

THE PEARL WITHIN
DISCOVERING THE RICHES
OF THE UNDERWORLD

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PART TWO

FINDING OURSELVES

The experience of the Self is always a defeat for the ego.¹

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

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

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

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

¹ C. G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, CW14 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975)

² Edward Edinger, *Encounter With The Self*, (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1986, p. 9)

Chapter Four

Leaving Home

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

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

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

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

Move forward.

Walk on.

Put one foot in front of the other.

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

Pull on the push let it pull you push you.

It wants you to live.

Don’t fear it.

Be it.

Don’t fear it.

Be it.

Bear it.

Let go.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What many of us need in a time of mourning is only for someone who can say that they do not know either, as we struggle to understand things we may never be able to.

Why *do* things happen? There is a great difference between saying “they just do” and pursuing the question no further, versus accepting the Unknown but wondering anyway and trying to feel the presence of the Unknown in the unexplainable event.

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

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

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

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

If you can settle there in that empty space, and quiet your feelings of concern, then you can try to remind yourself that this is your Home, the Home of the Mystery that we are. If you spend time here, it will begin to feel more like your home, a place you vaguely remember but cannot name and cannot describe precisely.

Like the hero of the “Hymn of the Pearl,” asleep in Egypt, our error is in mistaking our narrow certainty and the authority of “experts” for our home. We have constructed a false home on weakening supports as a reassurance that we ARE in control. The supports are collapsing. Awakening means realizing that the “home” we thought could protect us is really a temporary resting place, and that to return to our true Home we must leave its shelter and hang out with what we don't know.



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

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

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

The Attitude of Consent

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

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

The *Tao-te-Ching* says:

Free from desire, you realize the Mystery.

Caught in desire, you see only the manifestations.¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Even this reassurance does no good unless we are able to muster enough faith. "Not my will, but Thy will be done." Instead, for example, of reading the trial and crucifixion of Jesus as something

one must blindly believe in if one is Christian, we can once again try to penetrate more deeply into the story without prejudice to hear the voice of the Mystery that speaks. When faced with the realization of what he must suffer in order to fulfill his *dharma* (the true innate purpose for which he was born), Jesus bends his will into a voluntary acceptance, a sacrifice, which literally means “to make whole or holy.”



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

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

Listen, and do not forget, and I will show you a mystery. It is not the sacrifice, whether it comes in youth or age, or the god remits it; it is not the blood-letting that calls down power. It is the consenting, Theseus. The readiness is all. It washes the heart and mind from things of no account, and leaves them open to the god. But one washing does not last a lifetime; we must renew it, or the dust returns to cover us.⁴

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

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

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

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

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

and sanity. These ancient inner ideas can help us to navigate, just as our atlases and computer programs help us land on the moon.

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

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

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

Notes

1 *Tao Te Ching*, 1.

2 T. S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men".

3 Michael Maier, *Symbola Aureae Mensae*(1617).

4 Mary Renault, *The King Must Die*, (Vintage, 1988), p. 17.