

THE PEARL WITHIN

DISCOVERING THE RICHES OF THE UNDERWORLD

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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 rises 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 shrunken 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.”²

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.*³

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.

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? Why would someone voluntarily put themselves into such a situation, if not for national tv exposure showing everyone how they can eat worms?

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.