

THE PEARL WITHIN
DISCOVERING THE RICHES
OF THE UNDERWORLD

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Chapter Seven

Polarities — The Opposites

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

YES OR NO, PRO- OR ANTI-, LIBERAL OR CONSERVATIVE, GOOD OR EVIL, male or female, right or wrong. To be or not to be.

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

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

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

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

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

Our evolutionary journey to this point seems to have followed the Way of Division and Separation. This is probably necessary and correct. Otherwise we would never have left our original state. But

can we not see where this path ultimately ends without any adjustment or reversal? Fragmentation and chaos, the “ten thousand things,” ten thousand beliefs, ten thousand religions, ten thousand truths, flying off in all directions to the infinite ends of the universe, unless a unifying Center is found, unless a “letter” calls us to awaken and reverse ourselves.

But any pole can tell only half the story. How can we reach wholeness, a totality of being, unless the natural tug-of-war of the opposites is somehow overcome? Before we can aspire to grand schemes of unity (God knows we’ve tried!) with any real possibility of actual achievement, our first task is to recognize and accept all the seemingly lesser and inferior halves we have rejected or proscribed.

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

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

Opposites and Shadow

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When it's cold outside, it's not hot. Of course, cold outside here is still hot compared to the temperature on Mars. How can we apply this relative way of seeing so that it helps us make sense of our lives and moves us along the path?

Well, at any moment you are somewhere in between many pairs of opposites. When you are unaware of all this, the natural tendency is to be controlled *by* the opposites as they playfully roll along, swinging back and forth between the two extremes. In addition, to whatever degree you are identifying yourself with one of the pair of opposites, you are unaware of the presence of the other, and being convinced that you ARE smart, happy, cool, active, whatever, you are equally convinced you ARE NOT dumb, unhappy, boring, passive.

The factors which come together in the coniunctio [conjoining, merging] are conceived as opposites, either confronting one another in enmity or attracting one another in love.²

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

This is one colorful description of that process, applied to arising desire and the temporary withholding of action (see also *Calcinatio* in **Chapter 9: Alchemy**):

In this transformation [of desirousness] it is essential to take objects away from those [inner] devils. They only become concerned with objects when you allow yourself to be self-indulgent. . . On this subject the great religions come together. The fire of desirousness is the element that must be fought against in Brahmanism, in Buddhism, in Tantrism, in Manicheanism, in Christianity. It is also important in psychology. When you indulge in desirousness, whether your desire turns toward heaven or hell, you give the [soul] an object; then it comes out into the world instead of staying inside in its place. . . But if you can say: Yes, I desire it and I shall try to get it but I do not have to have it, if I decide to renounce, I can renounce it; then there is no chance for [being possessed by your desire]. Otherwise you are governed by your desires, you are possessed. . . But if you have put your [soul] into a bottle you are free of possession, even though you may be having a bad time inside, because when your devil has a bad time you have a bad time. . . Of course he will rumble around in your entrails. But after a while you will see that it was right (to bottle him up). You will slowly become quiet and change. Then you will discern that there is a stone growing in the bottle. . . insofar as self-control, or non-indulgence, has become a habit, it is a stone. . . when that attitude becomes a fait accompli, the stone will be a diamond.³

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

On the other hand, if you are seen as generous, then in the same one-sided way, but with very different consequences, you are under great pressure to avoid any appearance of selfishness in order to preserve your flattering image. This could mean that you never can say “no” to anyone, because to do so would harm your image. That would lead to situations where you had to go against yourself and your true feelings (“I don’t want to; I’m too tired; I have something else I’d rather do”) because you have become trapped in your generosity. Being authentic and true in your nature means accepting your complexity and contradictions. How difficult is this to do when everyone around you cannot do the same and wants to put you in a box with one label?

From this example, it is not that far to turning it around and realizing that in your own desire to avoid the tension of complication with its lack of certainty, you mistakenly see others in the same way and unknowingly try to confine them with one-dimensional labels rather than see them as they more truly are. The truth is that so-and-so is being this way *right now*. In the next moment they may be the opposite way. This does not just refer to the possibility of duplicity. Even people with great integrity (integer: one, single) contain complexity and are not always going to behave in the same way each and every time.

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

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

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

Now, as mentioned earlier, when you consider yourself as not possessing one half of a pair of opposites (like selfishness) and only identify with the other half (like generosity), you contribute to what has been called your *shadow*, which is made up of unacceptable and undeveloped traits you have rejected as not-you. Since this shadow exists whether you like it or not, something has to be done about the presence of its irritating qualities so as not to continually confront you with the partial and false image you have created of yourself.

We need to maintain the partially false image or *persona* for ourselves so our sense of security and permanence is not threatened, and we also need to do this with regard to others so we will feel ideally loved or respected (though many who have given up on this will settle for being feared by others). So we unconsciously imagine that the unwanted traits aren't really ours. If we find another person or group or nation displaying this shadow trait we cannot accept in ourselves, then we feel a heightened sense of repulsion and antagonism toward them. They become our enemy and we can comfortably judge them for the unwanted characteristic instead of doing the much more difficult and painful work of owning and being responsible for our own shadow.

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

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

self-image that results from this acceptance of shadow is followed by the reconstruction of a truer, more honest and therefore more sturdy sense of self.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

One other indication of the secret common identity can be found in the very high incidence of cult abuse among both groups. New-age groups in their zeal to soar to the heights and leave the messiness of pain and suffering behind are notorious for their tendency to self-destruct as the result of unexamined shadow. Leaders are first worshipped and followed blindly, and very often the

result is sexual manipulation and misappropriation of funds, an abuse of the trust indiscriminately given. The leader and followers have no interest in keeping an eye on the darker side of their motives, and so end up in great disillusionment or confusion, feeling betrayed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

- 1 C. G. Jung, *Modern Man*, pp. 95-96.
- 2 C. G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, CW14, p. 3.
- 3 C. G. Jung, *The Visions Seminars*, Book 1, p. 239.