

THE PEARL WITHIN

DISCOVERING THE RICHES OF THE UNDERWORLD

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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*², 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.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE CYCLE

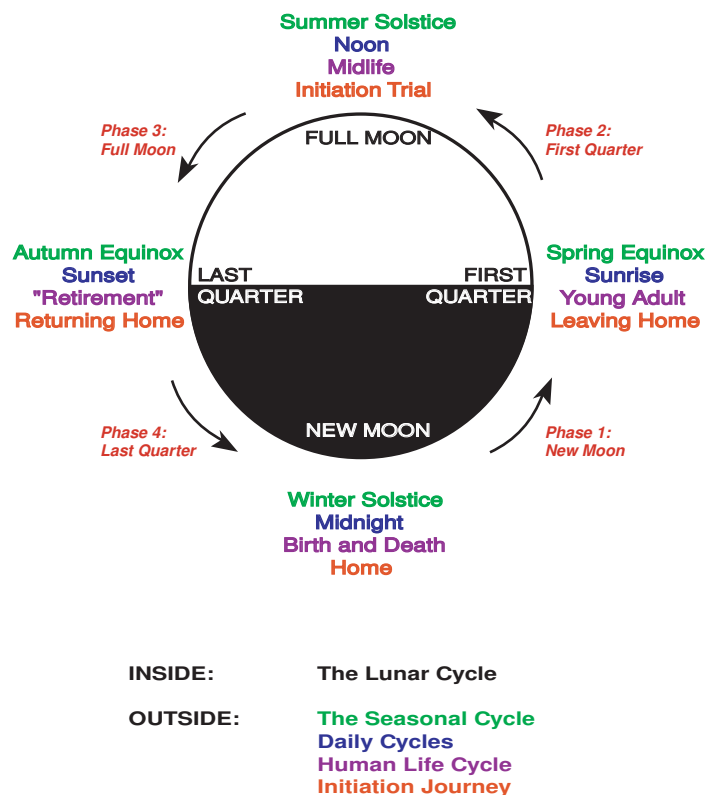


Figure 1

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 intuiting 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 revolution 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.³

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."⁴) 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 Daedalus 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"

2 Edward S. Ayensu & Dr. Philip Whitfield, eds. *The Rhythms of Life* (New York: Crown, 1981)

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

4 C. G. Jung, *Alchemical Studies*, CW13 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 245