

### Chapter 3 The Birth Canal of the Heart

Work of the eyes is done, now  
go and do heart work  
on all the images imprisoned within you; for you  
overpowered them: but even now you don't know them.  
-Rainer Maria Rilke

#### *Heart Murmurings*

Who speaks to me in the night? In the state between sleeping and waking, sometimes words come to me in clearly articulated statements, as if I were being spoken to directly. Not long ago during a wakeful moment in the middle of the night, these words formed softly, seemingly out of nowhere: "The heart thinks in images." A few months previously as I awakened in the morning, these words drifted in: "The only truth is the truth of the heart." Some time before that, in the middle of the night: "Whatever the question is, the answer is love." As simple as these statements are, volumes could be unfolded from each of them. Because of the kinds of messages that come to me in this way and their tremendous potency, I have the impression that this in-between realm is the realm of the heart.

Some years ago I lay down for an afternoon nap. While still awake, just as I began to drift toward sleep, I heard the words, "You have to listen to the space between heartbeats." Suddenly I found myself in what seemed to be an endless, fathomless space, maybe more aptly described as spacelessness. Then I felt my

heart beat, like a hammer, and it seemed to crash me back into time and space—a very disturbing and disruptive sensation. After this, I drifted back into the spacelessness. Crash, again my heart beat. I was, irritatingly, back in the world of time and space. I fell away again, only to be slammed back. This went on for some moments, and each time the heart beat I felt unhappy, cheated, angry. Soon, however, I started to get the rhythm of it, and felt less aggravated. There is a dance here, I thought. Accept it. Get the beat, find the rhythm.

On another occasion, I sat at a restaurant with a small crowd of friends all busily chatting away as we enjoyed the ambience, food, and wine. As I listened to the conversation, I suddenly slipped into a “space between,” had a remarkable and complex dream, and then found myself right back with my friends, not having blinked an eye or missed a word. This was new. The dream that occurred has been powerfully with me ever since, and is one that opens to me in new ways at different turns in my life’s journey. All of this occurred right in the middle of a sentence that I was still tracking, a conversation I was still an active part of. There are eternities of information in the space between heartbeats.

The dream was filled with long sequences of detailed stories that spread over time, all of which faded upon “awakening.” As I came back I heard the words, “The only path is the path to the center,” and could see that all of the scenarios from my dream had made this point brilliantly. Words of Jesus came to mind, “Neither shall they say, Lo here! or lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of

God is within you" (Luke 17:21). I had a sense that my whole adult life I had been running from here to there, going to meetings, appointments, gatherings, pilgrimages, lectures, classes—for the most part at a fairly frantic pace—all in sincere efforts to be true to the demands of my chosen life path. This dream gave me a sudden, solid sense of knowing that the journey to the core of my own beating heart is the only effort I need to make. The path is not over here or over there. It is never where I am not. I am already there. It is already here. I can relax. Stop. Slow down. Listen to the heart beat. What does the heart want? It wants to be here, at this table, with friends eating and drinking wine. When I get up to leave, it will want to smell the night air and look at the stars. When I get home, it will want to tuck in my daughters and kiss them good night. This, then, is the path—listening to and then doing what the heart truly wants. But that is not as easy as it sounds.

Eze Anamalechi, my Nigerian friend, explained to me that the indigenous people know that the "mind exists not in the brain, but in the heart." Jung (1961/1989) was given the same message by his Pueblo Indian friend, Ochwiay Biano, who told him that their people believe the white men to be mad because they think with their heads. When Jung replied, "Why of course. What do you think with?" his friend indicated his heart, saying, "We think here" (p. 248).

Experience seems to tell me that the thought of the heart comes from these in-between spaces, dream-like places, unfamiliar and often threatening to the

rational, reasoning, thinking of the head—the styles of thought and perception so well developed in the mind cultivated in the West. The logic of the heart often defies and opposes that of the mind. A consciousness intent upon the operations of rationality and reasoning, and addicted to the resulting illusions of mastery and control, most often cannot or will not listen to the wisdom of the heart. To do so seems counter-productive and even counter-intuitive to the thinking in the head.

Once while in the wilderness, where my rational mind is not so engaged and I can wander into the in-between spaces for longer periods, I had a vision, which I briefly mentioned in Chapter 1. The image suggested that our species, the human species, was born with something like a birth defect. The fact that our eyes are physically located right next to the brain creates the unfortunate problem that the enormous amount of information taken in through the eyes gets processed through the brain before it ever reaches the heart, and sometimes it never reaches the heart. This produces a certain impoverishment and perversity of perception. Were our eyes and heart physically closer together, that which the eyes see would be more directly filtered through the heart's perceptual mechanisms, and such distortions would be less severe.

With this idea came the thought that just as a person born with a birth defect often develops phenomenal strengths as a result of the problem, capacities that might otherwise never be called forth and developed, so might the human

species achieve astonishing aptitudes and powers as a result of our defect—possibly the thinking of the head and the thinking of the heart, distinct and sometimes opposite as they are, can be brought together in as yet unforeseeable ways. For this to occur, however, we have to shake ourselves awake, out of denial about how perfectly imaged we are. We would have to accept and perceive that we are flawed, to recognize a fundamental imperfection common to all of us, and live with humility and courage into the challenges that overcoming the weakness present, individually and collectively. If a handicapped person denies that there is a problem and fails to accept the challenge it presents, the opportunity to develop new strengths and powers may be foregone.

While in the wilderness, I noticed that as the great beauty surrounding me lavished my eyes, my brain busily sparked off of all that I was seeing. My heart, however, felt like a dense, dark region that did not have the facility, cultivation, or language to join the party; it felt uninvited. The heart, I thought, is our Africa. It is our misunderstood, uncomprehended, big land of rich mysteries inconceivable and perplexing to the Western mind and modes of perception. We treat the terrain of the heart as we have treated Africa. We unapologetically colonize, brutalize, infantilize, exploit, and enslave it, and are utterly dismissive of its messages.

Looking up the word “heart” in library catalogues at major universities yields long lists of references to the heart as an anatomical object: heart rate,

mental effort in relation to gaseous exchange, pressure pulses in cardiovascular system, frog's heart—on and on. I could not find any reference to the heart as an organ of perception, thought, or knowledge. Such notions of the heart are not taken seriously, do not make it into the catalogues. This is tragically revealing. How have we managed to ignore and remain in denial of vast information that is literally right under our noses? What is it about the thinking of the heart that is so threatening to Western conceptions that it must be suppressed with such denial, vehemence and strength?

Writings of Henry Corbin (1969), French philosopher and professor of Islamic Religion at the Sorbonne, are a counter-point to this denial. Corbin states that the heart is an organ “which makes it possible to achieve the true knowledge of things, a knowledge inaccessible to the intellect” (p. 229). He writes of the “*himma*” of the heart as a concentration that makes it possible to “know the Divine Being through intuitive vision” (p. 230) such that the mystic becomes the true knower, or “eye-witness” of God. Corbin concurs with the Gnostics who say that the true eye is in the heart. That which the heart sees and knows he calls “the science of the heart” (p. 230). The world of the heart is an intermediate realm, he writes. And facility within the realm of the heart yields the understanding that all things in our so-called sensible world are of the same order as visions in a dream, subject to interpretation in the same way as the images we encounter during sleep. The *himma* of the heart sees as real the figures of the imagination and of dreams, but also sees the figures we call “real” as dream images.

How often did we sing as children, in rounds, the wonderful little song “Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream. Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream”? This is a heart-wisdom song. The heart knows life as a dream, and does not distinguish between the intermediate worlds and the sensate world in the same way the mind does. The heart does not see one world as “real” and the others as “not real.” The heart dwells in and understands the reality of many worlds.

#### *Human vs. Machine*

“The desert is not in Egypt; it is anywhere once we desert the heart,” writes James Hillman (1981, p. 66). Modernity, he writes, is a desert.

Scientist Rupert Sheldrake (Fox & Sheldrake, 1996) uses the term “machine cosmology” (p. 3) to describe the worldview that has developed since the scientific revolution of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In this view, the universe with all of its regulating laws is conceived of as a vast machine, and all of us who dwell within it are so envisaged. Rene Descartes was the original visionary of this movement, conceptualizing creation as soulless matter mechanized by mathematical urgencies. Robert Romanyshyn (2001) eloquently discusses the impact upon psychological life that occurred when, through the work of the English physician William Harvey during that fateful 17<sup>th</sup> century, in the minds of the masses the human heart became nothing more than a mechanical pump, “a piece of machinery” (p. 126).

Four hundred years later, life in the machine cosmology is dependent upon machines. I am increasingly horrified and unnerved as I realize how much these instruments affect and run my daily life—more, I think, than I can grasp. If my computer isn't working, my e-mail does not function reliably, my answering machine won't pick up messages, my oven, air-conditioner, refrigerator, or car need repair, life as it has been created for and by me does not work. It is broken. Its operations are impaired and huge stresses result. Life becomes about forever maintaining and fixing the machines. When I pick up the telephone to accomplish a bit of business, it is hard to find a human. If I go to a public place of commerce or government, humans regularly defer to the machinery. "I'm sorry, ma'am, we cannot do [this reasonable task] for you because the computer will not do that. It does not understand that request." Their faces are generally friendly, but blank and unquestioning. Thinking, reasoning, and decision-making have been abdicated to the machines. And feelings or simple logics of the heart have no place in this desert of a system; it is generally inappropriate to even mention how you experience what the machine has decided. Humanness, our deepest humanity is rendered powerless, is irrelevant, and ultimately becomes so marginalized that it is, in critical ways, lost to consciousness.

As my own indigenous psyche was awakening I became increasingly sensitized to this machine reality. It began to feel that a war was going on inside of me at a cellular level, and this induced severe suffering. The machine thoughts have invaded even the structures of my biology, at the most basic level. Reviving

an indigenous awareness caused my *cells* to hurt. I am not a scientist; I cannot explain this, but I feel it keenly. I ache in every cell as I try to bring myself back to life, and to wake myself up from the machine nightmare. It feels something like metal against flesh, pervasively, at a deep structural level. I was becoming acutely aware of this problem when a friend who had been living in Africa for 2 years came home for a visit and shared with me this dream:

I am in some unknown location. It feels like a laboratory or some place that is sterile—lots of metal or maybe tile in the room. Under glass covers I see a whole range of “dishes” that have been prepared. There is a lot of blood that I can see in the periphery of my vision. The whole scene is pretty gross, really. I realize, suddenly, that what I am looking at are dishes made out of human parts. There is something with kidney and another with brain parts. But these are prepared as gourmet dishes – one dish is called something like “human kidney a l’orange.” The whole thing is very macabre and bizarre. And then I realize that the butchering of humans and subsequent preparation of the dishes have been done by these human-looking machines. Somehow it is easier to accept that machines did this. I felt I would be more offended if other humans had done it. Still, the whole thing is so weird, but I can’t seem to stop looking. Then I remember that my children are with me and I start to worry about how this scene is going to affect them. I think that it is going to cause them nightmares. I was left with an eerie, surreal feeling that lasted for days after the dream.

This woman had been living in a land that operates within a different cosmological structure. The Western invasion, the machine cosmology, has not penetrated so far into its functioning and its psyche. Though she is Western, she had been breathing and dreaming in this other world. Just after returning to American soil her psyche delivered this dream to her. Distance grants perspective. I believe this dream to be a candid photograph of the inner world of our cosmology. Humans who are actually machines are serving up dissected

humanity as though this is the essence of sophistication and taste. We look like humans, but even our cellular structures are becoming altered over time by the concepts we hold in the mind. We are losing track of what it means to be human at the deepest level.

### *The Manufactured Self*

“Narcissists can be identified by their lack of humanness” (Lowen, 1985, p. x). If indeed, as Lowen and many others suggest, our entire culture is pervasively narcissistic, if we are spoon-fed narcissist values from birth and need to cultivate them continuously in order to succeed and survive, the loss of our humanity insidiously permeates individual and collective psychic life. A true self and the true human are being forgotten, even vehemently denied, in the quest for creating a manufactured self to meet external standards of perfection, achievement, and a fashioned image. Brian Swimme (1996) shakes his readers out of a hypnotic stupor as he makes us aware of the level of brainwashing we unthinkingly accept through our “religion of consumerism” (p. 15). He writes:

Before a child enters first grade science class, and before entering in any real way into our religious ceremonies, a child will have soaked in thirty thousand advertisements. The time our teenagers spend absorbing ads is more than their total stay in high school . . . We learned to accept [this] so long ago we hardly ever think about it anymore.

But imagine how different we would feel if we heard about a country that programmed its citizenry in its religious dogmas in such a manner. (p. 13)

The manufactured self that we promote and create is in certain ways like a machine built around a void at the center where our true, indigenous self should

be. This indigenous self is largely avoided, and voided, as its human feelings and human values are inconvenient, even dangerous, to the structures of modernity. For the individual to be successful in our created world, our deepest humanity needs to be significantly silenced, domesticated, and tortured into containers that meet acceptable standards. It is not a wonder that as a people we are violent, depressed, addicted, perverse, and unhappy.

Some years ago I had this dream:

I am in a hospital setting. There is discussion among several doctors about a discovery of chemicals in the brain that produce a limited vision of the self, that create a notion saying the self of a person is the only important or real thing, that the universe revolves around that self, and nothing else matters but that self. The discovery is being made that a shift in brain chemistry can resolve this illusion, so that a vaster, broader awareness of the universe can be experienced.

The message of this dream correlates to insights presented by physicist David Bohm regarding the brain, and impacts that chemicals emitted in the brain have upon our thinking. Bohm (1985) identifies a tripartite structure of reality, whereas much of science has dealt only with two aspects, matter and energy. He believes there is a third element inherent in the basic physical composition of all that is, and he calls this element *meaning*. Bohm understood meaning to be an essential part of *matter*, not some ethereal quality having its existence only in the mind. Because of this, a deep change of meaning, he writes, creates a “change in the deep material structure of the brain” (p. 95). The meanings we hold are fixed

into the brain chemistry and construction; changes in meaning change the matter, and thus the operation, of the brain. He explains:

If the brain holds the old meanings, then it cannot change its state. The mental and the physical are one . . . . We could say that living as we do, we probably have a great deal of subtle brain damage. In other words, the brain is damaged at a subtle level that might not show up at the cellular level but deep in the implicate order. Eventually of course, it shows up in the cellular level too. (p. 95)

A cosmology that holds the meaning that the universe is an immense machine sets this mechanistic view deep into our collective brain structure and thus we can only operate out of it. This view compels the thinking operations, and the way we think creates our world.

Even certain branches of psychology are invaded with the machine thoughts. There are some very highly regarded and respected authors in the field that I find helpful up to a point, but I cannot read too much of their work as I find that I begin to be seduced to think of the psyche as a machine, with diagnosable parts and problems that can be fixed so that the machine will run smoothly again. Even psyche becomes soulless.

Narcissism as a psychological condition is a natural product of a cosmology that separates everything into mechanical parts that make up the big machine. The narcissistic concept of self perceives of itself as a separate fragment, and does not operate out of a meaning that recognizes a deep, living connective tissue between all beings, human and nonhuman. Certain kinds of feeling are lost in this cosmology. If these feelings were in tact, the pain that the narcissist

inflicts by plundering the earth's resources for purposes of self-interest, and the pain that the narcissist inflicts upon other humans by nonrelational thinking and behavior, would be felt as happening to the self as well as the other. But we do not even feel it. The mechanical meanings that seep into our biology shut down the feeling, and we become no more aware than a machine is aware of the impacts of our actions and behaviors. Can you blame someone who does not feel? Good Dr. Jekyll is completely unaware of the horror Mr. Hyde keeps producing. He can't even sense it, is utterly disassociated from it.

How might we correct chemistry in the brain that creates such a disassociation? According to David Bohm (1985), the perception of new meanings constitutes a creative act—it alters our physical reality and the chemistry in the brain. “The situation changes physically as well as mentally. Therefore each perception of a new meaning by human beings actually changes the over-all reality in which we live and have our existence—sometimes in a far-reaching way. This implies that this reality is never complete” (p. 94). Reality is not a dead, objective thing—a machine—that we stand outside of and are subject, or victim, to. We make reality. We create it.

Brian Swimme (1995) illustrates this point in the following story from his beautiful series of lectures called *Canticle to the Cosmos*. He describes the effect that the choices we make have upon the very structure of our genes, creating the world that is then lived in. He uses the evolution of the horse as an example. The

horse used to live in the forest. When the time arrived that a predator attacked the horse, it chose to flee instead of charge or fight. This moved the horse out onto the plains. Living on the plains, certain kinds of bones and other physical structures became more important. Thus the selection pressures over time produced the species we now know as horse. The bison, on the other hand, chose to charge. This produced other environments and genetic selections, moving that species in its unique development.

Swimme urges his fellow humans to recognize that we are, right now, every minute, similarly making choices that create ourselves and the world we live in. This meaning is hard to grasp. Our reality is not created for us, with *us* having to adjust to *it*; it is created by us, and we decide what it is going to be. The responsibility we carry is immense.

With the development of nuclear capabilities, we live at the brink of self-annihilation as a species. The human's attitude of entitlement and domination over the nonhuman world, our narcissism as a species, is causing mass extinctions of plants and animals on the planet at an extraordinarily alarming rate.\* The dark end we have brought to so many species may soon include our own. We have reached a time in which for our own survival it is imperative that we awaken to our responsibility, and especially to the very real power we carry to reverse these trends. This calls for deep listening, a listening to the heart, and

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\* For information, see the website created and maintained by California Institute of Integral Studies professor David Ulansky: [massextinction.net](http://massextinction.net).

to the humanity that is yet alive in our deep core. I hear an ecstatic call within these words of Brian Swimme's (1995) delivered in his lecture:

How you choose your world is ultimately going to depend upon what you hear at the depths of things. Return to the source of our dreams. What do you hear? That is going to decide what world you choose.

When you make that decision, then you allow the universe to conspire with you in sculpting who you become. You are going to set up your own selection pressures.

The basic idea I'm trying to present here with this cosmology is that if we see ourselves as kin to everything alive – there's a basic world! Enter that world! See yourselves as bonded to every species. I'm saying that if there's a decision, if there is a commitment like this, then the world is the world of love, or the world of compassion, or the world of biological wisdom. That suddenly is the world that shapes you. You see, with every decision you make, you're going to get shaped. We don't know what we're going to give birth to. But we can choose the world in which we're going to work. Enter the world of love. Enter the world of wisdom. Absolutely everything you interact with is shaping you for that world. (Tape #7)

The continuation of our planetary and self-destruction is not necessary.

But a reversal of it calls the human to *work*, to work hard, to change our individual and collective course.

### *A Difficulty We Face*

Unfortunately, changing meanings is not an event that comes without strong resistance, from within and without. The Western way of life has become an addiction. Anyone who has ever struggled to overcome an addiction, or who has watched someone undergo the ordeal, knows the overwhelming level of effort and commitment involved: the focus, time, humiliation, ego dissolution, horrors, sweats, nightmares, terrors involved in surmounting such an obdurate

problem. Many would prefer to die than do this work—either by self-destructing within the addiction or by ending the struggle by suicide. I believe collectively we have the same decisions to make—either we self-destruct as we run our species into extinction by continuing the addiction unabatedly, we commit suicide by blowing ourselves up, or we do the difficult work of recovery.

In his book *Thought As a System*, David Bohm (1994) explains that thoughts we think produce endorphins, which have a similar molecular structure to morphine. Morphine, as we know, covers up pain receptors so that we don't feel the pain; and we know that morphine is a very addictive substance.

Thoughts that become comfortable, familiar or habitual can be exactly the same; they become physically addictive and then we can't give them up no matter how harmful they are. If the desired substance is taken away from an addict, anxiety, despair and panic are produced. So it can be when our familiar systems of thought are challenged. When new or different thoughts try to inform, affect, or open up old ones that have become comforting or habitual, endorphin levels in the brain drop and unpleasant or painful symptoms of withdrawal are experienced. Even an obviously harmful thought—for example one that tells a person that she is worthless, since her mommy always told her she was worthless—will become familiar and therefore addictive. If someone tries to convince her otherwise, the incoming, unfamiliar thought may feel as though something is terribly wrong. Endorphin levels drop producing the reflex to defend against the incoming ideas, as though they are enemies. The defense may

occur automatically and unthinkingly, almost at the tacit level – or if a larger danger is felt, the defense might be very outwardly fierce. Bohm remarks that we bring the instincts of the jungle to the defense of our thinking. The terrible fear and the response to defend are neurophysiological, as well as intellectual and emotional.

These explanations help to understand the nature of fundamentalism, an increasingly rampant and dangerous social problem, one that may produce nuclear war. Fundamentalism is certainly not just the domain of religions. Any closed system of thought is fundamentalist. Political, corporate, social, scientific, philosophical, personal—there are many forms of fundamentalism. Even the world-view produced by an individual ego can be a person's own private fundamentalist religion. When threatened, the challenge feels like a sacrilege and a danger—and a personal, righteous, holy war may ensue. A cult can be comprised of one, two, several, or thousands of individuals. It is a style of mentality, a closed system. As the decay of the Western worldview continues no matter how hard some try to patch it together, fundamentalism is on the rise—politically, in religions, in science, in sects of psychology or philosophy. Opening the heart and mind to contain great diversity, and the resulting disequilibrium, is frightening and too challenging for most.

The act of real *listening* becomes exceptionally difficult when internal defense systems become triggered. To listen may allow the invasion of new

thoughts, new meanings that seriously challenge the old ones. Endorphin levels might drop. Anxiety may be produced. The panic that the addict feels during withdrawal may arise. And this experience feels like a danger and an evil. A shield is thrown up to block the new thinking. Fear may cause the endangered mind to be simply dismissive of the thinking being presented; or to continually interrupt, talk more, faster, louder; or to withdraw, close the conversation, walk away—anything to avoid the threat posed by listening. These behaviors are observable in personal, collective, and international arenas. Notice how little true listening happens in most social or personal discourse.

Listening seems like a passive activity, but truly it is not. Deep listening requires tremendous resilience, courage, determination, vision, and commitment; a willingness to go through the potential neurophysiological and emotional ordeal of having one's most cherished notions upset. The willingness and ability to deeply listen show strength of heart.

### *The Birth Canal of the Heart*

As I was in the earliest stages of conceiving of this dissertation I had the following dream:

I am building my new home, a very large home without a roof, open to the sky. The home is on an enormous piece of land that reminds me of the Serengeti plains in Africa. It expands much further than the eye can see. A woman is there explaining to me that I have inherited two tigers that live on the land. They are very virile and strong and juicy, she says. Then I see that one of the tigers, a white tiger with black stripes, is coming toward me. We lock eyes. As she gets closer I see that she is in the process of giving birth. The head of the baby is already out, coming out of her chest. I

see that the birth canal is through the heart. The tiger heads straight toward me to help her, like a mid-wife, and she lies down at my feet. My youngest daughter and sister-in-law are with me, and they reach in and pull out the baby. While they take care of the mother, I bathe the baby and put it in some warm, soft pajamas. It looks like a human baby, but I am aware that it is a tiger. I am not confused by this. I have some ambivalent feelings going on however, in that my daughter and sister-in-law pulled the baby out and I'm not sure that this didn't interrupt the natural flow of the birth, that maybe the mother should have been allowed to push it out without their help, in her own timing. The other ambivalent feeling is that while I am cleaning and dressing and tenderly holding the newborn, I am thinking "Oh gosh, now this baby is bonding with me as its mother and will always have those maternal responses to me." I'm not sure this is best, but I have such overriding warmth and joy in my heart about the whole event.

There are images in this dream that I may be unpacking for the rest of my days.

The dream itself is one of the core experiences of my life so far. I am completely in love with this tiger, with the fact that she asked me to help her give birth, with the baby, and with the image of the heart as a birth canal.

Certainly the dream suggests a fierceness about the energy of the heart. To enter the terrain of the heart is to open oneself to a powerful and wild instinctual nature. Yet in this dream the nature of the tiger was direct, she knew what she wanted, who she wanted and what she was doing; she was serene, maternal, and extremely powerful even while abandoned to her birthing task. There was absolutely no sense of danger.

As the Western person has moved away from the thinking of the heart into the thinking of the head, much of the instinctual power and energy represented by this tiger and her wild terrain has gone into the unconscious. The

thought of the head, of light, of reason stopped integrating these other modes of thinking, being and perceiving—and has attempted to cage and domesticate this aspect of our nature just as we have done to the wild animals and the indigenous people on our continents. These parts of ourselves have become feared rather than valued, and for the most part are pushed so far away from our conscious life that we have chosen to forget very important aspects of who we are as humans. This has effected a loss of power, which places our psyches in a posture of fear and defensiveness rather than one of harmony, courage and strength. Our lack of self-understanding makes us essentially nervous and has become a serious problem.

As humans we tend to fight wars outside, but it is inside where the only true victory will occur. We have to find the way to put ourselves back together, to get the opposites in our own natures back into communication with one another. It is much, much easier to cut away, bomb or destroy someone else than it is to do this internal work. Giving birth to ourselves, our whole selves, will require awakening the ferocity and power of the tiger, and the opening of the heart.

### *Christianity's Contribution to Our Psychic Split*

Many times I have puzzled over the evolution of the Christian story. Looking at its simple beginnings, the man Jesus seemed to be a person who defied religious authority and who loved everyone, not just the people

considered righteous, pious, and holy. His power was in his utterly nonjudgmental love that dissolved social, religious, and gender barriers. People were drawn in masses to that kind of love, which disturbed the church authorities, who perceived him as a threat and had him slain.

How did we get from that basis to such a perfectionist, excessively judgmental, punishing, domineering, conquest oriented, and intolerant system of religion and thought? Why did the story have to evolve saying that the man Jesus never made an error, never had or fulfilled human appetites, never got irritable—then making him an impossible model, an unnatural standard that all persons must imitate or else be doomed? What could be more opposite to what this man was apparently about? Certainly great damage has been done to human spiritual, psychological and cultural development by imagining the life of Jesus in such ways and imposing the example upon ourselves and others.

The ancient quest for an ideal of immortality, infallibility, and perfection in human nature and the idea that we need to be saved from our natural or whole selves surely led to the creation of such a story for our species to grapple with. And the entire species does have to grapple with the story to some degree. Even those who have never learned of Christianity know about the ideologies of the West that are infiltrating the world, and as such are confronted with its foundational myths.

## *Understanding Nature in Human Nature*

The cross, or whatever other heavy burden the hero carries, is *himself*, or rather *the self*, his wholeness, which is both God and animal – not merely the empirical man, but the totality of his being, which is rooted in his animal nature and reaches out beyond the merely human towards the divine. His wholeness implies a tremendous tension of opposites paradoxically at one with themselves, as in the cross, their most perfect symbol.

-C. G. Jung

As the Christian story evolved, it has increasingly endeavored to take nature out of the human, and the human out of nature. The subsequent attempts to conquer nature on the planet—the destruction, exploitation, and efforts to control her, the ways that we in Western life styles encase and protect ourselves indoors, away from nature’s cycles, rhythms, and vicissitudes—describe how we have come tacitly to regard our own inner nature, nature within us, and attempt to hide from, control, and defy the truth about who we are. Humans are not masters over nature; what hubris and foolishness has led us to consider ourselves to be so?\* Nor is our rational and reasoning component superior to, or entitled to dominate, the instinctive and nonrational parts of who we are. Externally we are paying an extremely high price for the effects that this idea of domination has had upon the planet—eliminating peoples and species, upsetting the bio-equilibrium, poisoning and destroying the air, water, and soil necessary for survival. Internally we are similarly paying an exceedingly high price. The

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\* I am reminded of the many depictions in Western art that portray Adam and Eve as huge figures, with the garden as mere backdrop; whereas Taoist art tends to show the human as a tiny speck in a massive land or seascape. Notions held by a culture about the human’s place in the universe are revealed in such basic artistic styles.

efforts to destroy and dominate, rather than to be in right relationship to our own natural selves is effecting a loss of joy, sanity, and health on every level—physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual. Yet in the external as well as the internal situation, humans tend to plunder on and refuse to stop, rethink, and re-evaluate the direction in which we are headed. A radical reversal of direction is called for if we are to survive.

Of these problems, Carl Jung (2002) wrote:

The European . . . has a science of nature and knows astonishingly little of his own nature within him . . . . For the European, it is sheer poison to suppress his nature, which is warped enough as it is, and to make out of it a willing robot.

. . . . It is undeniably much more comfortable to live in a well-planned and hygienically equipped house, but this still does not answer the question of *who* is dwelling in this house and whether his soul rejoices in the same order and cleanliness as the house which ministers to his outer life. (p. 124)

. . . . The European . . . needs to return, not to Nature in the manner of Rousseau, but to his own nature. His task is to find the natural man again. Instead of this, there is nothing he likes better than systems and methods by which he can repress the natural man who is everywhere at cross purposes with him . . . (pp. 125-126).

. . . So far reason has failed lamentably, and the very thing that everybody wanted to avoid rolls on in ghastly progression. Man has achieved a wealth of useful gadgets, but, to offset that, he has torn open the abyss, and what will become of him now – where can he make a halt? . . . the abomination of desolation will grow to limitless dimensions. And who or what is it that causes all this? It is none other than harmless (!), ingenious, inventive, and sweetly reasonable human spirit who unfortunately is abysmally unconscious of the demonism that still clings to him. Worse, this spirit does everything to avoid looking himself in the face, and we all help him like mad. Only, heaven preserve us from psychology – *that* depravity might lead to self-knowledge! Rather let us have wars, for which somebody else is always to blame . . . . (p. 204)

Self-knowledge may possibly be the most difficult and exacting of our tasks as a species. We can go to the moon, create art and technologies that continually astonish, possibly even clone ourselves, but we will not know ourselves. Denial, control, and mastery of nature in us, rather than partnership with it, seems to be the long-standing effort—from the earliest religious and philosophical traditions through the present. Since, as a species, we are possibly driving our train into a self-annihilating wall, maybe it is time to re-evaluate the root of even some of these most ancient traditions. Something is not working; seriously not working. I believe it is in the indigenous mind to know how to partner *with* nature, internal and external nature; but this mind has been departed from, submerged, forgotten, and could be extinguished if we do not work to revive it soon.

The human body is made of the elements of nature. Scientists tell me that if all of the space between the elements of the atoms in my body were removed, the matter that makes up my body would fit on the head of a pin. So, I am air. They tell me that 90% of my body is water. I am water. They tell me my physical body is made from the same material that used to make up stars. I am fire. And it is the fruits of the earth that nourish and keep alive this body. So I am earth. I *am* air, water, fire, and earth. I am nature.

As air I can be a breath of fresh air to you, or I can blow you away. As water I might moisten you, or flood and even drown you. As fire I might warm

you or burn you. As earth I might nurture you or hit you like a rock. The civilization process will help me to manage these powers and effects to some degree, but ultimately I cannot control nature in me, or how nature in me impacts you, any more than I can control the weather. It is foolish to imagine that I can. I exhaust, diminish, and ultimately destroy myself trying.

If, as science tells us, every particle of matter is both particle and wave simultaneously—as particle we are bounded and separate, individual, but as wave we are at the same time continuous and connected to everything else. As such, we share consciousness with everything else, and can draw upon and awaken other forms of consciousness within our own. We can think like a rock, know our kinship with the river, hear what the plants are saying.

Native Americans, along with many other traditions, know how to draw animal qualities and strengths into their own natures when they are needed. This was a rather abstract concept to me until recently. At the time I was experiencing some personal challenges in which my own rights and needs were continually not regarded. In the past, I had always had someone to help me, stand up for me, defend me when harm was coming my way—a parent, a husband, a community—but now I had no one close by. Trying to exercise a muscle in my psyche that could come out in my own defense, I found that it was quite atrophied. I barely even realized I had rights, and generally just rolled over and took demeaning treatment. When I did realize that I needed to do something

about it, the most I knew how to do was be hurt, cry, or get mad, but I did not know how to defend myself.

Finally, and suddenly, the image of a rattlesnake occurred to me very powerfully. I remembered having learned that this snake wants peace and does not come out to hurt or challenge in a predatory way, but if its boundaries are crossed and it feels threatened, the snake is provoked to action. First it shakes its rattle as a polite warning not to come nearer. If the warning is heeded, no aggression will follow, and everyone goes separate ways unharmed. But if the warning is not heard or respected, the snake strikes.

As I reached a juncture in my own development, I felt I was being presented with this strong image as a model to emulate. No living guide had ever taught this to me, but I seemed to know that I should call upon the rattlesnake to help me activate the wisdom and power in its nature. Like the rattlesnake, I do not want to harm and do not go out looking to hurt; but if harm is coming my way, I will arouse and create an energy that resembles the shake of a rattle. This is to politely warn that I do not want to use aggression, but I definitely will if it becomes necessary in order to protect myself. My challenge in awakening this power was to commit myself to *meaning* it. I will not continue to allow myself to be harmed. I *will* strike rather than be harmed.\* For me, as an

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\* To clarify, I do not mean a strike that produces physical harm, but like the snake, a strike with the tongue. I will say what I see. Most persons prefer a physical strike to one that might expose any portion of their shadows. I want to avoid a behavior that is experienced by another as such violence, but will do so if it is necessary to protect myself from further harmful aggression.

enculturated woman and indoctrinated Christian, this was a hard strength to find, but I felt the energy of the rattlesnake awakening it within me. Every such attitude has a timing and level for conscious application.

Edward Edinger is quoted as saying, in private conversation with Jungian analyst Don Sloggy, that “the sacred urge to realize the self is located in the aggressive instincts.” Sloggy remarks that the aggression is in support of the self-realizing, not in support of greed, power, or ego concerns. “To locate your own aggressive instincts,” he said, “is fundamentally important and necessary. The Self cannot fully individuate without the brute aggressive instincts being present.”

Through the experience with the rattlesnake, I came to understand in a much less abstract way the remarkable variety of strengths and skills that can be called upon from non-human into human capacity and awareness. The unity and diversity of shared consciousness is a profound reality almost entirely overlooked and ignored in our anthropocentric narcissism and autism. David Abram (1996) eloquently states that “we are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human” (p. ix). Otherwise we experience a grave loss of insight, aptitude, and perspective.

In order to develop a capacity for awakening and integrating skills and powers available to us from other-than-human forms of consciousness, the task may be first to understand more fully who we are as humans, to face and

acknowledge our specific nature. I don't want to *be* the bear or the snake, I want to be who I am, a human, utilizing these qualities with consciousness and moral responsibility. But who am I as human? Obviously, I have begun to realize, I am not who an overly anthropocentric, narcissistic, autistic, patriarchal, disembodied, whitewashed, brainwashed system of thought and culture has taught me to believe that I am.

The journey to recover human self-understanding will require, I believe, the courage to overcome deep personal and cultural denial, especially about the shadowed aspects of human nature. The inertia in our tendency to project the problems of humanity outside of the self will have to be interrupted. But it is frighteningly difficult work.

I was recently stirred to some awakening in this regard when I heard a biologist note that animals that are prey generally have eyes on the side of their heads, which helps them to see in more directions at once and therefore protect themselves. Animals who are predators have eyes on the front of their heads. They can focus better on what they are after and move in on it. My eyes are on the front of my head. Do I deny my own nature if I say I am not a predator? Certainly it is easy to see that our *species* is predatory, but me? I? Myself?

Let me focus a moment upon the species. It is inarguable that human activities and life-styles prey upon the nonhuman and human worlds constantly. Preying is not only a means of survival, but for humans it is also a sport and a

fascination. Historically in such places as the coliseum in Rome, the lust for witnessing humans being preyed upon was indulged and celebrated. Today snipers and serial killers have a kind of celebrity status. We are horrified but truly fascinated by what they reflect to us about our own natures, which we cannot figure out how to own and integrate. Violent movies continue to be made because the public demand for them is so phenomenally high. Humans are compelled in masses to look into these mirrors without much clue of what to do with the reflection.

I remember the horror I experienced many years ago when, in my good Christian mindset, I read the classic *Fox's Book of Martyrs* (Forbush, 1967). The first hundred or so pages provide account after moving account of individuals who gave up their lives rather than denounce their faith in a religion that professed simple love, acceptance, and kindness toward all others. Almost unimaginable horrors were unleashed upon these people in an effort to stomp out the growing number who defied the power of religious authorities and their doctrines. Bravely the martyrs faced the violence and offered their lives in hopes that a message of tolerance, forgiveness and love might prevail over what had become a strict, condemning, elitist, punishing, and intractably rigid religious establishment.

It was more than my mind could bear when not too far into the story the history started to shift and, unapologetically in this account, the persecuted

became the self-righteous persecutors. The stories turned into tales of conquest, forcible conversion, and violent suppression of opposition, enacted by the same persons who had previously endured the tortures and *knew* that pain and the injustice of it. I had to put the book down. I can't tell you how it ends.

Jung (1961/1989) writes of visions he had while visiting the Pueblo Indians. I find it interesting to note that he reports that these images occurred when he fell into a long meditation immediately after being told that the white man thinks with his head, whereas the Indians think in the heart. He says:

For the first time in my life, so it seemed to me, someone had drawn for me a picture of the real white man. It was as though until now I had seen nothing but the sentimental, prettified color prints. This Indian had struck our vulnerable spot, unveiled a truth to which we are blind. I felt rising within me a shapeless mist something unknown and yet deeply familiar. And out of this mist, image upon image detached itself: first Roman legions smashing into the cities of Gaul, and the keenly incised features of Julius Casesar, Scipio Africanus, and Pompey. I saw the Roman eagle on the North Sea and on the banks of the White Nile. Then I saw St. Augustine transmitting the Christian creed to the Britons on the tips of Roman lances, and Charlemagne's most glorious forced conversions of the heathen; then the pillaging and murdering bands of the Crusading armies. With a secret stab I realized the hollowness of that old romanticism about the Crusades. Then followed Columbus, Cortes, and the other conquistadors who with fire, sword, torture, and Christianity came down upon even these remote pueblos dreaming peacefully in the Sun, their Father. I saw, too, the peoples of the Pacific islands decimated by firewater, syphilis, and scarlet fever carried in the clothes the missionaries forced on them.

It was enough. What we from our point of view call colonization, missions to the heathen, spread of civilization, etc., has another face – the face of a bird of prey seeking with cruel intentness for distant quarry – a face worthy of a race of pirates and highwaymen. All the eagles and other predatory creatures that adorn our coats of arms seem to me apt psychological representatives of our true nature. (pp. 248, 249)

It is difficult to know what to do with such revelations about who we are as humans. The temptation is strong to just go with the long-standing tradition of projecting the problem outside of oneself. *They* are predatory, but not I. Evil is out there, but not in here. It is extraordinarily difficult to recognize evil inside.

Analyst Don Sloggy remarks that the task of the human is to carry the aggressive and predatory instincts consciously, and ultimately in service to the highest value. If we do not become conscious of them, they are played out destructively.

Part of the problem may be that often evil or predatory activities are carried out by a network, a collective body, of generally well meaning, well intentioned individuals—such as social climbers, religious persons, business persons or politicians. Few, if any, humans can honestly consider themselves as separate from some such network. When someone or something begins to feel threatening to the momentum or vested interests of these groups, in order to suppress the hazard, acts of prejudice and emotional, psychological, or even physical abuse may be acted out against the outside parties without a specific person within the group needing to take responsibility. The injured parties know that the hurt they experience is real and is painful all the way to the bone. Yet in most cases the individuals involved in the hurting see themselves just like the good Dr. Jekyll sees himself—as good, intelligent, mindful, kind, harmless, righteous people. How do we fill in the gap? Horrendous hurting is taking place,

but no one specifically owns up to being a hurter. No one consciously intends to be a hurter. If inquiry is made, the response will be along the lines of a scriptural or cultural justification, denial, and blame upon circumstances outside the individual's control. The injury is very real, but no one feels responsible.

The microscope needs to isolate the cell. The individual needs to find his particular responsibility in this system, to recognize his own nature and capacity for harm and evil. If it is outside of me, then it is also inside of me. How do I digest and reflect upon my personal predatory nature? To realize fully that I harm? I am responsible. If I begin to look honestly, it is not that hard to find. Most of the harm I do is unintended, even unavoidable, but that does not make it one bit less painful to the persons or life systems that I hurt. Much of the harm I do is acted out in reactionary defense, is thought to be necessary and is justified in my mind. Some is careless, thoughtless, unconcerned. Some is mean, vengeful, and vicious.

Rainer Maria Rilke (1982) offers his insight in the following poem:

At first a childhood, limitless and free  
of any goals. Ah sweet unconsciousness.  
Then sudden terror, schoolrooms, slavery,  
the plunge into temptation and deep loss.

Defiance. The child bent becomes the bender,  
inflicts on others what he once went through.  
Loved, feared, rescuer, wrestler, victor,  
he takes his vengeance, blow by blow.

And now in vast, cold, empty space, alone.  
Yet hidden deep within the grown-up heart,

a longing for the first world, the ancient one...

Then, from His place of ambush, God leapt out.  
(p. 259)

“The child bent becomes the bender.” The betrayed becomes the betrayer. The used becomes the user. The criticized becomes the critic. The dominated dominates another. The pattern is relentless, self-perpetuating and unconsciously acted out. But, as Jung (1958/1991) points out, “Before the bar of nature and fate, unconsciousness is never accepted as an excuse; on the contrary there are very severe penalties for it. Hence all unconscious nature longs for the light of consciousness while frantically struggling against it at the same time.” (p. 98)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is easy to identify with a model such as Job, the pious, righteous victim of violence. It is very, very difficult to identify with Yahweh, a predatory force of mercilessness and vengeance. Denial about this aspect of human nature is implacable, and has become a sophisticated art form, a highly advanced skill.

As a nation and as a people, it is hard to muster the courage, perspective and humility to look squarely in the face of and take responsibility for tragic consequences and unfathomable suffering that predatory global activities have caused to peoples, animals, and biosystems. Though many of these actions have been due to unmitigated personal or corporate greed, most have been thought to be rendered for the cause of good, the advance of civilization, in order to progress and further the elite style of life enjoyed by only the small percentage of

people on the planet who continue to feel entitled to that life. It is hard to back down, to say we have made and persist in making terrible mistakes, and to imagine the radically different life that will certainly be necessitated by a change of course.

As previously emphasized, it is absurd to believe that such reflection will take place at a collective level before we as individuals, one by one, muster the courage, perspective, and humility to look squarely in the face of and take responsibility for the tragic consequences of *personal* activities that have caused severe suffering to the people in our own sphere of influence, to animals, and to biosystems. There seems to be an observably enormous psychological investment in perceiving of oneself as harmless and good; and, when conflict arises, in being the victim but never the perpetrator. If being a perpetrator is acknowledged, then a whole system of excuses, justifications, and explanations kick in. These prevent the remorse and humility needed before real change will take place.

Why is it so hard to say "I got it wrong"? "I didn't know then what I know now." "I made a mistake." "I was offensive." "I acted badly." "That was a crime against you." "I apologize." Even among very sophisticated, psychologically well-trained, confident, and intelligent people, such admissions are very hard to find. Denial and justifications are the order of the day. I honestly believe that in many or most cases it is not for lack of willingness to self-reflect, but because personal responsibility is very difficult to discern and discover. Learned systems

of denial complicate the effort. Brain chemistry obfuscates the thinking. Unconscious identification with an ego constructed to emulate an infallible model of god-like perfection that never makes mistakes or does anything wrong disallows contradictory information.

This is not a small problem that we face. It is huge. Intractable. Violent. People will instinctively kill, themselves and each other, rather than confront the opposites within their own natures. Schism after schism in personal and collective histories are recorded as people cannot conceive of how to do the work of holding together, rather than splitting apart, these opposites.

*A Schism in the Human Heart*

In *Aion* (1959/1978) Jung writes:

The present age must come to terms drastically with the facts as they are, with the absolute opposition that is not only tearing the world asunder politically but has planted a schism in the human heart. We need to find our way back to the original, living spirit which, because of its ambivalence, is also a mediator and uniter of opposites, an idea that preoccupied the alchemists for many centuries. (p. 86)

I find potency in every word of this statement. Jung warns that our coming to terms with the facts as they are is a must, and will be drastic. The schism between the split opposites has affected us all the way into the human heart. We need to find our way back to origins, there to encounter the inherent ambivalence that we have avoided at too high a cost. Finding our way back to that original, living spirit is the hope for re-uniting the opposites, which must occur if we are to regain balance, health and wholeness—individually,

collectively, and as a unified planetary system. It is my belief that the way back is through the heart.

“Shatter my heart to make room for an infinite love,” says the Sufi poet, Rumi. For some strange reason I fell in love with this prayer statement, and a friend had it drawn in artistic calligraphy to give to me as a gift. The gift hangs upon my wall. I keep it there to remind myself to be careful what you pray for, and to remember that I actually requested the shattering after shattering that has occurred to my heart over the last decade. Just when I think it can’t break any more, it is broken some more. Maybe there is no end to it. But maybe something in me desired this because I knew the shattering to be necessary before the original spirit could more fully emerge into consciousness. Maybe what I had come to hold in my heart obscured rather than revealed that spirit.

The prayer asks for this shattering to make room in the heart. Before the shatterings began, my heart felt smaller. Expanding into the room that was created, however, has been an arduous process. Previously something was either good or it was bad, but not both, equally, at once. Most of life’s questions seemed to ask for a “yes” or a “no” response; but both couldn’t be lived at the same time. You either stay or you go, but not both. You either love or hate, but not both concurrently and vividly. You are forgiving or angry, but not both at the same time. Previously in my self-reflections, at any given moment I could see myself as patient or impatient, kind or mean, happy or sad—but not all of it, all at once, all

intensely, with no opposing thought or emotion being more dimly felt or expressed than the other. The shattering of the heart unleashes so much energy. Everything is in the heart. All at once. Not just what we consider “good” stuff, but everything.

To live into this kind of ambivalence is paralyzing and difficult work. Move. Stay still. Act. Wait. Abandon. Restraint. Dionysus. Buddha. Even the marvelous occurrences of astonishing synchronicities would urge me to think or act in one direction and then the next day or moment in its opposite. Rather than being a relief from confusion, they compounded it. I might have as many as 16 psychologically and emotionally demanding dichotomies going on at any given moment in any given day, with conflicting value systems asking opposite things of me all at the same time. I could barely breathe, day or night. There was an explosion of so much unconscious material, all of it charged with so much potency and insistence, that survival seemed questionable. Giving the needed attention to every opposite thing all at once was almost unendurably demanding and exhausting.

Ultimately I came to understand that all of this was creating space in me, room in my heart. Every point of view had its time, its validity and its value. None needed to cancel the other out. Each could exist at its own level, in its own timing, for its own purpose. Jung (1961/1989) writes:

For self-knowledge – in the total meaning of the word – is not a one-sided intellectual pastime but a journey through the four continents, where one

is exposed to all the dangers of land, sea, air, and fire. Any total act of recognition worth of the name embraces the four – or 360! – aspects of existence. Nothing may be “disregarded.” (p. 214)

I have come to believe that Attention Deficit Disorder is a gift trying to be born rather than a problem to be solved. What if we actually can pay attention to everything all at once? The universe is so multi-faceted and many layered, and all of these levels intermingle and interplay all of the time. To narrow our focus to just one layer, one set of meanings, one priority at a time may be unnatural, counter to our deepest nature, making us so much narrower and smaller than we are meant to be.

The ambivalence of nature, the tension of the opposites, is in every single motion we make; there is a both-sidedness to whatever we do. Even the most kind, generous, healing act I can perform will have a shadow—it may create a dependency, an expectation, a denial of other possibilities, or have any number of negative consequences. No matter how hard I try to have a “good” effect, I will create a “bad” effect at the same time. The best I can do is strive for the good, and work to be conscious of, admit and atone for the bad.

I recall a dream of many years ago in which a woman from Canada approached me, seeming to idealize me in some way, saying, “Divine Mother told me that you have the blue thunder in the heart!” I was touched by her admiration, but laughed exhaustedly and said to her, “Well, some people like it and some don’t.” As a woman who wants too desperately to be loved, it has been

hard to come to terms with the “thunder” in my own nature, and to experience how acutely some people like it and some don't. I have had to learn the hard way respectfully to give people the freedom to just not like me, to have their own well-reasoned preferences, without blaming myself or pestering them to change their minds. This is a term of life that probably everyone has to face to some degree.

The human problem of the tendency to idealize seems to be a root cause when schisms happen—whether it is a person being idealized, a philosophy, a system of religion, or any organization of thought and effort. To idealize already splits off admission and acceptance of the problematic aspects, the inherent ambivalence in the nature of anything that exists. When idealizing happens, the problems are projected outward, away from the idealized object onto something or someone else. They are considered to be externally created rather than internal to the individual or philosophy. Adherents doing the idealizing become personally identified with the loved person or idea, and cannot bear to see the problems, as that feels like a negation of their own selves. The threat of it is experienced as demeaning and sometimes annihilating. Therefore as problems naturally accumulate, more and more is cast onto the other by projection, and into the unconscious. This backed up energy builds into something like a demonic force. Its vengeance is nature herself, but comes through persons or situations that will carry it. Intolerable antipathies, hatreds, and sometimes wars

and violence ensue. Yahweh is constellated and Job works to deal with the onslaught, unconscious of his own part in creating the horrors.

When any schism takes place, I believe the event of something or someone being too idealized will be found at the root of the problem. The opposites contained there could or would not be held together by the individuals who split from each other. Even schisms in personal relationships often occur due to the fact that one or more of the egos involved has been too idealized, not allowing for the both-sidedness of human nature—holding to the notion of some ideal of perfection in oneself, unforgiving of imperfection in the other. In all of these situations, deciding to go separate ways is one thing, but the pain of great aversion or violence may be avoidable if more consciousness is brought to bear upon the problem of idealization, as it denies the unavoidable ambivalence in the nature of that which has been idealized. And, if this consciousness could be reached, the split may not need to occur.

James Hillman (1975) writes that schisms occur so that the multiplicity of the psyche can be realized. The divisions transpire to divide things up, reminding us of how complex is totality. A monistic environment or temperament will inevitably move toward schism, because psychic structure is polycentric. But if this reality were already realized, the pain of schisms would not be necessary. “Schism,” he writes, “seems hardly possible in a polycentric universe” (p. 93).

Hillman (1981) also notes that the impassable wall down the center of the heart, the heart divided against itself, makes it necessary that the contents of the heart must circulate through the entire body in order for the blood to reach the other side of the heart. The heart's "left and right chambers, though side by side, are most remote to each other, without communication" (p. 24). The blood's long journey through all of the body to travel from one side to reach the other creates the movement of the heart's energy into every cell. Thus in some sense, we become "all heart" (p. 72).

The heart is not a monism, but is multiple and polycentric. Even though the apparent illusion suggests that the heart is split, in actuality it contains, values, loves, invigorates, and nourishes everything, rather than splitting off anything.

The troubles in the brain chemistry that cause us to split away persons, ideas, or things that threaten the thought systems of the head will be eased if we can move the thinking operation from the head to the heart, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. This is not just an imaginal notion. In recent years, neuroscientists have discovered that there is what they call a "brain in the heart" (Childre & Martin, 1999, p. 10). There are cells in the heart that are just like those in the brain, and the heart has its own thinking and nervous system distinct from that of the head. There is a two-way communication system between the heart and the brain.

Joseph Chilton Pearce (2002) writes about the brain in the heart, noting that the heart's intelligence is distinct from that of cerebral intellect. "The heart's intelligence is not verbal or linear or digital, as is the intellect in our head, but rather is a holistic capability that responds in the interest of well-being and continuity . . . . Intellect, however can function independently from the heart—that is, without intelligence—and can take over the circuitry and block our heart's more subtle signals." (pp. 66-67) His research illuminates the different areas of the human brain and their functions, describing the reflexes for defensiveness in thought, which obstruct and prohibit the thought of the heart from partnering with that of the head. Conscious effort must be made to make this communication and alliance possible.

According to Pearce (2002), cultural and religious dictates interrupt the dynamic interaction between the head brain and the heart brain, which would allow an evolution out of the current crises and endless cycles of violence, hate, and hurt. Biologically, he believes, we are *made* to transcend this, but to do so requires a willing break with culture. Picking up that cross, as he puts it, "shifts us out of hindbrain survival instincts and opens us to the higher frequencies of love, forgiveness, and trust. Intellect will open to heart and move for the well-being of all life" (p. 255).

## *Tiger in the Heart*

The creature in my dream who was giving birth through the heart was a tiger. This animal certainly suggests the courage and passionate energy necessary in order to live from the heart—but so would a lion, or a number of other animals. Why did my psyche present the specific dream image of a tiger? Curious about the difference between lion and tiger, I looked up their symbology. J. C. Cooper (1978) says that the symbol of the tiger is “ambivalent as both solar and lunar, creator and destroyer” (p. 172). Interestingly, just after the tiger was born in my dream a struggle began with ambivalent feelings about various details of what had just taken place. Cooper continues, “[Tiger] can also be a manifestation of the Earth Mother” (p. 172). The dream’s setting on the open plains certainly corresponds to this aspect of the image.

James Hillman further amplifies tiger in his book *Dream Animals* (1997). He writes that “Tigers are striped with contraries: orange and black, white and black. As different as day and night.” (p. 59) Further, he says:

Whereas the lion can stand in for the king of Judah, for the crusading Christian king, for Christ’s disciple Mark and other saints, even for Christ, the tiger seems contrary to that entire noble tradition. As William Blake wrote so famously in his poem “The Tyger”: “In what furnace was thy brain?” “Did he who made the Lamb make thee?” Blake put that tiger “in the forests of the night,” implying that it brings darkness with it. So, the tiger carries our cultural shadow – sinister, double-colored, perhaps the duplicitous representative of the “other side.” (p. 60)

The tiger dream occurred in the middle of a nightmarish period of confrontation with the shadow, with the “other side” of myself and of persons

very close to me, persons I loved completely, with a whole heart. I could no more stop loving the persons whose very dark faces were hurting me than I could stop breathing. I compassionately understood and was horrified by their behaviors, each with equal intensity. I compassionately understood and was horrified by my own responses equally also. I fiercely loved and fiercely hated both at the same time. Unfortunately those who experienced the hate could not then trust the love. But I knew the absolute truth of both and could not deny myself either. I did not know if I could be considered sane with the intensity of so many opposites exploding in my psyche all at the same time.

Hillman (1997) refers to the main character, Dr. Abbey, in Michael Ventura's novel *The Zoo Where You're Fed to God*, remarking that when he falls apart:

It is to the tiger's enclosure that he goes, the tiger who calls him, the tiger's eyes he looks into, the tiger who watches over his madness, his sanity, and the strange mysteries of passion and tenderness. It could not have been a lion because Dr. Abbey is undergoing a soul initiation, called in our culture "a breakdown" (p. 62).

Certainly what I endured was a very serious breakdown, yet the image of this tiger offered the perspective that it was also a birth. A human baby/tiger baby was born, and the birth canal was through the heart. The physical organ of my heart, throughout the long ordeal of the breakdown, hurt at times almost unendurably. I wished constantly that I had some knowledge of what kind of mud packs, something of wet earthy substances I could place over the area of the

heart. Only wet earth seemed like it could take away the sharpness of the heart pain.

Though I never did discover such a remedy, it has been contact with earth that has provided healing energies that allowed me to breathe, endure, and persist. Just as in the dream my new home had no roof, I began sleeping outdoors, and when I did feel that I was a newborn safe at home in her cradle, loved and watched over by mother. All the elements of earth and sky profoundly soothed me. This love was unquestionably unconditional. It did not judge me, or withhold love for bad behavior. It would not abandon me. It could be relied upon without fail. This was a love that is richly diverse, never-endingly mysterious and always available. My smaller heart, which had only really known love for humans, when shattered finally had room to experience this infinite love, as Rumi's prayer promised.

The question arises—can this kind of love be contained and expressed through the human heart? Can love be so unconditionally available among humans toward each other, toward themselves and for the rest of life? That which we now call love seems to be provisional, seems to end, seems not inclined to embrace and express the full range of nature in the subject or object of love. To keep this love intact, a splitting off and denial of much of who we are seems to be necessary. If that effort fails, schisms in relationships take place, or the love moves into a state of numbed-out tolerance, a trial of endurance. Can a

relationship survive a major confrontation with shadow? Can an individual survive it? Maybe not until the heart is opened to a love that will hold all opposites together within it—a love so inclusive that not one organism, anywhere, is left out.

Humanity has done much in these last centuries to make light and reason conscious. Now it behooves us to make the darkness conscious, to stop the endless denial, splitting, and projecting—and figure out how to maintain love in the face of the horrors in the darkness of who we are, even as we work to transform, transcend, and constantly atone for it. This will require a new understanding of what love is.

Sitting in my home on a recent afternoon, my thoughts drifted toward my daughter at school, who was taking her semester finals. As I was reviewing in my head her after-school plans and deciding what to cook for dinner, I moved my body. I then had a physical sensation like nothing I have ever in my life experienced. It was as though every cell in my body were a portal into an infinite abyss containing unfathomable voltages of high energy. I felt that I could detonate, like a bomb; not a bursting into flames, but something more like a nuclear explosion. I had a feeling similar to that which occurs when an accident almost happens, but doesn't—I felt like I had almost exploded. I was catching my breath when it occurred to me that this felt energy is the force of love contained like nuclear power at the atomic level of my being. Just thinking on my daughter

produced this almost annihilating, terrifying sensation. Realizing this, my thoughts drifted to my older daughter and the sudden, frightening sensation repeated itself. I sat very still for a while. This power is locked into my body, my physical matter. It is not spirit, but body that contains it.

I had once had a vision of the big bang at the origins of our universe, and sensed that all of life is a modulating unfolding of that huge power source. Since we could never survive looking straight into the source of creation, it gently reveals itself through the unfolding universe of stars, colors, mountains, waters, music, animals, humans, plants, the full variety of things created. This experience with love reminded me of that vision. Since we could not survive the full confrontation with love's power, it gets unfolded through daily events of interacting and caring for one another—lunch, laundry, recreation, conversation, homework. This is the gradual, more tolerable experience of love's energy. I had never begun to understand love until that moment. The sentimental feeling we call love is not even a shadow of what love is. Love is an astonishing, incomprehensible power locked into every atom of creation, and is the stuff between them that holds it all together.

As I have experienced schism after schism in my human relationships, my heart has cried out to an apparently deaf universe, "What about the love?" There is all of this hate and hurt, yes! But what about the love? Is it not more powerful and more real? Does it not overwhelm and put to shame these transient details of

conflict that will be gone like so much detritus tomorrow? Why is everyone in the kingdom asleep, while love cannot make it through these briars?

In our age of luxury and convenience, we have gotten weak and forgotten the rewards of endurance and hardship. Love is not a soft, feel-good kind of experience, though it certainly has those moments. As Rumi (1993) writes:

The way of love is not  
a subtle argument.

The door there  
is devastation. (p. 13)

Rainer Maria Rilke (1975) concurs, saying:

The demands which the difficult work of love makes upon our development are more than life-size, and as beginners we are not up to them. But if we nevertheless hold out and take this love upon us as burden and apprenticeship, instead of losing ourselves in all the light and frivolous play, behind which people have hidden from the most earnest earnestness of their existence – then a little progress and an alleviation will perhaps be perceptible to those who come long after us; that would be much. (p. 33)

Jung once said that people need churches to protect them from God. I believe that similarly psychologists need psychology to protect them from the psyche. And people need carefully defined roles in relationships that will protect them from love. The raw power of God, psyche, and love are more than can be endured until the heart is so wide open that all experience can be contained within it and fear is barely a memory.

As humans, I believe we are just as guilty of projecting love and happiness outside of ourselves as we are of projecting evil and darkness. God is love, but

not I. They are happy, but not I. Just as we look on the screen of the violent movies and see the evil as outside of ourselves, so do we look on the screen of the stories of love and long for, but never fully realize love in our lives. Now I begin to understand why. We have barely begun to understand what love is. It is a nuclear capability, and an utter devastation of the small person we have been taught to believe that we are. Even as we long for love, we avoid it like we avoid the plague. We have not yet figured out how to fully let it in, or fully give it. It is an immeasurable, uncontrollable power.

It will be a daunting task to begin to make love conscious, and integrate it as a personal potential and responsibility. Can we love enough to allow the full range of our humanity to emerge, without hiding big parts of it in cultural and religious shadows? Can we relinquish the illusion of domination and control imagined through the thinking of the head, and face the wildly fierce terrain of the heart with courage and confidence? The consequences of long avoidance of this work have brought us to a dangerous precipice.

Love me as I am, all of me.  
Don't hide. Allow me to see and love you as you are, all of you.  
I have darkness and will fail as often as I succeed.  
I acknowledge as much for you.  
Mistakes are every day occurrences. We can strive to forgive.  
Even God is still becoming.  
And the very laws of the universe are changing.  
There is space in the heart for all of it.  
I look to walk the way of the heart.

The way of the heart walks with feet on the earth and stays close to her.

The head will lie, but the heart will not. The head gets lost, but the heart knows

its way. The head can wander into moral ineptitude, but the heart cannot. The head projects, but the heart contains. The head condescends, but the heart equalizes. The head is the servant, and the heart is master.

The birth of the thinking of the heart is a phenomenal challenge to the status quo, to the structures of individual and collective physical and psychological life. So it is, and so it will be until enough individuals see the wisdom, survive the suffering, and work out the changes that will inevitably occur as the brain in the head becomes coordinated with that of the heart. I think it will be a new era for us all.