

THE PEARL WITHIN
DISCOVERING THE RICHES
OF THE UNDERWORLD

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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Our modern civilization believes the old trust in gods and nature spirits is outdated and superstitious (“a belief or practice resulting from ignorance, fear of the unknown, trust in magic or chance, or a false conception of causation”) and that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.²

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 wrongdoing. 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?³

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?

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."⁴



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"⁵ 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?"

"The Tao that can be spoken of is not the Tao at all."⁶ 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 environmental 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 disrespect 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 scientific 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.⁷

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.”⁸ 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, beauty 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.⁹ 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 mal-adjusted 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

- 1 C. G. Jung, *Modern Man In Search of A Soul*, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1933), p. 62.
- 2 *Mundaka Upanishad*, 3:1:1-2 (Sri Aurobindo, trans.), *The Upanishads*, (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1972), p. 281.
- 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.
- 5 For more on the primal wound, see John Firman & Ann Gila, *The Primal Wound*, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997).
- 6 *Tao Te Ching*, Stephen Mitchell trans., (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 1.
- 7 See Ernst Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed*.
- 8 Thomas Moore, *The Planets Within*(Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1990), p. 82.
- 9 Levoy, *Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life*(Three Rivers Press, 1998).
- 10 Rachel Remen, M.D., *The Human Patient*

