which the soul is transformed from one state to another, and here the outcome, if successful, is to be more embodied, to incarnate more fully into the here-and-now life in which we are born. To do so may mean to suffer grief over the loss of unlimited potential and unlived possibilities. But without submitting to this process, you will remain above life rather than embedded in it, and when your life is over, you will have escaped the prison of having lived a single committed lifetime, but your life will also have escaped as well, because it remained mostly potential rather than being actualized as THIS ONE specific life, bound to this moment in time and this point in space.

Often the *coagulatio* feels as if you are nailed to the present situation you are in, with no avenue of escape remaining. It is a time for surrender, again with the thought that “here I am, here I find myself, and so I must chose, must consent to be here, and hope only to do what I must as well as I can.”

Sublimatio

The air element and the laboratory image of vapors rising from a flask are indicative of the movement upward called *sublimatio*. Where *coagulatio* moves downward into the earth, *sublimatio* moves upward into the air. Associated images are height, subtlety, powder, distillation, whiteness, purification, air, spirit, mountain, tower, ascent, eternity, stairs, ladders, elevators, flying.
Sublimatio appeals to our fantasy of ascending to the heights, rising above our problems into an ethereal realm of pure thoughts and ideas, white, shining and pristine. This transformation releases something from its density and imprisonment, but may also allow it to float away into oblivion. When you are called upon to experience a sublimatio, it does not seem to contain the same agonies as the other alchemical procedures of the soul.

But for the earthy person, the sublimatio can be quite unsettling. Being released from the security of a solid and seemingly permanent identity or association with others—something that may feel suffocating to the airy type—the earthy person can feel naked, ungrounded, disoriented, quite lost.

Separatio

In the separatio, elements of the personality which have previously been fused or merged become separated. In our discussion of the opposites we explored the dynamic interplay of the pairs, but before that movement can occur, the pair must be separated or driven apart from its original unity. Just as myths portray the creation of the universe as originally a One, then separated into Two, we were apparently once a single “piece,” with no objective awareness of anything else but ourselves. You and the world, you and your mother were one unit, not two beings.

In the beginning, you and your True or Deeper Self were the same. You were the Mystery. Now we feel that we are separate from that Mystery. Yet if the Mystery is Who or What we truly are, then that separation is not real. The ancient Upanishads of India say that “where there is other, there is fear.” Thus before we were divided from our source, there was no fear, because there was no “other” to be afraid of.

Part of the ego’s problem is that it initially was identified with the entire original Self that you are. We can observe this in children before they encounter reality and learn the limits of their power. Conscious and unconscious are fused together, with no recognition of each other. Once we as children start to run into problems, and we see that the world does not conform to our wishes, we have to face the fact increasingly that there is “me,” and there is “not-me.” This is the so-called period of adaptation to reality.

As we mature, and if we gain in psychological sophistication, we begin to see that as St. Paul said,

For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do what I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

Here is the struggle of the human will against forces that he calls “evil,” which refuse to submit to our wishes. We are unable to carry out our will, and we are unable to prevent ourselves from doing things we believe we do not wish to do. Leaving aside the judgment as to whether such opposition is “evil,” it certainly brings home the realization that we are not one single person, but that there exists opposition—one or multiple—within us. This is the experience of the separatio. We go from believing we are one to more than one.

Only when this has been realized do we then have the opportunity to become aware of exactly what or who it is that opposes us. For our discussion, we have refrained from any clear definition or value judgment, and been content to call it the unconscious, using psychological terms rather than theological ones. When you have been forced by defeat or symptom or obsession to acknowledge the presence of an “other” occupying your mind, it is of course a shock to the system. It is not unreasonable to feel fear or anxiety, because the illusion of control has been shattered.

But this is also the beginning of the journey Home to your True Self, because that Self must include that of which you are unconscious, as well as what you know. If you persist in your encounter with the unconscious and do not try to banish it, it becomes more than just a hidden opposition; it becomes your partner, your
Companion. It wants to lead you Home, but in order to do so, you must release your fear and mistrust of it. It is like learning to dance, only you are not the one who leads.

Only by becoming separated, by first breaking up into pieces and feeling your brokenness are you capable of reuniting in a greater Whole. The earlier false sense of unity must be undone so that the opposites can be recognized, including the oppositions of ego and shadow, and of conscious will and unconscious will, what some might call the Will of God: “Not my will, but thy will be done.”

But the fear of disintegration, the loss of a solid sense of center, leads us to resist this encounter. Mistaking our partial center—the ego—for our true center, because we mistake our conscious self for the entirety of who we are, makes necessary the overthrow of the ego’s rulership. We have been speaking throughout this book about the opportunity that symptom, defeat, compulsion or catastrophe brings. The encounter with the Self is a defeat for the ego, Jung said.

**Coniunctio**

The *coniunctio* is the merging, the bringing together of the separate halves into one single whole. It is an image for the imagined outcome of the human evolutionary process, for the goal of the alchemical *opus*. It is another representation of the gold, the philosophers’ stone, or the elixir. The marriage of the Sun and Moon is another frequent likeness in alchemical art symbolizing this paradoxical union, which in its contradictions reminds us of the descriptions of the stone or of deity: high and low, hot and cold, male and female, both at the same time.

This deep and unconscious drive within us pushes us to our fulfillment, though resisting it and the recognition of the unconscious Other in us can force it into the same distorted and literal expressions as the other denied needs of the soul.

We will leave our discussion of the *coniunctio* for our final chapter, **Sex: The Coniunctio**.
Notes

4 Matthew 13:45-46.
8 web.uvic.ca/shakespeare/ © Internet Shakespeare Editions 1996-2000
9 Joni Mitchell
13 C. G. Jung, CWI4, par. 548.
14 Firman & Gila, *op. cit.*
16 See Edinger, *Anatomy*, ch. 3.
17 Hebrews 11:1.
18 C. G. Jung, CWI4, par. 623.
Chapter Ten
Initiation — The Critical Moment, Entry into New Ground, Letting Go

And He said, Go, and tell this people, You can hear indeed, but do not understand; and you can see indeed, but do not perceive.

For the heart of this people is darkened, and their ears are heavy and their eyes closed, so that they may not see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and be converted and be forgiven.

Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities lie waste without inhabitants and the houses without men and the land be utterly desolate

And the Lord shall have cast off men far away and there shall be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.¹

The Critical Moment

At a time in our human history when more and more people are feeling the loss of any center that holds things together, the choice is either to ignore the warning signs of societal breakdown and have a good time, or to ask if there may be something that one may do. For the first group, the need for greater distraction and more entertainment is the focus, and the use of medications—legal or illegal—to deaden the pain is growing.

If there is a biblical God, which fewer believe because evidence is harder to find and organized religions have shown increasing signs of collapsing in corruption, then this first group would certainly be a candidate for the old-fashioned fiery retribution that God is reported to have visited upon those who lost the way. They were called “sinners,” which means “missing the mark.” It is not difficult to imagine that this group is missing the mark, because they appear to aim at no mark other than ego gratification, self-indulgence and escapism. In the Bible, these people would be turned to dust, blown away. However, looking around us now, it is hard to see that God takes people away or makes them suffer based on their “goodness” or “badness,” unless things have deteriorated to the point where dying is now the reward, and being kept alive is the punishment.

But the second group, alarmed increasingly by the trends of greater violence, diminishing respect, and our spiritually starving, shallow culture and its loss of meaning, is searching. Many do not even know yet that they are, but deep down there is a wish and a hope that something will happen, something will change, to make it better. In earlier times, this need was characterized as a feeling of expectancy for the Messiah or the Second Coming of Christ.
These images can be seen as fantasies, not in the present day sense of having no real basis and being “just imagination,” but in the psychological sense of existing in the imagination as an inner fact, whether or not there is a matching manifestation in our outer world. For this discussion, the real issue is not whether we need to think in antiquated religious terms (which may still be valid for some), but the rediscovery of the reality of the inner life and its validity. It is our unbalanced faith in only the outer material world and our denial of the substance of the inner world of dream, imagination, and fantasy that is keeping us in our downward spiral.

So the first group contains both the people who deny that there is any breakdown in our society, and others who may acknowledge it but choose to ignore or escape from that fact. As each day goes by, however, with its increasingly horrendous events reflecting the desperation of a world fragmenting and falling apart, it becomes apparent to a growing number that we are in trouble. Our direction can only be seen to be downward, and more out of control, revealing the absence of a hub or center in our lives.

In earlier times, the unquestioned authority of both the political and religious institutions were the “glue” holding our world together. We seem to have outlived the time when these can command the respect of enough people to provide order. Now chaos arises because individual self-determinism and political corruption have disempowered political leadership, and corruption and a lack of authentic faith in our religious institutions, as well as the scientific undermining of myth-based religious beliefs, make religion more of a social or communal function than the “binding back” (re-ligio) to our true spiritual Source that it once was.

Popular spirituality, appearing periodically as “in fashion,” has proven largely as empty and shallow as each year’s fashion trends. What’s hot, what’s new, what’s in. Can we believe that these passing fancies will provide the substance and nourishment we crave so deeply in our souls? Do we as a people have the necessary discipline and commitment to follow anything that takes a lifetime of devotion and faith anymore? The evidence around us is not encouraging.

The ideas here are not new, but are borrowed largely from the ancients. Yet if we do not clothe these ideas in modern terms, prejudice may lead us to reject anything of value, because our fast-paced ego-driven progress has us believing that if something is old, it’s worn out, outdated and useless. It’s like our society’s attitude toward things like razors and watches (not to mention the elderly). At one time they were heirlooms, handed down and made with the finest craft. Now they are cheap and replaceable. The soul’s need for something of deeper and longer lasting quality is one of the many casualties of our efficient money-worshipping culture.

The stories of the importance of dreams—in the Bible, native American lore and among other indigenous peoples, and recorded history—are ubiquitous, and yet, what tiny percentage of people today even give the slightest attention to their dreams? Where did respect and reverence for the dream as a source of guidance and an interface with God or Spirit go? Perhaps without the belief in any Higher Power, there is no longer any need for such a line of communication. Now dreams are electrical impulses in the brain, leftover rumblings of last night’s dinner, a wild and crazy show that might give a moment’s entertainment. Many New-Age fantasies can find a positive and uplifting interpretation for any situation. But we can see with little effort that each day brings us absolutely horrendous and terrifying evidence that a good deal of life is totally beyond our comprehension and reveals no apparent order whatsoever. It seems random and cruel. Yet to accept this as the ultimate way things are—irrational, empty, meaningless and without the slightest concern for life—leads to a kind of insanity where one increasingly lives exactly that kind of life.

So we MUST at least exhaust all possible efforts to explore, to probe and dig, to struggle as a thirsty man in the desert, to see if there is in fact NO center which can hold things together as they seem to be flying apart, NO center within you and within me that can give our lives a foundation of meaning and a reason for living beyond sensual gratification, greed, and power.

Though such a center seems to have fled our scene, we have the centuries and millennia of recorded history, in all parts of the world, in all peoples, as testimony that until right now, almost EVERYONE believed in and many experienced the living actual presence of some kind of Center, some Higher Power. Though each
group had a different name for it and a different story, what they all had in common was the absolute taken-for-granted faith that there was SOMETHING present in the world and in each person that kept things from falling apart.

We do not have this. And we are falling apart, flying apart. So the question is: is this happening because we have truly lost whatever all these people had at one time, because it is gone, vacated, absent, empty? Or is it still there but we have lost the way, the sight and understanding necessary to recognize it? “For the heart of this people is darkened, and their ears are heavy and their eyes closed, so that they may not see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and be converted and be forgiven.”

In the Bible, God follows this statement with a very frightening curse or prediction. If there truly is such a Center, and It has not gone, but we are living as if It has, is it such a stretch, even though the Bible seems outdated to many, to think that such a dire outcome (or “course correction”) is in store? In fact, how far-fetched is it to imagine that IT IS HERE NOW?

Rather than be faced with the need to swallow all the stories in and about the Bible in order to face our situation as this possibility, what if we are able to read the Biblical stories as imaginings, signifying real inner psychological facts, much like we can take the methods and works of the alchemists as the expression of the human psyche, speaking and revealing itself to “those with the eyes to see and the ears to hear?”

This is the approach we are taking here: first, that there is at least the possibility that there still is a real Center, for which we can offer no definitive name or description, other than to call it Mystery, Something greater than us, larger, more comprehensive, and unknown. Second, if we are to find our way back to this Center, called by some psychologists the Self, then we need to find ways to hear Its language, see Its signs, not demand that they conform to our expectations. If someone wanted to offer you all the treasure in the world, but they only spoke French and you didn’t, would you insist they learn English?

Listening to the testimony of ancient sages, as well as the modern psychologists who have sought to penetrate the meaning of these traditions, apart from their cultural myths or symbols, we find that the practice of some form of meditation, as a way of quietly observing what happens within us, and also familiarizing ourselves with the imagery and language of our dreams and fantasies, is often the path they describe.

Few seem to have the time to do something as simple as sitting 10 or 20 minutes a day quietly, faithfully and regularly.

We have acknowledged some of the reasons why you may not find yourself motivated, even if you are curious. The discovery of the shadow and the need to face painful memories and shameful feelings is good enough reason. The undergoing of a mortificatio and a loss of whatever sense of stability and security the false survival personality has provided is another.

We don’t think anyone is going to undertake this journey of self-discovery, at least beyond the reading stage, unless you have to. The point is, with things going as they are, chances are you WILL have to, if you don’t already. This book is for when that time comes, to help you find your way. Be warned though: your unconscious psyche is like one of those spy programs that companies install on their employees’ computers so it can record everything they type, and thus allow employers to know if time is being wasted on personal and frivolous activity. Your psyche knows you are reading this. It knows and records everything you do and read. And if your psyche or soul knows you are now better equipped to make the journey back to the Home of your True Self, it’s likely that it is already stocking provisions and weighing anchor as you read this.

Reading words from the soul or about the soul tends to stimulate the soul. So you may well be on your way, even if you thought you hadn’t started yet. Perhaps your journey started 20 years ago in a passion for exploration and then petered out with the responsibilities of family and livelihood. Or perhaps things just got too hot and you needed to back off. There’s nothing wrong with that. The psyche knows how much you can handle. Perhaps it cannot stop someone from going overboard or going too fast if they won’t listen to their own feelings or heed the signs. But maybe now is the time when things begin to heat up again, and memories or problems come more to the foreground demanding attention.
In other less technologically sophisticated, but more spiritually and psychically advanced cultures, both ancient and modern, there is a “space,” a psychic “space” created by the consensus acceptance of the reality and importance of dreams and other inner phenomena. It may be thought of as the realm of the “gods,” but does not have to be. If you grow up from childhood surrounded by adults who take for granted and revere the presence of this “space,” some of whom travel through this “space” regularly, it becomes a part of your natural environment.

But in our times, that “space” has shrunk to the size of a very small dot. There is no recognition of such a “space.” It is not mentioned, except by people who are considered “out there,” which they are, given that the “space” is no longer “in here,” but “out there.” If we each take the time to venture into ourselves, not as ego adoration but humble exploration of the Mystery at our core, we very gradually stretch out that small dot. And as each of us becomes more familiar with, and comfortable with, this almost forgotten “space” it becomes less “out there” and more “in here.”

When you or I take the time and devote the energy and attention to opening that “space” in ourselves, we are also opening the “space” for all of us. And in the enlarging “space” we share in the unconscious psyche, singly and as a group, the soul responds by filling that “space” with its food, its images. And then visionaries have visions, which they always have, but what’s different is that society is able to see what the vision is about, because enough of its members are now open to resonating to the images and fantasies being sent from the Mystery.

When that happens, and when it is talked about and acknowledged, not as shameful and secret, then that “space” will become acceptable for our children. Because the truth is that as children, this “space” is “in here,” inside them, and we are in it. It is only our education and the taboo in our culture against taking this “space” seriously, the experience we have of the adults in our world, that leads us to abandon that “space” as “make believe,” only “imagination.” Remember that this “space” is not abstract or “only” fantasy for most people who came before us, and for many today not corrupted by our materialistic shallowness, i.e., they haven’t been “saved.” It exists in their world and supports and nourishes them. Even if their explanations of that “space” seem childish or unsophisticated to us, it does not mean that such a “space” does not exist. What fools we are if we assume in our egotistical arrogance that this is the case!

We have explored the idea that the psyche is something that seems to be part of us, and we a part of it, and—most importantly—that it is autonomous, that it is an objective reality that is not the same as the you who says “I.” It has its own “I.” For you, it is really more like a “you,” another personality who inhabits your own space inside you. It is unlikely that this concept has really sunk in very deeply, because the ego naturally has a great deal of resistance to the idea that it may have to share power (and ultimately quite probably surrender power and to follow, rather than to lead). It also seems so vague and nebulous, not material or substantial.

Consider the story of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane as He foresees his inevitable betrayal, and think of it as a fantasy (and perhaps a real historical event, who knows?) of the ego, facing its destiny and realizing that it will have to be sacrificed in order to fulfill its dharma or its mission. Jesus prays, reflecting on his plight or destiny when he “will be delivered into the hands of sinners”: “O my Father, if this cup cannot pass, and if I must drink it, let it be according to thy Will.”

We have also tried to map out some of the more well-established psychic territory of the soul—showing that the psyche or unconscious seems to participate in a dance of pairs of opposites, with an opposite counterpart being buried in the unconscious for every conscious trait or quality we use to identify ourselves. And we saw that the retrieval of these buried opposites which contribute to the shadow personality, the opposite of who you normally think you are, is necessary if the total personality is to be expressed. This corrects partial false masks and establishes greater wholeness.

And we described the opposites as operating in a cyclic manner. They begin fused together, then separate as we go about defining ourselves and carving out a personality. The opposites become differentiated from one another. When we are on our journey back to our Home or True Self, we need to bear the tense challenge of accepting and accommodating the rejected half of each pair of opposites. The structure of the cycle has been briefly discussed, how each opposite grows to its peak of manifestation, and then in a magical and
mysterious moment of reversal or *enantiodromia*, begins its retreat as the almost invisible other half starts its ascent. We used human midlife as an example of this cyclic interplay.

In trying to gain more familiarity with the hidden inner psychic world, which is who you are and what you are, we turned to the imagery of religion, myth and alchemy, as fantasies devised by the psyche to portray the inner workings of the unconscious. The four elements and the laboratory procedures of the alchemists, as well as their descriptions of the great Work or *opus*, helped to sketch the mysterious pieces of the journey—the initial confused and chaotic *prima materia*, being transformed into the philosophers’ Stone, the gold, or the healing elixir.

The unconscious psyche is apparently in constant motion, and its movements are shown to us by means of the steady stream of fantasy that is always going on, usually beneath our attention and awareness. That is why we meditate, to learn to filter out the distractions and quietly observe these movements. These images in our dreams and fantasies are communications from the soul, from that other self, that objective and autonomous psyche, for which our words fail in their attempts to describe what can only be called a Mystery.

In its perpetual motion, our soul in its inner hidden world is constantly going through metamorphoses. For us, these often evoke crises. It has been said that the Chinese symbol for “crisis” means “opportunity.” A crisis is a turning point, a place in our journey where there is a break in continuity, like a river becoming a waterfall. The break in the river means sudden power in the waterfall, and we know that this provides an opportunity to tap the power generated by the falling water. In our life crises, we are like raft riders on the river, and as we approach the falls, it is not unusual to panic. But we know that trying to turn around is often more dangerous than letting go and going over the edge.

We are at such an edge now. And if we as a group are facing a crisis in our survival and our growth, it can only mean that we as individuals are also reaching a critical point, a point where we must let go and go over the edge. We are on the edge now. The water is pulling, the stream of life in its movement carries us forward, with or without our consent, ultimately to our final destination and last breath. To resist or deny this movement is to die prematurely to who we really are. The body may survive for a little longer, the old personality may be preserved, but the vital soul is stopped up and diverted, maybe drying up and leaving us breathing but sterile, as so many are.

Which is it to be: sterile avoidance of change and the adventure of new places and new discoveries, or brave willingness to surrender and to follow the movement of the soul as it carries you forward into the unknown? As one wise man said:

*There is no security, only adventure; even stars die.*

**Initiation As Entry**

At the turning points in your life, just as at the one we face now as a collective, the time comes for initiation (“to cause or facilitate the beginning of: set going; to induct into membership by or as if by special rites; to instruct in the rudiments or principles of something”). This idea, so decrepit and lifeless in our age, has always been vital and revered in the past in healthy societies.

We imagine an initiation as a secret ceremony of rituals, in which those who have passed the test are inducted (root of the word “initiation”) into a society or organization, if we think of it at all. But it is not the ceremony that is the essence of initiation, nor the ritual that enacts it. They are the “holders” of the initiatory process, providing a vehicle for enactment of what fundamentally is a Mystery. The spirit of initiation is a change or transformation, a passage from one state to another which is final and irrevocable.

A marriage is an initiation, as is puberty, or death. A realization of something that radically changes who you are and how you see, a loss of innocence, is also an initiation. Thus the theme of death and rebirth has always been connected with the initiation process. The entombment of the initiate in the sarcophagus inside
the secret chamber of the Great Pyramid as a mysterious ordeal apparently led to either the realization of
a greater truth, or the breakdown of the applicant. Some believe the initiation chamber experience caused
an actual physical change in the molecules of the initiate, making it possible for him (or her?) to withstand
“higher energies.”

Clearly death and rebirth have been a major theme in our exploration of change or transformation. The
several alchemical procedures discussed were also descriptions of a death/rebirth. Dying to be born again
is a basic idea running throughout history, particularly in religious literature. From the earliest times, we
humans could see in the yearly vegetation cycle how life sprouted from the earth, bloomed and bore fruit,
which provided life for us, and then died, returning into the earth until miraculously it sprouted again. If
we could see with the eyes of a child, would this not be an astonishing Mystery?

And it was, and was celebrated in rituals that even involved at times the actual murder/sacrifice of the
King, or of virgin maidens, or a bull, in the belief that their blood spilling into the earth would ensure the
renewal of life in the future. Death to bring life is a theme so deeply buried in our collective unconscious.
But having lost our way, forgetting who we are and about the Pearl, we are left with no insight other than
the concrete physical process of death, which surely offers no hope of anything beyond our last breath and
decomposition (putrefactio). No Mystery—no rebirth.

It is easy to dismiss these myths and religious beliefs, as many have, as wishful thinking, necessary to avoid
the despair and terror of such a final end, with nothing but worms for eternity. And the believers don’t
really know, they just believe. But the skeptics DON’T REALLY KNOW either. You don’t. I don’t. And
since you don’t know, do you really want to stake your entire life on the POSSIBILITY that nothing comes
after, or the dogmatic belief that you know how it will be? What if death comes and you are wrong? Better
yet, what if the question of whether anything comes after death is determined solely by what you believed
about it when you were alive?

You don’t need to choose between opposing beliefs. You can stand in the middle, embracing the Mystery
and accepting your ignorance: don’t know, will find out. And you will have ample opportunity to practice
before the time comes, because in your life you will face, and already have faced, death in the transitions
which are initiations.

You lived as a fetus in the womb. Maybe it was the “Garden of Eden,” a blissful and peaceful warm world
of total satisfaction. Maybe your mother drank and smoked and suffered anxiety or depression during her
pregnancy, which would make that period anything but Eden. In any case, the world you knew, and the
being that you were, changed forever when you were physically born. Your birth was a death as well, a
death of the womb. You crossed a threshold and can never return (though many try). This was your first
initiation, unless you want to include the meeting of the sperm and egg that you once were.

You left your home and went to school. Life as a stay-at-home toddler ended either quickly if your mother
worked outside the home, or later when formal education began. Another movement from another womb.
Another death and another birth.

Perhaps this initiation could have been put off if, for some reason, you were kept at home, an eternal child.
But the death of childhood and innocence in the initiation of puberty cannot be avoided. At that time, you
shed your childish self and entered into the world of (new) adult sexuality with the potential to reproduce.
What an awesome change! There is a reason that spiritually healthy communities have rituals to help its
adolescents across this threshold. And nothing is more indicative of our sad shallow plight than our loss of
any such markers for this cusp. There may still be confirmations and bar/bat mitzvah’s, but they are largely
empty shells of what they symbolize.

In aboriginal Australia, the men of the village go into the woods at night, and make a great racket. In the
middle of the night, they burst into the huts and snatch the terrified boy from the arms of his mother, while
she screams and carries on. They take the boys into the woods and in a ceremony they may scar, or knock
out a tooth, or cut off a finger of the boy. He carries this horrific memory and permanent physical reminder
of his entry into the world of the men. His mother’s arms are now history. He is a man.
In our world there is no such ceremony. It does not have to be done with such brutality, though who are we to question when we can observe the manhood of these natives and compare them to the softness of many adult males in our society? Never having to leave the mother’s arms, many men remain there in their psyche. They simply shift from mother to wife, a woman expected to continue the maternal protection and catering to his needs. They are not men but boys.

There is no witnessed entry into the world of the men. There is no community of men who welcome the youth as one of their own. The closest thing we have to this now is entry into the armed forces. Boot camps and drill sergeants are the initiatory means to manhood. And what do women have to carry them into the world of the women? Is there even such a world anymore?

Having lost any appreciation for the necessity of initiation in our lives, because we do not recognize the natural initiations that life forces upon us, we do not experience the clear lines of demarcation between one stage and the next. The early stage of childhood bleeds over into young adulthood. Sonhood leaks into husbandhood.

This is not meant to say that in order to become an adult we need to face the destruction of the child within us. But there does need to be a shift of the locus of identity, of “I,” from one to the other. It is one thing to be an adult man with access to the wonder and sensitivity of childhood, another to be a child in adult’s clothing. Any time you are brought by life to the point where an identity is worn out and no longer serves a purpose, it is in your interest to shed that identity, even when—as is so often the case—you have no idea what you will replace it with.

In a sense, you need to be willing to replace it temporarily with nothing, or a state of transitory chaos. The elements of the personality, so long organized around a central sense of who you are—a subpersonality who takes care of others, a victim, an expert, a person who makes other people feel good, an anxious expectancy of doom—become set loose and chaos replaces the order that existed (no matter how repressive). You naturally are inclined to avoid chaos—though some of us are natural chaos-makers—and may cling to the familiar ways of the past, even if they are causing great pain.

This loss of identity is only natural, since everything changes, at least until you have recovered enough of the Pearl to experience the presence of an enduring “stone” inside of you. By enduring the many changes or “deaths” that come naturally, a sense of a deeper identity begins to dawn as the real foundation of who you are. Then any changes are like changes of clothing, not of the core self.

**Letting Go**

Each time you change, you are experiencing an initiation—an entry into unfamiliar territory which is both a death and a birth. Everything ends, everything dies, nothing is permanent. Yet how much of our lives do we spend acting as if this were not true, and doing all we can to avoid it. Right from birth you repeatedly break new ground, establish yourself and become more familiar with who you are and what is expected of you. The natural desire for control makes you want to stay there, but you cannot. Nothing is permanent. Even stars die.

Maybe initiation is a means by which your soul gradually opens you up more and more to the realization of who you really are. At first we haven’t a clue, and of course nothing in our world teaches us about this, so we are really on our own. The ego defends its turf and resists change. We would turn to stone if the ego had its way. But it doesn’t. And if it doesn’t, then who or what does? Who IS in control? We are taught it is our ego versus the cold random chaos of the universe—life as molecular ping pong balls bouncing off one another.

One can certainly question whether an initiation is a moment in which an unnecessary layer is peeled away, revealing the essential truth that had been hidden beneath, or if it is an acquisition of something new.
If we do experience a revelation of an underlying order because of a coincidence or the “chance” encounter with someone or a book that leads us in a new direction, we prefer to think of it as “luck.” But luck was once called “good fortune,” and fortune was Fortuna, sometimes meaning chance, but often meaning fate, as in the will of the gods. We are so frightened culturally to believe in and to trust the existence of anything but physical matter and each other.

But we have been making the case here that there is abundant evidence every day in your life that there are forces that are not you, but which behave autonomously, with intention, and quite possibly with intelligence. Again, this has been the prevailing belief under many names for most of recorded history. What has taken the floor from beneath our feet and left us dangling over the abyss of random and meaningless chaos?

If this is the present situation of Western humanity and its advanced technology, we might conclude from our prior discussion that this is the time for a collective global initiation. The old image of ourselves as human beings has been destroyed by scientific knowledge and the debunking of myth. We are left out in the cold with nothing to protect us. But what if this intellectual advance that has cost us our security and God’s protection has only brought about the loss of the names and beliefs with which we once clothed God? God had become, like our dominant self-image, too familiar and taken for granted, no longer seen or appreciated.

The name “God” has become too commonplace on dollar bills and before baseball games, after sneezes and justifying violence and war, to generate awe. The biblical name of God has been translated as “I am That I am,” an ambiguous phrase carrying little meaning for most of us. But what if it is saying “I am that particular I am,” not you, not the one who usually speaks from your mouth when you say “I am?” Then God is defined as the autonomous not-self that you encounter in dreams and fantasies, passions, symptoms, defeats and disasters.

This restores God’s original place as the supreme Mystery: “For in him we live and move and have our being.” Things started going wrong when we started calling this Mystery “Him.” Immediately we knew something—that God was male. But the Mystery has been long described as paradoxically containing all opposites, as male and female. The splitting of the Mystery created the same half-and-half situation that we live today as conscious personality and unconscious shadow. God had a shadow, and we named that shadow the Devil. God was attributed with all the desirable (though still fearful at times) qualities like all-knowing, loving, supremely powerful, and the Devil was everything that God was not, his enemy and opposite. God was good, and the Devil was evil.

We have just projected our own inner split and conflict onto the Mystery and in so doing, we have lost the Mystery. But just as being split cannot last forever without our undoing, so is our rupturing of the Mystery now leading us further astray.

Perhaps our time of initiation has something to do with this. We are not claiming to know, only to call attention to the need in our times to restore the Mystery to its rightful place as the source and foundation of all that is. Whether we are discussing the grand questions of the creation of the universe and life’s purpose, or the more practical concerns you and I have for understanding what troubles us and trying to make sense of life’s problems, including the problem called being human, the answer lies in the Mystery.

If we can submit to the humbling attitude of living in a Mystery and as a Mystery, we become open to receiving insight and guidance. We are being initiated into the Mystery now. We must be willing to endure the chaos and the death surrounding us just as we need to when we lose a familiar identity. We must trust that after the death comes a new birth. Even these words have lost their power, being over-used and too common. How can we find new eyes and ears to comprehend what it really means to die and be reborn?

By surrendering, consenting to our fate, and venturing and falling all the way in, we will come out on the other side. Maybe. There are of course no guarantees, at least not here. Fundamentalist religion or politics specialize in those guarantees but have yet to deliver. And it is the certainty of the black and white nature of fundamentalism that appeals to many of us in this state of deteriorating uncertainty. It is definitely a temptation, but you won’t find it there.
Initiation — The Critical Moment

If an initiation resembles the tales we have from ancient Egypt, then we can expect our critical time to follow a similar pattern. Individual initiation is apparently a very lonely and isolating time. Imagine being sealed up in a stone coffin, in total darkness and stillness, with only a limited amount of air to breathe. No noise, no visuals, no distractions of any kind, only your own insides keeping you company. No sense of time nor of how long you will be there, and the very real question of whether you will in fact survive.

Some stories have it that in that sarcophagus the initiate faced his or her own worst fears, kind of like shows like “Fear Factor” on television. If you were afraid of spiders, then suddenly they were crawling all over you. Or scorpions, or water rising etc. It does not sound like something anyone would choose, so why did they?

We have to wonder what these brave or foolish people were seeking that would lead them to this dangerous place. Sometimes when the coffin was opened, what was left apparently was a corpse or someone who had lost their mind. What was there to be gained that was worth the price? We don’t know.

In your own initiation process, especially the big ones, what is there that will bring you to a voluntary consenting attitude? In many cases it can arise because of the necessity or inevitability of where you find yourself. In our case, unlike the Egyptian initiates, we typically feel we have been forced or thrust into these situations, like the passage from childhood to adolescence, or menopause. But apart from these biologically ordained passages, chosen by our DNA, it is probably possible to trace back during the ordeal to a moment when in fact you did choose it, though not necessarily realizing the consequences at the time.

One example would be the initiation of marriage, which is a letting go of the previous way you have lived, and entry into a new and unknown life, in which you are now a part of a couple (new at least the first time). You could see that you chose to come to this point of critical change when you chose to pursue or accept the relationship. We make these choices without necessarily foreseeing how they will change us. And this leads us to wondering about how that happens, what is it inside or outside of us that perhaps knows exactly what may happen when we choose?

It is like the movies that begin with the hero or heroine in a critical situation, which is then followed by the rest of the movie as a flashback showing how they actually got there. What is it in us that stirs us, that inflames our passions and evokes our curiosity to the degree that we choose (or feel compelled) to take the first step down a path which will ultimately lead to a death and a rebirth? Could it be intentional, could it be some kind of “plan” or destiny or fate? Certainly this has been imagined many times before.

Is there a pattern of destiny within your own soul? Does this mean your life is predestined? Must we follow, or do we have a choice? Who knows? But we would probably be wise to at least consider the possibility, and to look for evidence of it in our life and in the choices and outcomes we have lived. Why? Because in this moment or the next, you will face the loss of what you know, sooner or later, if that is what is in store for you, and how will you face it? What will give you the strength to let go and the faith to follow through?

In some way, even though we may be facing such an initiation as a collective at this time, it can still be as isolating and lonely as it must have been for the Egyptian initiate. WE are alone in our situation, with no one out there to help. WE must take the next step and let go. WE must be willing to fall back into the dark black emptiness and to listen to our collective soul and to see its vision of what is eventually to come.

At some point, after having let go, the lid of the stone sarcophagus was removed and the initiate was released into the air and light. Imagine what that must have felt like! What did he or she know now that they didn’t know before their ordeal? How were they different? Was it only the fact of having survived that changed them, like if we make our first parachute jump or walk on hot coals? Or did something actually get revealed to them in there? Will something be revealed to you when you are in your empty dark moment of letting go?

I call upon you now to willingly undergo the initiation or entry into the mysterious world of hidden meaning. Listen to your dreams, pay attention to your fantasies, imagine that your relentless problems and symptoms and compulsions are voices trying to get through to you. Imagine that your life depends upon it. Try to realize that it just may be that this inner world is not garbage, not meaningless, not a waste of
your time. It just may be that the life circumstances which absorb so much of your time and attention are the outer shell of something much deeper, something which can feed your hunger and meet your needs, so much more than what you seek habitually.

Turn your eyeballs around so they face inward (not recommended while driving or operating heavy machinery). Instead of obsessing in front of the mirror about your abs and buns, direct some of that energy to watching what’s on the inside. Initiation will happen anyway. Death will come anyway. But instead of being its victim, you will be a participant. Is it possible that in this moment we have reached the mysterious turning point when all our frantic outer activity and trivial pursuits quietly begin to reverse themselves and to move ever so gently in the opposite direction?

Imagine our having the same zest and passion for the Mystery within that now fuels all the activity surrounding us.
Notes

1 Isaiah, 6:9-12.
2 Matthew, 26:42.
3 Roberto Assagioli, personal quote.
Chapter Eleven

Sex — The Coniunctio

ANY OF THE MOST PERVERSIVE AND FUNDAMENTAL IDEAS that make up your world and mine—like matter, gravity, magnetism, electricity, and sex—may be taken for granted because we've heard their names throughout our lifetimes. But with any reflection we realize that they are truly mysterious and unknown. We can compute the duration and speed of an object falling from a tower or from space through mathematical formulae with great precision. We can determine the strength of attraction between two magnetic fields, whether of heavenly bodies or inside an atom. We can generate enough electricity to light up the planet and to allow instantaneous communication between any two points in our world, or even beyond it.

But we still do not really understand what these things are. We have learned to control and to use them to our great advantage without having penetrated to the Mystery that they express. Just as we discussed with regard to religion and the word “God,” we mislead ourselves through our long familiarity with these terms into believing we understand what they are. And familiarity breeds contempt, some say, or at least complacency. How can we be curious or in awe about something we think we already understand?

As we said very early on, the Mystery is present every moment, in everything, or else it is not the Mystery. In the pause for the right word, the scratching of your head in perplexity because the question or problem doesn't have a ready answer, the Mystery is right there, requiring only humility and a hunger for depth. But we are so habitual in our skimming of the surface for the quick answer or—if none can be found—the easy dismissal of the problem, that depth is a flavor we need to learn to savor once again.

Nothing probably captures the fascination and deep reaches of the Mystery more than the feelings between lovers. Caught in the attraction that threatens a sweet drowning in the tides of our emotions, we can only wonder in amazement: “Who ARE you? What is this feeling on the edge of out-of-control that draws me on and scares me at the same time?” Feeling like fate or predestination to many, evoking a sense of deep familiarity, romantic love has avoided all attempts to quantify or explain it. Only the poets are able to approach this Mystery at all, just as they are the spokespersons for the Mystery in other realms.

If you look for the truth outside yourself,  
It gets farther and farther away.  
Because someone has made up the word  
‘wave,’ do I have to distinguish it  
from water?

There is a Secret One inside us;  
the planets in all the galaxies  
pass through his hands like beads.

That is a string of beads one should look at with luminous eyes.
It is only the compelling force of romantic love that can make most of us stop long enough to dive into what we do not know. And we can because we have a partner in the task. But all the other mysteries that surround us cannot compete with the frantic pace of our lives. There is no apparent “pay-off” in penetrating them. Yet we will throw everything away and put all our concerns aside for the chance to penetrate another human.

What is going on here?

Why is it that mystics through the ages have tried to express their joys and realizations in the same terms and language that describe romantic love?

Today we are impoverished in so many ways, none more than in our confusion of love, sex and intimacy. Sex has become for so many silicon implants, lots of skin, and tight buns. Talk about how the Mystery has become lost in our shallow literal approach to life! Instead of the mysteries of sexual attraction and pleasure, we have pornography, strip shows, lap dances, and more and more revealing of the body to cover up our sad loss of appreciation for what is not revealed. This is an apt symbol for our loss of the Mystery. We seek it in the most literal and shallow ways, and do not even know what it is we really seek.

What gravity, magnetism, electricity and sex—and romantic love—all have in common is attraction. Something draws bodies together, whether celestial, atomic, electrical or biological. It makes you wonder if our whole universe is not primarily run by attraction. Of course, remembering the opposites we could equally make a case for repulsion as the fuel that drives everything. We have to recall Jung’s statement:

_The factors which come together in the coniunctio [conjoining, merging] are conceived as opposites, either confronting one another in enmity or attracting one another in love._

What is he really talking about? What is the _coniunctio_? What are the “factors which come together?”

The imagination of the alchemists, as they sought to unlock the secrets of matter and its transformations, offers a revealing picture of the unconscious psyche’s own behavior, as it was projected onto the outer chemical substances. Inadvertently for most of them, they provided a powerful and colorful representation of the psyche’s process of its own metamorphoses. And these metamorphoses are not abstractions, they are what you and I are living every day.

The great decisions of human life have, as a rule, far more to do with the instincts and other mysterious unconscious factors than with the conscious will and well-meaning reasonableness.

The psyche dries up, drowns, burns. It turns black, or white, or red. When it does these things, you feel it. It colors your moods, fantasies and desires. It can inflame you or quench you, submerge you or depress you, enlighten you or elate you. This goes on inside of you and me every day. We rarely think about it. And yet we make our decisions based upon these inner states which come to us from a source other than our conscious selves and which we do not understand at all. The alchemists have passed on to us through their lonely and often unrewarding work, for which many of them devoted their adult lives, a glimpse of our hidden roots. For their efforts they are considered idiots and fools, now that the science of chemistry has set us straight about how things REALLY work.

In their fantasy of what they were striving for, their imagery may suggest the symbolic goal of the psyche. Was it gold, the most precious metal, which cannot be corrupted, the highest Value? Or was it the philosophers’ Stone, equally incorruptible and solid as the rock of Gibraltar? Or was it the healing elixir, the medicine which they claimed could cure ALL ills? Most likely it was all these things, as well as the long list of contradictory opposites they used to describe the Stone. Is this Stone our Pearl?

Another favorite image for the alchemists of the successful outcome of their _opus_ was the marriage of King and Queen, or Sun and Moon. This seems fitting if the descriptions they left to us of the Stone are so paradoxically filled with pairs of opposites. The human being who has reached the goal of his psychic growth is a marriage of opposites, of conscious ego and unconscious soul. This royal couple was often depicted in sexual embrace. They were merged or fused together, the meaning of “conjoining”.

Sex — The _Coniunctio_
This makes us wonder about the fact that everything seems to consist of opposites which are “confronting one another in enmity or attracting one another in love.” What is this mysterious force inside of each of us that drives us toward or away from particular people and things?

There have been attempts to explain romantic love with theories of hormonal activity, endorphins and other brain substances, or as the effort to recapture Freud’s childhood desire for the parent of the opposite sex. Perhaps all of these are partially true, but not the whole answer. We may never know what desire really is, but there appear to be two different kinds of desire. The alchemists distinguished between what they called the “crude sulphur” and the “true sulphur,” as sulphur symbolized for them the burning power that moves or motivates us.

The crude or base sulphur could be the raw desires that spring from our ego and its self-centered passions, hungers to feed the separate self and its biological drives. And the true sulphur could be the passion that comes from within to transcend the separate ego self, to fulfill one’s dharma or true Self. Remember when discussing the Fountain of Treviso (see Appendix), Jung said: “The enemy is your own crude sulphur, which burns you with the hellish fire of desirousness.”

The images drawn by some of the alchemists depicting the coniunctio show intercourse, or sexual union. This was their way of trying to portray the total merging and coming together of the opposites. This image of the man and woman in sexual embrace (often in a tub of water, making it more of a dissolving/fusing) seems to portray a deep and prevalent quality in the unconscious psyche. So much so, we could imagine it almost as THE driving force in our world. This would be fitting with regard to our discussion of the opposites and how everything is really the dynamic interplay between pairs of opposites.

Ancient myths tell how lovers are really the two sides of one soul that got split in half. The meeting and conjoining of two lovers is really the reuniting of the one soul. What if this fantasy is also true for our individual selves—that we each are half a soul, meaning the ego, the one in us who says “I,” is separated from its other half, and that other half could be what we have been calling Mystery, or unconscious, or Companion, or autonomous psyche? If that were so, we would be in a perpetual state of unfulfilled desire, yearning unconsciously for our “other half.”

Perhaps that is exactly what is going on in our world of desire. We yearn to find and merge with our other self, which is first presented to us in the form of our shadow. Not an appealing prospect, but if we survive that stage, then behind the shadow come deeper layers of the psyche, emerging from the unconscious in dreams and fantasies, often evoked by real-life human beings (or pets) that stimulate our desire for closeness. What is the ultimate closeness but merging? Thus the confusion of sex, love, intimacy and closeness, both with each other and possibly with what Jung called the “thirsting for eternity.”
Suddenly in the grip of obsession to possess a shiny new car, a fancy new dress, a tenured professorship, the hot young thing down the street, we do not recognize the roots of our desire. Instead we imagine and project our ultimate yearning to merge the separate, isolated and defended ego with its true Nature onto these things and people. Doing so, we expend great amounts of energy and often do damage in our one-sided pursuits, only to find that whatever joy or satisfaction we anticipated may dissipate very quickly and leave us with a sense of emptiness. Is this because we find that the desired object does not fulfill our unconscious fantasies of the wholeness we imagined?

We are not asserting that all desire is really a misguided urge to conjoin with our other half, the unconscious Self, or God, or eternity. Just as it is the exaggerated and one-sided emotional reaction to others that is a sign of our projection of our shadow qualities, it is the compelling obsession to possess—the need to have it—and the sense of futility or disappointment with the outcome that signifies a deeper unconscious motive at work than normal desire.

But we also discussed how desire serves the alchemical process of coagulatio, leading us to deeper involvement in the life of material pursuits and the specific here-in-this-moment and at-this-particular-point-in-space life we live. It seems desire both draws us deeper into the ego life of concrete matter, and can also motivate our detachment from, or transcendence of, that life of ego.

In fact, there could be a third kind of yearning or desire which was described in alchemical literature and in Freudian psychology as being quite dangerous. This would be the longing to return to the womb, to merge regressively with the source we came from, interpreted in a literal way by Freud as incestuous sexual desires for the mother. Most people upon hearing Freud’s ideas find them incredible: to think that I could have wanted to sleep with my mother when I was a little boy! But as absurd as this sounds, it most likely points to something there, even if not literal sexual desire.

So we have three types of desire or yearning:

1. **Longing for a return** to the comfort and security of the womb, before you were born, which is a retreat from life and a giving up of any individuality. Examples are all around us: the sacrifice of individual differences in order to have a relationship or to belong to a group that offers safety; “cocooning” with drugs, alcohol, television or other escapes in order to avoid risking failure, exposure, or vulnerability; clinging to habit and family tradition so as to avoid the loneliness of standing on your own.

2. **Longing for objects**, situations and people, in order to be with them, find closeness which we imagine will bring comfort and peace, a sense of well-being and fulfillment. Examples: the new car we must have, the man or woman we can’t live without, the job or promotion that we crave. It is not unnatural to want things, but this feels more driven, like our life is somehow at stake and to fail will mean doom.

3. **Longing for God**, for enlightenment and liberation, but for what purpose? This is critical, because it is easy for many to pursue spiritual goals in order to escape life. This suggests that they are still being controlled by the activity of the pairs of opposites—in this case either dirty, sweaty, suffocating material life with its limitations and responsibilities, or a kind of high and free “above it all” transcendence to be with God. The latter is really another ego defense disguised as spirituality, a type of “getting high.”

We are imagining here that “true” longing for God (whatever that may really be) is not an escape, but a merging into a larger and more inclusive identity, bringing with it an even greater sense of being in this world, of manifestation, sacrifice, and a larger consciousness which includes previously separated opposites.

Incest is defined as “from *incestus*: sexual intercourse between persons so closely related that they are forbidden by law to marry.” Freud’s use of that fantasy, something he inferred from his pathological patients, refers to a taboo subject, the sexual relations between father and daughter, mother and son, brother and sister. It is completely characteristic of the very literal and materialistic 19th-century thinking.

“Incest” as a fantasy of the unconscious psyche would then imply the merging of two elements closely related, of same origin or background, or perhaps the merging together of something with its “mother.” If we
abstract ourselves from the literal sex aspect (which does occur and is taboo) and see into the fantasy, then incest would be the merging of your ego self with its source, the unconscious, the early womb environment we described in #1 above “Longing for a return to the comfort and security of the womb.”

This is one of the main reasons why the journey we are taking here is so dangerous. If one is not mature enough, or stable enough, then there is a real risk that the personality could disintegrate by regressing backwards to an “incestuous” relationship with its source (or “mother”) which is the unconscious. Then we have schizophrenia or psychosis. This would be a “negative coniunctio,” a merging or fusion that obliterates the ego personality, not in a spiritual transcendence but in a drowning death and loss of self.

Ken Wilber has described in his writings the “pre/trans fallacy.” He believes that modern psychology/psychiatry has confused the descriptions of mystics and sages, who have achieved a genuine consciousness beyond (“trans”) typical ego consciousness, with the experience of regression back (“pre”) before consciousness. Both are described in terms that refer to a blotting out, immersing, or swallowing up of the ego’s conscious identity. But, in one case, the ego’s identity is lost in an incestuous return to the bliss of life before (“pre”) consciousness, and in the other, the ego has transcended (“trans”) its solitary stance by merging with a greater and more inclusive consciousness (“Self”), spontaneously or through meditation.

In this fallacy, modern psychology denies any possibility of achieving a state of awareness beyond that of our everyday ego (because it cannot be measured quantitatively), thus assuming that the teachings of great Eastern and Western sages are only the babblings of psychotics. This denial of any kind of progressive future path of consciousness leaves us in a spiritual cul-de-sac. We have reached the limits of “me, me, me” and have nowhere to advance to. It does seem rather absurd for the advocates of “normality” and of the defended ego to be passing judgment on states of awareness that they have never experienced. Yet that is the official position on these matters.

Let us slow things down here and try to get our bearings. This is not easy for us to fathom, again because we are talking about the fish and the water it lives in—we are so immersed in desire and longing that we rarely step back and look at it.

We can bring in here a different perspective that may allow us to understand the role desire plays in our lives, how this ties into the mission to retrieve the Pearl, the encounter with the opposites and the unconscious, the facing of our buried shadow and the discovery of the Companion, the pursuit of the gold, elixir, or Stone, or the coniunctio of the alchemists and their imagery. All of these are really quite personally important, as they pertain to your journey back to your Home after losing your way, like the hero sent for the Pearl.

We referred earlier in our sketch of human evolution to a sequence that appears to begin with the person embedded in a tribal group (Chapter Six). At first what is important is the existence of many human beings in order to provide the membership for a group at all. Individuality and differences are not suitable when the goal of evolution is the formation of a group. The child is first initiated into the customs and rules of the family, in order to be a member of the family, so that the family will be preserved. The child is also indoctrinated with the traditions and customs of his or her ethnic culture and/or nationality for the same reason.

In all these cases, the group or collective and its needs dominate the individual. Individuality and its differentness are a luxury, only safely indulged in when the collective stability and security of the group are ensured. But looking backward in time we can see that eventually the individual did emerge from the group, and differences became more accentuated as a way of defining the person as distinct from everyone else. We could call this the emergence of the ego in the history of human consciousness. The ego is the vehicle of individual development. It emphasizes being separate, individual, different, and defends its turf against the influences of the group. That is its nature and probably part of its purpose. Without the ego, we would all still be members of the masses, following like sheep. In our times we like to think we don’t do that anymore, yet careful observation of ourselves and our environment would show that the original need for safety in numbers and belonging is not gone.
If the ego prefers to think of itself as the ultimate ruling authority in the personality, then it may be necessary for the comfort of the ego that our earlier needs, for being a member of the herd and like everyone else, be rendered unconscious and part of the shadow. So we may follow the group in a devious way in order to preserve the illusion that we don’t need them and are somehow more conscious or advanced in our growth. To really emerge from the group and to stand on your own is much more terrifying than we like to admit. Sacrificing the safety of numbers takes a strong personality. It invites attack from the other members of the family or society who are threatened (“what if everyone thought they could do this?”) and makes it necessary to find a new foundation for security. The tribal group is supported by the unquestioned authority of the instincts and also its traditions.

So much of psychotherapy over its short history has been centered on this difficult initiation wherein a person needs to emerge from the safety of the collective to the stage of individual ego. Either the person cannot take the step because of the fear of standing alone, or the resistance of others, or the stepping out makes necessary some damaging behaviors that require healing and repair of family and social relationships, or the now-separated, alienated ego flounders without the necessary inner authority, strength and support.

As Freud discovered, the ego wins its independence by overcoming the compulsive domination of the instincts—what he called the id. But when the ego learns to sever its connection to the body and its natural instincts, it risks losing its unquestioned authority. What will it stand on now? Do we need to adapt to the norm around us, or will that cost us newly won individuality? These are some of the major problems facing would-be individuals in our times.

Perhaps our present discussion can provide some perspective on these issues. We must remember that our theme here is not sociological or therapeutic, but based on the pressing need we have in our time to recognize the reality and great importance of our neglected inner world. These developmental issues can be seen as originating inside of us, and the possible resolution of these problems may only be found within. Thus to remain neglectful of our interior will probably only prolong our difficulties.

**Heroism and the Outward Arc**

There is a repetitive motif that runs throughout mythology and religion. The fact that it appears so frequently and in so many different unrelated times and places suggests that this theme is inherently built into our unconscious psyche, as if part of the psyche’s own history. Joseph Campbell studied comparative mythology and was able to identify certain sequences that stood out, regardless of the specific characters or settings of differing cultures. In his book, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, he described a prevalent type of dramatic structure found in many myths—the journey of the hero. This is relevant for us here for at least two reasons: first, we have been following the “Hymn of the Pearl” as a symbolic story which suggests striking parallels to our current predicament, i.e., finding ourselves lost, without a memory of the purpose that got us here, and descending into chaotic behavior because the central core meaning for our journey has been forgotten, become unconscious.

The story of the Pearl is a perfect example of the mythological theme described by Campbell, what he and others would call the archetype of the hero (see figure 4). The hero leaves his home and familiar surroundings, goes on a journey or quest, sometimes alone and sometimes with a companion, seeking a treasure (golden fleece, pearl, etc) which is hard to attain, often guarded by dangerous monsters or natural challenges. He undergoes a test or ordeal, by battling the monsters, scaling the cliff, enduring torture, avoiding seduction, etc. and if he succeeds, he retrieves the treasure and returns as the hero, saving the land or the people, redeeming the king or somehow bringing healing and salvation as the result of his trials. In our
story, the letter from his parents is the crucial factor that restores the hero’s memory and sets him back upon his intended path.

"The hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder; fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won; the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man." (page 30)

The second reason for citing Campbell’s map of the heroic journey is that modern psychology has often described the development of our ego as following exactly the same theme: the ego leaves its safe and protected environment (unconscious bliss, the womb, the Garden of Eden) and ventures into the world, facing challenges and trials, with a heroic attitude of domination, unyielding determination, and macho pride. The ego wrests its independence from the jaws of the dragon, or snake, or bloodthirsty monsters, which are interpreted as the instinctual drives buried in the unconscious. If successful, the ego acquires the light of reason, freedom of choice, and the strength to stand alone and to lead.

Some schools of psychology have recognized that, in its necessary effort to free itself from its mother’s (the unconscious) domination by instinct, the ego heroically must spurn the feminine qualities of the mother, like safe containment, close nurturing, and warmth and comfort. Just as the aborigine feels it necessary to noisily and roughly snatch the adolescent boy from his mother’s arms, the ego has to fight aggressively for its freedom, because passivity means death or still-birth. This is not just a story of a psychological abstraction or of heroes from ancient myths; it is the story of you and me, who to this day are threatened by the possibility of being taken back into the womb of the unconscious if we do not continue to fight in this aggressive way to maintain our independence.

So Campbell’s heroic journey is what we have been describing in part. You have left home in at least two ways. You have left the safety (if it WAS safe) of the family and your mother to venture into the world,
where you must heroically strive to establish yourself against the regressive pulls of your own fears and doubts, your greedy and lustful instincts, and the threats of the outer objective world as well (trickery, deceit, competition, domination by the collective in its need for conformity). Secondly, you as the ego have left the safety of the unconscious and heroically sought survival as a responsible freely self-conscious and willing human being.

The very important implication of both Campbell’s work and our “Hymn of the Pearl” is that there is a further step to be taken. What matters most here is to recognize that in fact deep in your psyche, conditioning you since at least birth, is a necessity, whether we call it scientifically evolution, or theologially God’s Will, or just a Mystery. This “calling” has demanded that humanity take the step forward, out of our prehistoric past, to move beyond being instinctive animals controlled by aggression and desire, part of the herd serving what we call “instinct,” to a more “enlightened” stance in which we are capable of reflection and choice. Ideally it is the ego who reflects and chooses.

Quite often, however, it is still the instinctive so-called “lower” self who makes the choices for us, and the ego only serves to rationalize and justify what our instincts choose. This is a deceptive pretense, and the cause of so much of our difficulty. By pretending we are making choices with conscious reflection and logical thought, we do not reflect upon our real motives, and the world remains a prehistoric jungle in so many ways, only with more modern architecture and technologically sophisticated weapons.

In addition, in your life and mine, we are repeating the same pattern as our human race. You also have left the early womb and the life dominated by instinct that is so appropriate for the young child, and have tried to forge a more mature and conscious approach. This is the development of your own ego, partly forced by socialization that teaches you that to pursue only selfish and greedy goals that are purely self-serving will not be tolerated. But we have the same problem as humanity as a whole—you and I often pretend to have arrived at a choice by clear thinking and reflection, when in fact what we do is driven by unconscious motives closer to the Neanderthal.

To emphasize the most important point—there is largely agreement that you and I both as individuals and as members of the human race have arrived here as the result of an ongoing heroic struggle to free ourselves from being unconsciously embedded in tribal instinctive desires (called participation mystique). Though we may overestimate our gains, and be more subject to the past we claim to have defeated than we wish to realize, we are still very much involved in the heroic struggle. That heroic quest is one which we can see is “out” from being contained in the family or tribe, “out” toward greater freedom and independence, “up” from our prehistoric roots in the earth and in nature—“out” and “up.”

But Campbell, the “Hymn of the Pearl”, and other myths and fantasies all indicate that life is NOT only a linear movement in a single direction—“out” and “up”—and away from our source, whether the jungle, the earth, the mother’s womb or the unconscious. In each case there is a turning point, a reversal, a metanoia, or an enantiodromia, such as we described in our discussion of the opposites. We have pretty much believed that our human history has been a single forward movement from ignorance and instinct to enlightened thought and rational self-awareness, from unconscious to consciousness. This belief is—according to the myths from the mysterious unconscious—false. We have been told by the unconscious that we are only seeing a partial picture. In our modern neglect of the unconscious and its messages, we have gone dangerously too far down (really up) a path that diverges more and more from our true journey. We are ignoring its messages from our past and its signs in the present.

It is only natural that if we ignore the unconscious Mystery which is capable of a greater perspective than that of the ego, we will continue to pursue the ego’s direction without ever turning. If our evolutionary goal as human being was to move “out” and “up” in order to gain freedom from the earth, body, and tribe, or if your personal goal was to move “out” and “up” from the womb and passive conformity to instinct and collective norms, then why not keep going? There is nothing in the ego or the world we have built upon that upward and outward movement that can show us what’s next. But the unconscious has left us signs in our myths and does so every day in our dreams and fantasies.

On the day this book began, at virtually the same moment, the space shuttle Columbia crashed to the earth. Psychics and fortunetellers rushed in, as they always do after a catastrophe, to tell us what it meant. If it has
any meaning at all, beyond the scientific and cause-and-effect reasons for its happening, at the very least it can be said that it represents a movement “down.”

In Campbell’s image (figure 4) there is an Outward Arc and an Inward Arc. The hero journeys first away from his source and home (out), just as the hero of the “Hymn of the Pearl” does. Like the prodigal son in the Bible, there can be no return home if we do not leave. There can be no life lived if we do not leave the safety of womb and mother. We will simply die someday with life unlived. The Outward Arc serves two purposes: to take the hero out and away from his embeddedness in the unconscious (phase 1 of our cycle in Figure 1) and the familiar, and to lead the hero to his initiation trial (phase 2).

The Inward Arc: A Different Heroism

So the story of the hero has both an Outward Arc, leading to initiation, and an Inward Arc, returning to the source—what we have been calling our journey Home, to our True Self. These are just words, conveying no literal sense of what these images really stand for. But they are all we have. We must not take them literally, but symbolically as fantasy.

We have reached the end of the Outward Arc. We are in danger of failing our initiation and not returning. It is time to stop our linear movement “out” and “up.” It is time to reverse ourselves and begin moving “in” and “down.” The frantic activity, speeding up of time, loss of quiet and stillness, are all pathological defenses to avoid “in” and “down.” We do not value inward and downward. A “downward” trend means only one thing today: defeat, loss and failure. “Out” and “up” are at their peak. Their opposites—“in” and “down”—are eclipsed and needing to reassert their presence.

At the time of initiation, the hero faces the need to reverse the direction and attitude that brought him there. Overcoming the dragon, retrieving the treasure, it is time to STOP the quest, because it is over. The hero does not make a life of permanently going after every dragon in the universe. He cannot do this, because he now is responsible for what happens to the treasure—the Pearl, the golden fleece, whatever he has attained through his sacrifices, endurance of ordeals, and heroic acts. To continue in the same manner would make no sense. We would say he has become addicted to his role as hero, or at least to the first part of his journey. Because isn’t it also the hero’s role to return to the source with the treasure for the betterment and redemption of all? He doesn’t go home just to retire in a mansion and drive expensive cars. He brings back what he won, because he won it for all of us, and it is his destiny to bring it back to share.

And here we are. We have won (but are not finished winning) our separation from being lost and unconsciously embedded in nature. We have gone so far that we cannot stop seeing nature and instinct as our enemy, something to be conquered. We will never conquer nature. All we can hope to do is gain the freedom of choice inside of ourselves so that we are not unconsciously compelled by appetites and fears, nature within us. Nature shows us almost every day with her earthquakes, tidal waves, tornadoes, and droughts that we are nothing. It is not literal nature that we were meant to be victorious over, but the “natural”—because primitive and unconscious—drives we inherit by being biological beings.

Now our mindless mission, which has lost perspective, is our own worst enemy, not nature or dragons. The time calls for us to recognize the Inward Arc, the return with our treasure of self-awareness back to our Source. We do not even see our treasure, only our adversary, nature, and our compulsive need to win, to be the hero, to go up and up and out and out, conquering more and more frontiers. The new frontier is not outer space, but inner space. And we will need to turn ourselves around if we are to begin to fulfill the hero’s journey. We are being sent a letter, like our hero in the “Hymn of the Pearl,” a letter reminding us of who we really are and where we have come from. The letter, however, is also inside, and if we do not turn our attention in that direction then we will find that the world around us will increasingly continue to show, by disaster and violence and disrespect for life, that we have lost the way and are going too far.

Consider this: we seem to have originated in a state of unity. Once you and I were ONE. One thing. Not separate or different. We can see this in the myths of creation, where from a state of oneness comes separa-
tion of heaven and earth, above and below. We talked about this as the beginning of the pairs of opposites. We can also see it in the current creation myth of the Big Bang. Science theorizes that out of some kind of formless single substance came an intense and sudden “explosion” sending matter in all directions, and only later did it become separated different elements, which then formed stars, planets and eventually life.

Or if myths are too distant and abstract, how about yourself? You began as a zygote. Your mother’s egg received your father’s sperm cell. We ALL have this in common. Out of that one cell came all the cells that eventually made you who and what you are right now.

So whether it’s ancient myth, modern science creation theory, or obstetrics, the idea is still the same: if we look deeply at our origins, which is what we have been calling our original “Home,” we can see that we originated in a state of oneness or unity, and from that state we came forth by the process of separation and multiplication. The One became the Many. And here we are. Multiplicity and variety are the order of the day. So many different opinions, beliefs, systems. In our discussion of the interplay of opposites and the cycles of their movement, we saw that they swing back and forth between their two poles—first with one almost totally dominant, then reversing and shrinking while at the same time, its opposite grows in power until it dominates.

Here we have the pair of opposites (maybe the original two), One and Many. The “Outward Arc” we have been looking at from the various hero myths, where the hero leaves home, like our own “Hymn of the Pearl,” is our journey from the original One to the present multiple Many. But Many, if persisted in, leads ultimately to fragmentation, chaos and disintegration. What is “dis-integration” but the loss of a unifying center which holds things together? If we took the Sun from our solar system, we and all the other planets would just fly off forever into space, because the Sun’s gravity would no longer hold everything in orbit.

The hero’s myth shows that the Outward Arc leads to a moment of crisis, an ordeal or initiation. This moment could be seen to be the same as the mysterious point of reversal, of metanoia, or enantiodromia. It is an abstract version of our own personal turning point—the midlife crisis. For half a lifetime of moving “out” and “up,” out of the womb, out of the family, out of our early roots and groups, we follow a quest into the world, to carve out our own place where we feel we belong, where we can provide for ourselves and perhaps for others we love. But this is not the only direction for one’s life, just the first.

There naturally and necessarily comes a reversal of this direction, a turning point, which we vaguely name “midlife.” We are familiar with many of the signs or symptoms of this crisis, but have very little understanding of its real significance. From the One to the Many—the journey from simple unity to a variety of multiplicity. Then the initiation, the crisis of reversal, meaning that the dominance of the drive to go outward and to multiply must reverse itself. And this means that the power of the One, of unity and integration ascends once again, just as it ruled over our beginnings. For the first half of life we feel that we are moving “out” and away from our birth. After midlife, if we have navigated it successfully, our direction reverses and we are no longer moving away from our birth, but “in” and toward our death. This is hard to grasp if you think of death as only depressing and morbid.

We enter this life from a mysterious unknown place which feels like unity, and we depart to a similarly mysterious unknown place which feels like unity. Could they be the same, as the Buddhists and other religions imply? Death announces itself increasingly at midlife in the death or disablement of parents, the body’s gradual or sudden loss of youthful appearance and potency, the growing up of our children, and dreams of mortificatio themes, like corpses and graves, nightmares with heart palpitations and sweat, as if time is running out. Do we meet these shocking announcements with a desire to understand and to adapt, do we turn and flee as fast as we can, or reactively ramp up our heroic stance as if we can overcome the passage of time?

Reversal IS a shock.

In our culture we are not presented with the model of meeting our mortal limits willingly. Death is something we must fight against heroically, even if we know we cannot win. The stereotypical man of middle age, who suddenly leaves his wife (because she is aging just as he is) for a much younger woman and a motorcycle, is in full flight from death.
Midlife and beyond is a time (or should be) of assimilation, of gathering “in” the results of our quest and its challenges and rewards, and of integrating the various achievements, and lessons of defeat—in inner and outer—into a sense of fulfilling wholeness, a feeling that we are One whole human being. Perhaps this is what the period we call “retirement” is meant to be. Not just a ceasing of work and instead traveling or living by the sea. That is what retirement looks like when it’s only seen on its surface, from the outside. But inside, if one still has any inner life, it is time for memories, recollections, and digestion of the life we have lived—bringing family, career, tragedies and victories into a single package, which is who we are. We could call this an alchemical distillatio, in which the precious gold is distilled from the debris.

Extending our perspective back out a bit, the hero’s journey, which we have just compared with one individual life with its crisis of reversal at midlife, has an Inward Arc. What is this really and what does it mean for us?

If we have journeyed, both as individuals and as the human race, outward from unity to multiplicity, from the One to the Many, then the Inward Arc implies a reversal. From the Many to the One. The perennial picture of human evolution that has been taught for centuries by sages is one that goes from the One to the Many and back to the One. The journey back to our original Home is this path back to the One, the same One or Unity from which we emerged when we were born, either as you and I, or as the human race and consciousness emerging from nature.

It is only natural that we misunderstand this reversal as a regression, a “going back” to the place we started, because we do not have any cultural maps provided by education or religion that can show that even though our direction goes back toward our original Unity, it is, as is sometimes said, “on a higher turn of the spiral.” We do not end up at the same place. That would indeed be a tragic waste of the journey.

The hero doesn’t just turn from the slain dragon and go back to mom and dad. He takes the treasure he has won, and goes back to his home in order to bring what he has retrieved, to heal or change the home he left. Thus the home he returns to is not the same as the one he left, very much because of the heroic journey and initiation he has undergone.

We need to turn and go home. We need to seek out the One that holds everything together, before our compulsive fleeing “outward” sends everything flying off into space. That Center is still here, even though its presence has shrunk. We have lost It from our field of vision. We don’t know what to call It or where to find It anymore. It was called God, and other names, and It held everything and everyone in place around It.

It was right and natural that humanity had to grow away from that Unity, because the need to develop an ego and self-consciousness meant we could no longer stay in a conformist group of like-minded souls obeying unquestioningly the traditions and leaders who “knew best.” We have made it successfully, though not so far as we like to think, and not so free as we imagine. The presence of One and Unity is still here, but now it is unconscious as many follow the latest fashion or blindly serve the loudest voice. That is the old Unity, and it holds us back.

We need to find the new face of the One, which can continue to hold us together yet not bind us to the past. We are the hero and we have left home and reached our initiation. We are the hero of the “Hymn of the Pearl” who has reached this place, but remains asleep and who has forgotten the reason for coming here. We have forgotten the Pearl, and our royal parents, and the Home we need to return to and to rule.

**Coniunctio**

This long but necessary digression brings us back to the point where we started: the question of sex and the coniunctio. We began with a discussion of desire and its mystery. There is in each and every one of us something we call desire, something which gets stirred or awakened and makes us want things. When we experience that wanting or yearning, we want to take in the object of our desire, to merge with it, to conjoin.
Yet as we said, more often it turns out to be a temporary or unfulfilling experience. It is not really the object of our desire; we only thought it was. We do need to conjoin with something, but we rarely realize exactly what that is.

We feel emptiness, we feel hunger, but for what?

The hunger you and I feel is the hunger to conjoin with, to merge with the Oneness we originally left behind, only on a “higher turn of the spiral,” with our reclaimed treasure of human self-knowledge. We don’t know what this really is, but only this original Unity will fill our hunger. We may taste it in our highest sexual moments, but it does not last. And having tasted it, we go back for more. But just like LSD highs in the ’60s, the more you try to use anything to go back, the shorter the high and the more dosage you need. Because it is not the real thing.

How will we find the real thing? Where is it in this world of cell phones and computers, reality TV and corruption?

It is where it’s always been: INSIDE.

We have two clues: it is inside and it is a Mystery. It is the Mystery that dwells inside you and me. That may not be much, but at least it’s a start.

The Mystery is always both inside and outside. The pursuit of the Mystery in Its outer form is the quest for knowledge and scientific inquiry, which has taken us out of our early state of ignorance and domination by instinct. We have gone from instinct to intellect. But there remains the further stage from intellect to intuition. Mystery in the outer world has brought us the intellect (from “perceive, choose between”). Mystery in our inner world takes us further to the intuition (“the power or faculty of attaining to direct knowledge or cognition without evident rational thought and inference; origin: to look upon, consider, contemplate”).

There is inside of you a mysterious and unconscious Center, holding you together, letting you know when you wake in the morning that you are still the same person who went to sleep the night before. Even though you lose consciousness, something holds you together, like the little battery in the computer that remembers the date and time, even when the computer is unplugged. This something is present right now. It is watching you read this, and waiting to see if you will actually put down the book, close your eyes, and be quiet and listen. It wants you to. It wants to help us out of our predicament. It is waiting for you to pay attention, to observe and consider the dreams, fantasies, images and symptoms that keep arising from inside you, like smoke signals going up to the heavens for years and years until someone notices.

Recall that our present discussion began with sex. Recognizing that sex, as well as gravity, electricity and magnetism, were all at their core unexplained mysteries, we noted that they all had in common the phenomenon of attraction, which implies opposites being somehow drawn toward each other.

This attraction and urge for joining together is the same property that the alchemists used in their attempts to symbolize the goal of their work, or opus, in the coniunctio, when the King and Queen, or the Sun (Sol) and Moon (Luna) were shown holding hands in marriage, or in a sexual embrace. This appears to indicate a state beyond the antagonism and separation of opposites, where the two have overcome their differences and joined together. And we have noted that this merging without antagonism is identical to the state we imagine preceded our birth or the birth of the universe, a state of unity or oneness.

Further, we briefly mentioned the “pre/trans fallacy” described by Ken Wilber, in which he argues that it is a mistake to believe that the absorption into mystical unity, with all that is described by meditators and sages, is really nothing more than a falling back or regression to our initial state before differences came into being.

Building on that point, we brought in the archetypal hero’s journey as portrayed by mythologist Joseph Campbell, in which he showed, by examples of many different heroic tales, that the typical hero’s journey involves:
1. An initial **Outward Arc**, or leaving of the familiar home, then...

2. An ordeal or trial, an **Initiation** in which the sought-for goal or treasure is achieved through conquering the opposition in the form of monster, dragon, giant, etc., and finally...

3. The **Inward Arc**, where the hero returns to his source or home, bringing with him the precious fruits of his initiation.

Finally, our initial discussion of sex and the *coniunctio* led us to the basic yet mysterious subject of desire. Desire is such a fundamental and yet unfathomable element of our lives. After all, in the basic Western myth of our origins, it was desire for tasting the forbidden apple that got us to where we are. Whether this story is something that actually happened in a physical Garden of Eden, or if it is rather a myth, spun from the unconscious psyche revealing our psychic origins, it still has had a remarkable significance for our world for thousands of years.

Eve took the apple from the serpent, or the Devil as some would say, or even from the shadow side of God, because her desire was stirred. Something in her believed that she would be better off if she “conjoined” with the apple, merged with it, took it into herself and made herself and the apple one thing. That is what eating symbolizes—taking in and absorbing so that it becomes one with you, rather than separate.

The mythical Prometheus, who stole the fire of the Gods in order to give it to mankind, so that we could be less dependent upon the Gods, had a desire to do so. Without that desire, he would not have acted, and humanity would have never had the opportunity to learn the skills of agriculture, technology and the other gifts represented by this “fire.”

Desire is an enigmatic force that arises from hidden depths in each of us. We now live in a world which is largely run by the sophisticated manipulation of desire by marketers. We are played upon by imagery to “push our buttons.” The morality of such manipulation remains open to question, but the prevalence and effectiveness of the practice is not. We live in a world now in which the making of a profit is the prevailing force, in which the political leaders care not for human welfare or the human soul, but are bought and paid for by the profiteers. So laws are passed, practices are protected, by which someone has the maximum opportunity to invade your time and space for the purpose of trying to arouse your desire for their product. We are officially largely statistics and wallets.

One might question the effects of these practices and this perspective on humanity, particularly how it relates to the soul. The marketing onslaught depends on our attention being occupied at all times, never at rest, with outer images and messages. There is not yet a market of any significant size that depends on our being quietly observant of our inner world. Surely there will be, once the trend toward the inner grows enough to interest the marketers. Then we will be called during dinner for meditation enhancers, like blindfolds, music, herbs, instructional tapes, etc. This already is happening in New Age publications.

But it does not matter WHAT is being marketed, whether it is smut, air miles, long-distance service or enlightenment. Apparently the ego finds the purchase of objects and programs about spirituality less threatening and more attractive than the actual experience of disciplined inner observation and the long effort involved in trying to really know oneself. It is the practice of marketing, of being sold to, that is an obstacle to our turning inward. Marketing is just one of the “ten thousand things” of our outer world that distracts us from the “voice of the silence” within.

So we are run by desire. This is so profound a thought, which, like the others we have been considering, is so common and obvious that we easily overlook it and particularly its implications. We are run by desire. Desire is what moves us. With no desire, we do not move.

The Buddha claimed that desire is the cause of all suffering.

What does *that* mean?

If you don’t want to suffer, then do not desire.
We recall the quote by Jung in the Appendix about how we must detach from our desire, contain it, rather than be compelled by it. Many spiritual teachings are in one way or another about the mastery of desire. They often appear contradictory, because it obviously takes desire for liberation or some spiritual state to motivate someone to detach from desire for pleasure and comfort.

This brings us back to the alchemists’ distinction between the “base sulphur” and the “true sulphur.” If we consider sulphur to be, as Jung put it, “the motive factor in consciousness,” then the alchemists have, as they tended to do, simply found a chemical term to describe in fantasy a deep psychic unconscious mystery inside us. The base sulphur would be the desire that comes from the instinctive biological and animal body. It is our hunger for food, need for comfort and stimulation, desire for survival, belonging, power and recognition. It is the root of greed and lust, gluttony and megalomania. It is also the foundation of the ego and the Outward Arc.

We are each born with our own unique mix of these base sulphur motives. One person may be primarily driven by the need for attention, while another has little concern for that, but craves sexual pleasure. If we want to explore what kinds of base sulphur motivate us, all we have to do is look at the statistics for where people spend most of their money. Money and time go into the feeding of the instinctive desires that motivate all of us. How much is spent on defense, entertainment and cosmetics? On education, welfare, or spiritual development?

But beyond meeting our need for the necessities of life like food, clothing and shelter, which are powered by our instinctive desires, we can see that the motives of the base sulphur are for those things which support and bolster the ego—the separate self which rules the Outward Arc and which is mostly concerned with its own survival and empowerment. We rarely ask ourselves “survival for what?” For what purpose is the survival of the ego so necessary? If we were to ask the average person, what might they say? When only the Outward Arc is considered, then the point of survival for the ego is just that: to survive.

Survival of the ego has become the major concern only because it’s preferable to death and annihilation. But the ego typically lacks a greater vision or meaningful purpose, just as life is prolonged by modern medicine for its own sake, just to forestall death, without any real concern for the quality or purpose of the extended life. This is indicative of a life being lived in the linear pursuit of the Outward Arc without any clue that there may be a further stage in one’s life or in our evolution. I just have to keep going in the direction I’ve always been going, for as long as possible, because THAT IS WHAT I DO. This is sleepwalking. This is inertia. This is waking death.

But what about the “true sulphur” of the alchemists? What were they talking about or fantasizing? They imagined there was another kind of motive power or desire, and they chose to call this “true,” implying that the “base sulphur” was less true. The motives of the base sulphur serve the survival and enhancement of the ego and the body. They are not wrong or evil, but natural and from instinct. They largely existed before humans came on the scene, in primitive forms in the animal kingdom.

But when we humans evolved to the current state of self-consciousness, of being able to be aware of our thoughts, feelings, and internal states, we gained (theoretically) the freedom to make choices. And this, we are told, is what distinguishes us from the animals. Yet if our choices are dictated by the compulsions of our instincts and base desires, there really is no difference. The last statement describes the animal state and by far the majority situation for humanity at this time, and usually the situation for you and for me for most of the time we live and breathe.

It is only the Inward Arc that provides the meaning for the ego’s heroic movement up and out on the Outward Arc. Otherwise it is left with a goal of survival for its own sake. But the return from the initiatory turning point toward the Source, our Home, with the rewards of the trial is the whole point. And we have nothing in our current official theories of evolution that offers us this inspirational possibility.

Our own situation is usually largely unconscious, allowing us to imagine that WE, in our advanced state, are much more conscious than our more brutish fellow humans, and certainly that we have evolved far beyond the lowly animals. Yet one of the first recognitions that painfully dawns, when you commit yourself
to attending to your inner world and its true motivations, is that a good deal of the time you are operating at no higher a level than anyone else.

Literature and drama are full of examples of this “enlightened” façade and the accompanying buried unconscious shadow. One thinks of the 1930’s film “Blue Angel” with Marlene Dietrich, in which an intellectual professor is overwhelmed by his lustful nature when he meets the seductive singer. By living a life in which he had cut himself off from his “base sulphur,” it had only been waiting to surface, and he was ill prepared for it.

In our own ways, we too live this story when we think of ourselves as mainly evolved and conscious, beyond the more primal and base motives that seem somehow to control most of the world around us. The truth is certainly another blow to the pride and self-image of the ego, another encounter with the shadow, and a very good reason to leave the introspection to the gurus and impractical mystics.

But what about the “true sulphur?” Obviously there exists in some people (and perhaps deep in every one of us) some hidden spring in the unconscious that sends forth a stream of desire that craves to grow beyond the everyday world fueled by ego gratification. We can see this when a successful person becomes bored and even depressed with the abundance they have achieved. Sooner or later, they find it is not enough. It was enough to motivate their ambitions and sacrifices, but once gained, then what? This has been called an “existential crisis,” in some ways related to the midlife crisis.

After a great flowing of motivation and desire, it dries up, and emptiness and depression take its place. Of course, in our world this means a trip to the shrink and a prescription, replacing the emptiness with equanimity.

But if we don’t take the drugs, and don’t flee the void, and don’t just stimulate ourselves to distraction, it seems that something often arises from within—another motive, one that wants to do something FOR others, or WITH others, to create, to teach, to inspire. And perhaps also, to discover what lies within, beyond the well-lit areas of the psyche where the ego rules, in the dark and hidden places where one intuits that treasure may be found.

Might this be the “true sulphur:” motive that does not serve the ego and its separate desires, but instead serves the group, the community, mankind? In a sense, does this not suggest that the motivation of the true sulphur flows from a deeper Center, a Self that is not just yours or mine, but ours? Is this possibly the True Self, the Home to which we refer, the Place from which we departed in our beginnings, which we have forgotten and lost, but which awaits our return?

And could this true sulphur and the desire to serve others, to discover the truth and reality of one’s inner world no matter how challenging or uncomfortable, be what Campbell refers to as the “Inward Arc?”

If this is the case, then sex and all desire symbolizes the presence in us all of the coniunctio energy, whatever that truly means. The many desires that drive us onward, first outward toward greater self-determination and separateness, turn out to be forerunners of the need to conjoin, to meet and merge with the Center which is our real and true Source and which lies within (and all around). And the increasing disappointment or let-down that follows each lesser conjoining or merging with a sexual partner or a new car or a larger audience is not a sign of mental illness, but of having reached the turning point that takes us from the Outward Arc of the ego to the Inward Arc of return to the true Self, to the Pearl and to Home.

And what is the Pearl? Is it possibly the awakening to the presence of such a Self within us? Something that assures us that to feel emptiness and loss of joy from habitual appetites is not mental illness, but a deeper call? Do we not find this if we have the courage and patience to sit still in the increasing darkness and void, rather than clutching old thrills which are now empty husks?

Do we not need to do this now? Soon? Do you? Are you? Is it time for you? Does the growing fear and concern that you feel for the deteriorating respect for life that you see every day not say to you that it is time? Does the waning satisfaction and fulfillment of the things that once brought you joy and excitement not say to you that there is something more, even when our leaders and teachers cannot say what, or even if...?
It is within you to find. It is time to stop. Not all living, not the fulfillment of your needs, but the excess and the meaningless, the filling of the void with more void, more stuff, bigger garages and bigger cars.

Time is passing. Your heart has fewer beats left than when you started reading this. Perhaps 10,000, perhaps 10,000,000, perhaps 10. Think about it. Not to scare yourself, but to say “What am I doing?”

What... AM... I... DOING?

What would your life be like if you suddenly began seeing each and every desire that moves you, beyond the body’s need for survival, as a yearning to conjoin with the ONE from which you emerged at your birth? What if you began to question your “need” for this toy or that object, and to ask yourself what it hides behind it? What if you began to organize your life around the desire to find out what that hidden goal might be?

To do so may lead you into the bath, as the alchemists portrayed it. In a famous picture series known as the Rosarium, the couple conjoins, merges. And then... they die. The soul flies to heaven. The corpses are left in the bath. Then the dew falls, and the corpses are alive again, now one being, both male and female.

What in the world does this mysterious series of pictures mean?

Why is the result of the initial conjoining shown to be death? Is this somehow meant to symbolize the state of the ego after it has been wounded by its first experience of the greater Self—depression and loss of identity?

The implication from the previously mentioned “pre/trans fallacy” is that if we believe only in the Outward Arc, away from birth and Unity and Source toward separate ego identity, then a coniunctio experience can only be interpreted as falling backwards to that original state, a defeat for the heroic ego as it tries to leave its mother, its unconscious origins. It is a retreat and a loss of what has been gained through great effort.

If we accept the possibility of an Inward Arc, partly from the testimony of the great religious teachers, and the myths spawned by the unconscious throughout history, then dissolving one’s sense of separate identity in a merging, a “bath” if you will, can represent a step forward to the future of our evolution, a victory of the highest kind, in transcending and going beyond the separate ego self. That is exactly what the spiritual teachers have said.

Without recognition of this Inward Arc we are likely to make serious errors about our situation. Advancement and transcendence are considered negatives, a loss and a failure of the ego to hold its hard-won ground. And so we will turn our backs on our future, as we are doing now. How will we progress then?

Equally disastrous is the mistaken belief that any and all loss of ego identity is a transcendent leap forward. Particularly in many New Age practices, any loss of self is understood to be a great mystical experience, when it can appear later that it was rather a backward slippage not a forward leap. Thus the two states are confused and experiences are misconstrued, which at the very least, sends people backward thinking they are advancing, or misconstrues an evolutionary leap as a defeat.

What does a world with only an Outward Arc look like?

Well, for starters, the second half of life is no longer necessary or of any worth. The values and goals of the first half of life—the Outward Arc—are the only desirable objectives. Looking young, staying fit, seeking sexual conquests, trying to “make it,” either sexually or materially, are what matters to a young adult. But when these same goals are presented as the only options for the second half of life—when the Inward Arc is more appropriate—it starts to look a little foolish.

But what is one to do after 40? Or 50? What model do we have? How can we follow the natural inclination in our souls to go inward and deeper when the world around us seems to consist only of shallow and surface?

The heroism of the Inward Arc is the willingness to sacrifice the most obvious roles and goals of our youth and to begin a withdrawal, like the Hindu sages retreating to the forests in order to contemplate. Isn’t it possible that part of the rampant depression of the second half of life arises from the lack of any such option?
If you want to “belong” in this world as it is right now, then you better KEEP looking young and measuring your worth by more and more sex and toys and money. But these things don’t really nourish the soul after their appropriate stage in the first half of life. The heroism of the Inward Arc is sacrifice and surrender, the realization that the critical choices and acts of the Outward Arc which were aimed at establishing oneself in the world are past, and now it is time for the critical growth and deepening of consciousness.

We’re going to have to make that happen ourselves, not wait for our leaders or culture or trends to take us there. And if we do turn in that direction—a reversal, a metanoia, an enantiodromia—there will be Someone there to meet us, to Partner with us and to show us the Way.
Notes


Conclusion

Are You On the Bus, or Are You Off the Bus?

And so if we have left our familiar home of habit and routine, role and comfort, and been forced to encounter the changes, breakdowns, failures and symptoms that are part of life, all the while seeking the landmarks and maps left to us by earlier and contemporary soul travelers, we are likely to find ourselves temporarily without an anchor.

In each moment that you and I live, we are choosing where we want to be, what we believe, and how to cope with the openings and closings presented to us. It is a life-long and sometimes tedious work. The desire to escape or to fall asleep is at times overwhelming. Do we have what it takes to live consciously? Will it make any difference?

In the 60’s, there was a popular book, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* by Tom Wolfe, about Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, one of the original communal bands of hippies. These people rode around in a psychedelic bus, often high on acid, and pursued their pioneering adventure in alternative lifestyle. In their counter-culture life, before being a hippy was trendy, when dilemmas or conflict arose within the group, a person would be asked, “Are you on the bus, or are you off the bus?”

A lot of times the Pranksters seemed very much as if they were trying to find their way together to the kind of consciousness as a group being discussed here. A setting aside of ego, a listening to inner calls, a sense of participation in a greater and more inclusive Whole—these were part of what it meant to be “on the bus.”

At this time now, the same question could be asked of you. There is a rising tide of trouble out there. Shallowness and distraction are starving us. An oasis is available inside each of us, a precious Pearl, and a connection with your true Home. If you feel called to make that journey, fully aware of its dangers and the necessity for some very hard work and courageous honesty, then it’s time to ask: “Are you on the bus, or are you off the bus?”

I am an orphan, alone; nevertheless I am found everywhere. I am one, but opposed to myself. I am youth and old man at one and the same time. I have known neither father nor mother, because I have had to be fetched out of the deep like a fish, or fell like a white stone from heaven. In woods and mountains I roam, but I am hidden in the innermost soul of man. I am mortal for everyone, yet I am not touched by the cycle of aeons.

Listen to the voice of the orphan inside you, in your innermost soul. Listen to the warnings that arise when you allow yourself to feel your innocence, and how it hurts to witness the daily inhumanity and blind destruction of our environment, increasing when it should be decreasing. Where can this lead?

I don’t want it to happen, but I think it will. It already is. You don’t want it to happen either. I think of my daughter and your children, of the children to come. If it is going to happen, then let us do all that we
can to make it happen in the best possible way. If you can find your way Home, if you can reconnect to
the Mystery at your core, then perhaps that Center within us will provide us with solace, and with ways
to soften the pain and suffering that inevitably will come with the end of our time. That Center is What
brought forth this writing, and it may bring something forth from you.

If we must go through what is to come, then let us do it well.

I wonder—have I given a voice to the orphan? Have I come close at all to articulating her message, buried
inside of us?

The orphan IS the Pearl.

The Pearl IS the orphan.

Is anyone listening?

_Dancing in the dark ’til the tune ends_
_We’re dancing in the dark and it soon ends_
_We’re waltzing in the wonder of why we’re here_
_Time hurries by, we’re here and we’re gone_

_Looking for the light of a new love_
_To brighten up the night, I have you love_
_And we can face the music together_
_Dancing in the dark, dancing in the dark._

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Notes


2 Lyrics by Howard Dietz, “Dancing in the Dark” (1931).
Appendix

A Taste of Alchemy: Jung and the Fountain of Treviso

If thou knowest how to moisten this dry earth with its own water, thou wilt loosen the pores of the earth, and this thief from outside will be cast out with the workers of wickedness, and the water, by an admixture of the true Sulphur, will be cleansed from the leprous filth and from the superfluous dropsical fluid, and thou wilt have in thy power the fount of the Knight of Treviso, whose waters are rightfully dedicated to the maiden Diana. Worthless is this thief, armed with the malignity of arsenic, from whom the winged youth fleeth, shuddering. And though the central water is his bride, yet dare he not display his most ardent love towards her, because of the snares of the thief, whose machinations are in truth unavoidable…

The foremost student of medieval alchemy in the 20th century was Carl G. Jung. His dreams led him to its study—even though he was a scientifically trained physician—and he spent decades researching and writing about obscure texts. He was not constrained by the prejudices of his education or religious upbringing. Let us look at one such jewel, buried but not lost in the alchemical writings of the 17th century (1645). This is part of his interpretation of the above “Fountain of Treviso”:

If thou knowest how to moisten this dry earth with its own water, thou wilt loosen the pores of the earth, . . .

“If you will contemplate your lack of fantasy, of inspiration and inner aliveness, which you feel as sheer stagnation and a barren wilderness, and impregnate it with the interest born of alarm at your inner death, then something can take shape in you, for your inner emptiness conceals just as great a fullness if only you will allow it to penetrate into you. If you prove receptive to this ‘call of the wild’, the longing for fulfillment will quicken the sterile wilderness of your soul as rain quickens the dry earth.”

. . . and this thief from outside will be cast out with the workers of wickedness, . . .

“You are so sterile because, without your knowledge, something like an evil spirit has stopped up the source of your fantasy, the fountain of your soul. The enemy is your own crude sulphur, which burns you with the hellish fire of desirousness. . . You would like to make gold because ‘poverty is the greatest plague, wealth the highest good.’ You wish to have results that flatter your pride, you expect something useful, but there can be no question of that as you have realized with a shock. Because of this you no longer even want to be fruitful, as it would only be for God’s sake but unfortunately not for your own.”

. . . And the water, by an admixture of the true Sulphur, will be cleansed from the leprous filth and from the superfluous dropsical fluid, . . .

“Therefore away with your crude and vulgar desirousness, which childishly and shortsightedly sees only goals within its own narrow horizon. . . The water of your interest is not pure, it is poisoned by the lep-

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rosy of desirousness which is the common ill. You too are infected with this collective sickness. Therefore…consider: What is behind all this desirousness? A thirsting for the eternal, which as you see can never be satisfied with the best…The more you cling to that which all the world desires, the more you are Everyman, who has not yet discovered himself and stumbles through the world like a blind man leading the blind with somnambulistic certainty into the ditch.”

…The unconscious demands your interest for its own sake and wants to be accepted for what it is. Once the existence of this opposite is accepted, the ego can and should come to terms with its demands...

...And thou wilt have in thy power the Fount of the Knight of Treviso, whose waters are rightfully dedicated to the maiden Diana...

“The ever-flowing fountain expresses a continual flow of interest toward the unconscious, a kind of constant attention or 'religio', which might be called devotion. The crossing of unconscious contents into consciousness is thus made considerably easier, and this is bound to benefit the psychic balance in the long run…If attention is directed to the unconscious, the unconscious will yield up its contents, and these in turn will fructify the conscious like a fountain of living water. For consciousness is just as arid as the unconscious if the two halves of our psychic life are separated.”
Bibliography


The Seed of Fixity

Fixity:

1. The property of enduring heat without volatilization or loss of weight;

2. The condition of not being liable to displacement or change; stability or permanence in a situation, condition or form

Philip Levine is a retired psychotherapist, and a practicing and teaching astrologer since 1973. He received a Master’s Degree in Clinical and Counseling Psychology in 1981. Philip is the founder of Sirius Astrological Services, and creator of The Cosmic Window Personal Astrological Appointment Calendar, and co-creator with Richard Tarnas of A Calendar of Archetypal Influences.