

SYMBOLS: THE MEANING OF LIFE

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"Every man's condition is a solution in hieroglyphic to those inquiries he would put. He acts it as life, before he apprehends it as truth."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Modern man is passing through a major psychological reorientation equivalent in magnitude to the emergence of Christianity from the ruins of the Roman Empire. Accompanying the decline of traditional religion there is increasing evidence of a general psychic disorientation. We have lost our bearings. Our relation to life has become ambiguous. The great symbol system which is organized Christianity seems no longer able to command the full commitment of men or to fulfill their ultimate needs. The result is a pervasive feeling of meaninglessness and alienation from life. Whether or not a new collective religious symbol will emerge remains to be seen. For the present those aware of the problem are obliged to make their own individual search for a meaningful life.

I use the word meaning here in a special sense. In general we can distinguish two different usages of the word. Most commonly the term refers to abstract, objective knowledge conveyed by a sign or representation. Thus, for example, the word horse means a particular species of four-legged animals; or a red traffic light means stop. These are abstract, objective meanings conveyed by signs. However, there is another kind of meaning, namely, subjective, living meaning which does not refer to abstract knowledge but rather to a psychological state which can affirm life. It is this sense of the word we use when we describe a deeply moving experience as something meaningful. Such an experience does not convey abstract meaning, at

NOTE: This paper was read to the Analytical Psychology Club of New York on March 17, 1961.

least not primarily, but rather living meaning which, laden with affect, relates us organically to life as a whole. Dreams, myths, and works of art can convey this sense of subjective, living meaning which is quite different from objective, abstract meaning. It is the failure to separate these two different usages of the word meaning which leads one to ask the unanswerable question, "What is the meaning of life?" The question cannot be answered in this form because it confuses objective, abstract meaning with subjective, living meaning. If we rephrase the question to make it more subjective and ask, "What is the meaning of *my* life," it then begins to have the possibility of an answer.

This question of life meaning is a crucial one for modern man. Our age has been described as the age of anxiety. A major, contemporary, philosophical movement called existentialism gives foremost emphasis to the experience of meaninglessness. The majority of modern novels depict heroes living lost and meaningless lives. And most of the patients who come for psychotherapy include among their symptoms the feeling that life has lost its meaning.

The problem of life meaning is closely related to the sense of personal identity. The question, "What is the meaning of my life?" is almost the same as the question, "Who am I?" The latter question is clearly a subjective one. An adequate answer can come only from within. Thus we can say: Meaning is found in subjectivity. But who values subjectivity? When we use the word subjective, we usually say or imply *only* subjective, as though the subjective element were of no consequence. Since the decline of religion, we have had no adequate collective sanction for the introverted, subjective life. All trends are in the opposite direction. The various pressures of Western society all subtly urge the individual to seek life meaning in externals and in objectivity. Whether the goal be the state, the corporate organization, the good material life, or the acquisition of objective scientific knowledge, in each case human meaning is being sought where it does not exist—in externals, in objectivity. The unique, particular, not-to-be-duplicated subjectivity of the individual which is the real source of human meanings and which is not susceptible to an objective, statistical approach is the despised stone rejected by

the builders of our contemporary world view.

Even the majority of psychiatrists who ought to know better contribute to the prevailing attitude which depreciates subjectivity. Recently I gave a paper concerning the function of symbols before a group of psychiatrists. Afterwards the discussant gave a critique of the paper. One of his chief objections was that I described the symbol as though it were something real, almost alive. This criticism reflects a general attitude toward the psyche and subjectivity. The psyche is thought to have no reality of its own. Subjective images and symbols are considered to be nothing but reflections of one's environment and interpersonal relationships, or nothing but instinctive wish fulfillments. Harry Stack Sullivan, the founder of the William Alanson White School of Psychotherapy, has even made the extreme statement that the idea of a unique, individual personality is a delusion! A famous psychiatrist thus becomes unwittingly another exponent of modern collectivistic mass psychology.

Modern man's most urgent need is to discover the reality and value of the inner subjective world of the psyche, to discover the symbolic life. As Jung has said, "Man is in need of a symbolic life. . . . But we have no symbolic life. . . . Have you got a corner somewhere in your houses where you perform the rites as you can see in India? Even the very simple houses there have at least a curtain corner where the members of the household can lead the symbolic life, where they can make their new vows or meditation. We don't have it. . . . We have no time, no place. . . . Only the symbolic life can express the need of the soul—the daily need of the soul, mind you! And because people have no such thing, they can never step out of this mill—this awful, grinding, banal life in which they are 'nothing but.'"

Man needs a world of symbols as well as a world of signs. Both sign and symbol are necessary but they should not be confused with one another. A sign is a token of meaning that stands for a *known* entity. By this definition, language is a system of signs, not symbols. A symbol, on the other hand, is an image or representation which points to something essentially unknown, a mystery. A sign communicates abstract, objective meaning whereas a symbol conveys

ving, subjective meaning. A symbol has a subjective dynamism which exerts a powerful attraction and fascination on the individual. It is a living, organic entity which acts as a releaser and transformer of psychic energy. We can thus say a sign is dead, but a symbol is live.

Symbols are spontaneous products of the objective psyche.² One cannot manufacture a symbol, one can only discover it. Symbols are carriers of psychic energy. This is why it is proper to consider them something alive. They transmit to the ego, either consciously or unconsciously, life energy which supports, guides, and motivates the individual. The objective psyche is constantly creating a steady stream of living symbolic imagery. Ordinarily this stream of images is not consciously perceived except through dreams or through waking fantasy when the conscious level of attention has been lowered. However, there is reason to believe that even in the full waking state a stream of symbols charged with effective energy continues to flow beyond the notice of the ego. Symbols seep into the ego, causing it to identify with them and act them out unconsciously; or they spill out to the external environment via projection, causing the individual to become fascinated and involved with external objects and activities. The relation between the ego and the symbol is a very important factor. In general there are three possible patterns of relation between ego and symbol or, which means the same thing, between ego and objective psyche.

1. The ego may be identified with the symbol. In this case the symbolic image will be lived out concretely. Ego and objective psyche will be one.
2. The ego may be alienated from the symbol. Although the symbolic life cannot be destroyed, in this case it will function in a degraded fashion outside of consciousness. The symbol will be reduced to a sign. Its mysterious urgencies will be understood only in terms of elementary, abstract factors.
3. The third possibility is the one to be desired. In this instance the ego, while clearly separated from the objective psyche, is open and receptive to the effects of symbolic imagery. A kind of conscious dialogue between the ego and

emerging symbols becomes possible. The symbol is then able to perform its proper function as releaser and transformer of psychic energy with full participation of conscious understanding.

These different relationships between ego and symbol give rise to two possible fallacies which I shall call the concretistic fallacy and the reductive fallacy. In the concretistic fallacy, which is the more primitive of the two, the individual is unable to distinguish symbols of the objective psyche from concrete, external reality. Inner symbolic images are experienced as being real, external facts. Examples of this fallacy are the animistic beliefs of primitives, hallucinations and delusions of psychotics, and superstitions of all kinds. Confused mixtures of psychic and physical reality such as the practice of alchemy, astrology, and the numerous present-day cults of healing fall into this category. The same fallacy is at work in those religious believers who misunderstand symbolic religious images to refer to literal concrete facts and mistake their own personal or parochial religious convictions for universal and absolute truth. There is danger of succumbing to the concretistic fallacy whenever we are tempted to apply a symbolic image to external physical facts for the purpose of manipulating those facts in our own interest. Symbols have valid and legitimate effects only when they serve to change our psychic state or conscious attitude. Their effects are illegitimate and dangerous when applied in a magical way to physical reality.

The reductive fallacy makes the opposite mistake. In this case, the significance of the symbol is missed by misunderstanding it only as a sign for some other known content. The reductive fallacy is based on the rationalistic attitude which assumes that it can see behind symbols to their "real" meaning. This approach reduces all symbolic imagery to elementary, known factors. It operates on the assumption that no true mystery, no essential unknown transcending the ego's capacity for comprehension, exists. Thus, in this view, there can be no true symbols but only signs. For those of this persuasion religious symbolism is no more than evidence of ignorance and primitive superstition. The reductive fallacy is also shared by those psychological theorists who consider symbolism to be no more

than the primitive, prelogical functioning of the archaic ego. We fall into this error whenever we treat our subjective reactions and images in the abstract, statistical manner appropriate to natural science and physical reality. This mistake is the reverse of the preceding one: here a subjective symbolic image was used to manipulate physical facts, thus doing violence to them. Here, the abstract, objective attitude appropriate for an understanding of outer reality is applied to the unconscious psyche in an attempt to manipulate it. This attitude does violence to the autonomous reality of the psyche.

The conflict between the concretistic fallacy and the reductive fallacy is at the core of the contemporary conflict between the traditional religious view of man and the so-called modern scientific view. And since this is a collective problem, we all carry something of the conflict within ourselves. Concerning this problem Jung writes:

"Whoever talks of such matters [as religious symbolism] inevitably runs the risk of being torn to pieces by the two parties who are in mortal conflict about these very things. This conflict is due to the strange proposition that a thing is true only if it presents itself as a *physical* fact. Thus some people believe it to be physically true that Christ was born as the son of a virgin, while others deny this as a physical impossibility. Everyone can see that there is no logical solution to this conflict and that one would do better not to get involved in such futile disputes. Both are right and both are wrong. Yet they could easily reach agreement if only they dropped the word *physical*. *Physical* is not the only criterion of truth: there are also *psychic* truths which can either be explained nor proved nor contested in any physical way. If, for instance, a general belief existed that the river Rhine had at one time flowed backwards from its mouth to its source, then this belief would in itself be a fact even though such an assertion, physically understood, would sound utterly incredible. Beliefs of this kind are psychic facts which cannot be contested and need no proof.

"Religious [or symbolic] statements are of this type. They refer without exception to things that cannot be established as physical facts. Taken as referring to anything physical they make no sense whatsoever. . . . The fact that religious [or symbolic] statements frequently conflict with the observed physical phenomena proves that in contrast to physical perception the [symbolic] spirit is autonomous, and that psychic

experience is to a certain extent independent of physical data. The psyche is an autonomous factor, and religious [or symbolic] statements are psychic confessions which in the last resort are based on unconscious . . . processes. These processes are not accessible to physical perception but demonstrate their existence through the confessions of the psyche. . . . Whenever we speak of religious [or symbolic] contents we move in a world of images that point to something ineffable. We do not know how clear or unclear these images, metaphors, and concepts are in respect of their transcendental object. . . . [However] there is no doubt that there is something behind these images that transcends consciousness and operates in such a way that the statements do not vary limitlessly and chaotically, but clearly all relate to a few basic principles or archetypes. These, like the psyche itself, or like matter, are unknowable as such."

As with all matters pertaining to personality, the concretistic and reductive fallacies will not be changed by rational exploration. Actually they can be considered as two successive stages in personality development. The state of identification between ego and unconscious symbols gives rise to the concretistic fallacy. This state is characteristic of an early stage of ego development seen, for instance, in primitives and children. The reductive fallacy stems from a state of alienation between the ego and the symbolism of the unconscious. It seems to be a later stage of development, perhaps a necessary reaction against the previous state of identity between ego and unconscious. At this point ego development may require a depreciation of the unconscious and of the power of its symbolic images. However, this leaves a dissociation between ego and unconscious which sooner or later must be bridged if one is to become whole.

The ultimate goal of Jungian psychotherapy is to make the symbolic process conscious. To become conscious of symbols we first need to know how a symbol behaves when it is unconscious. All the inhuman practices of savage rites and rituals as well as neurotic symptoms and perversions can be understood if we realize how a symbol functions unconsciously. The basic proposition in this: An unconscious symbol is lived but not perceived. The dynamism of the unconscious symbol is experienced only as a wish or an urgency

toward some external action. The image behind the urgency is not seen. No purely psychological meaning is discerned behind the motivating force of the symbolic image which has one in its grip. The ego, identified with the symbolic image, becomes its victim, condemned to live out concretely the meaning of the symbol rather than to understand it consciously. To the degree that the ego is identified with the objective psyche, the dynamism of the symbol will be seen and experienced only as an urge to lust or power. This explains the distinction between the depth psychology of Jung and all other psychological theories. Only Jung and his school, so far, have been able to recognize the symbol, and therefore the objective psyche of which it is a manifestation, as it functions when the ego is not identified with it. In Freudian psychology, for instance, where Jung sees the transpersonal objective psyche, Freud sees the Id. The Id is a caricature of the human soul. It is the objective psyche. Its symbols are seen only by the way they manifest themselves when the ego is identified with them. The Id is the unconscious seen only as instinct with no consideration of the images that lie behind the instincts. To the extent that images are dealt with at all, they are reductively interpreted back to the instinct. The symbolic image per se is granted no substantive reality. This Freudian attitude toward the unconscious is important to understand because it is shared in one form or another by practically all the schools of modern psychotherapy. No psychiatrist will deny that the urgencies of the instincts are alive and effective but they almost all join in denying the life and reality of symbolic images in and for themselves.

This widespread attitude of modern psychology which sees the unconscious psyche as motivated only by the instincts is basically mispiritual, anticultural, and destructive of the symbolic life. To the extent that such an attitude is held, the cultivation of a meaningful inner life is impossible. Instinctive compulsions do, of course, exist—in abundance. But it is the symbolic image, acting as releaser and transformer of psychic energy, which lifts the instinctive urgency to another level of meaning and humanizes, spiritualizes, and acculturates the raw animal energy. The instinct contains its own hidden meaning which is revealed only by perceiving the image that lies embedded in the instinct.

Let me give you an example of a powerful symbolic image which

gripped a man unconsciously, forcing him to live it out as a symptom until he could understand it consciously. Since it is easier to see large things than small ones, I choose an example that is magnified so to speak by the fact that it is a symptom of psychopathology. I am thinking of a case of transvestism—a young man who had a strong urge to dress in women's clothes. When wearing some piece of feminine clothing, his attitude toward himself underwent a radical change. Ordinarily he felt shy, inferior, and impotent. But when wearing some article of feminine apparel which could be hidden from general view, he felt confident, effective, and sexually potent. Now what does such a symptom mean? This patient was living out an unconscious symbolic image. Since such symptom images have the same origin as dreams, we can approach them in the way we would a dream—by the method of amplification. We then ask ourselves what about dressing in women's clothes? What general and mythological parallels can we find?

In Book V of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus' journey between Calypso's isle and the land of the Phaeacians is described.* During this journey Poseidon stirs up a frightful storm which would have drowned Odysseus except that Ino, a sea goddess, comes to his assistance. She tells him to take off his clothes and swim for it and adds, "Here, take my veil and put it around your chest; it is enchanted and you can come to no harm so long as you wear it. As soon as you touch land take it off, throw it back as far as you can into the sea." Ino's veil is the archetypal image that lies behind the symptom of transvestism. The veil represents the support and containment with which the mother archetype can provide the ego during a dangerous activation of the unconscious. It is legitimate to use this support, as Odysseus does, during a time of crisis but the veil must be returned to the goddess as soon as the crisis is over.

Another parallel is provided by the priests of the Magna Mater in ancient Rome and Asia Minor. After their consecration these priests would wear feminine dress and allow their hair to grow long to represent their commitment to the service of the Great Mother. A remnant of this sacerdotal transvestism exists today in the skirts worn by the Catholic clergy who are in the service of Mother Church. All of these parallels go to show that the urge of the transvestite is based

in the unconscious need for a supporting contact with a feminine deity—what we call the mother archetype. This is the way we understand such a symptom symbolically. Of course, whenever we speak of the image of a deity, we are using a symbol because a deity or suprapersonal power cannot be precisely defined. It is not a sign for something known and rationally understood but rather a symbol expressing a mystery. This manner of interpretation, if successful, can lead the patient toward the symbolic life. A paralyzing, guilt-laden symptom can be replaced by a meaningful, life-enriching symbol which is experienced consciously rather than lived out in an unconscious, compulsive, symptomatic way.

I give this clinical case of transvestism only as an example of how a symptom can be transformed into a symbol through awareness of its archetypal foundations. Every symptom derives from the image of some archetypal situation. For instance, many anxiety symptoms derive as their archetypal context the hero's fight with the dragon, or perhaps the rites of initiation. Many symptoms of frustration or resentment are a re-enactment of Job's archetypal encounter with God. To be able to recognize the archetype, to see the symbolic image, behind the symptom immediately transforms the experience. It may be just as painful but now it has meaning. Instead of isolating the sufferer from his fellow humans, it unites him with them in a deeper rapport. Now he feels himself a participating partner in the collective human enterprise—the painful evolution of human consciousness—which began in the darkness of the primordial swamp and which will end we know not where.

To the extent that one is unaware of the symbolic dimension of existence, one experiences the vicissitudes of life as symptoms. Symptoms are disturbing states of mind which we are unable to control and which are essentially meaningless to us—that is, contain no value or significance. Symptoms, in fact, are degraded symbols, degraded from the reductive fallacy of the ego. Symptoms are intolerable precisely because they are meaningless. Almost any difficulty can be overcome if we can discern its meaning. It is meaningless, not the hydrogen bomb, which is the greatest threat to humanity.

Our waking life is composed of a series of moods, feelings, ideas,

and urgencies. These successive psychic states through which we pass are like beads strung on a single string. Depending on our conscious attitude, we experience this rosary of life either as a succession of meaningless symptoms or, through symbolic awareness, as a series of numinous encounters between the ego and the transpersonal psyche. Our pleasures as well as our pains are symptoms if they carry no symbolic import. The sages of India recognize this in their doctrine of Maya. According to this view pain and pleasure, which are the symptoms of life, are indissolubly connected. To gain release from the painful symptoms one must also relinquish the pleasurable symptoms. In terms of analytical psychology, the Indian's striving for release from the urgencies of pain and pleasure is equivalent to the search for the symbolic life. Nirvana is not an escape from the reality of life as it is commonly misunderstood in the extraverted West. It is rather the discovery of the symbolic life which releases man from this "awful, grinding, banal life" which is only a succession of meaningless symptoms.

Symbolic awareness is transmitted to the ego through what I have called, after Neumann, the ego-Self axis. Initially, prior to the birth of consciousness, the ego exists only as a potentiality in complete identity with the objective psyche or the Self which is its comprehensive manifestation. With development the ego separates gradually from the Self and the residual area of ego-Self identity is progressively reduced. However, the ego always remains an appendage of the Self and is dependent for its function and well-being on the vital link between ego and Self which I call the ego-Self axis. The ego-Self axis is susceptible to damage; indeed it is inevitably damaged to some extent in the course of psychological development. The reasons for this which are too complicated to present here are given in my paper, "The Ego-Self Paradox." I will only say that damage to the ego-Self axis causes an alienation between the conscious mind and the unconscious. This can cause the state of meaninglessness and the empty, symptomatic life. Repair of the ego-Self axis restores the living connection between the conscious ego and the suprapersonal psyche, bringing about symbolic awareness and the capacity to experience subjective meaning.

The symbolic life in some form is a prerequisite for psychic calm. Without it the ego is alienated from the suprapersonal sources of life and falls victim to a kind of cosmic anxiety. Dreams often attempt to heal the alienated ego by conveying to it some sense of its origin. Let me give you an example of such a dream. The dreamer was struggling with the problem that I call ego-Self alienation. She was a prey to profound feelings of depression, unworthiness, and the meaninglessness of her life and capacities. Then she had this dream:

An old man who was both a priest and a rabbi was talking to me. I listened to his words I was deeply moved and felt I was being healed. It seemed as though God spoke through him. I felt the eternal lesson which is always within me resolve itself. For a moment I knew why. As he talked he put me back in touch with something I had known long time ago—before I was born."

This dream had a powerful impact on the dreamer. She experienced it as something healing. The eternal question concerning the taming of her life was answered. But what was the answer? At first upon awakening she could not remember what the old man had said. Then suddenly she thought of an old Jewish legend she had once read in a book and she realized that it was the essence of this legend which the priest-rabbi had been telling her. The story of this legend is as follows:

Prior to the birth of a child God calls the seed of the future human being before him and decides what its soul shall become: man or woman, free or simpleton, rich or poor. "Only one thing He leaves undecided, namely, whether he shall be righteous or unrighteous, for, as it is written, all things are in the hand of the Lord except the fear of the Lord." The soul, however, pleads with God not to be sent from the life beyond this world. But God makes answer: "The world to which I send thee, is better than the world in which thou wast; and when I formed thee, I formed thee for this earthly fate." Thereupon God orders the angel in charge of the souls living in the Beyond to initiate this soul into all the mysteries of that other world, through Paradise and Hell. In such manner the soul experiences all the secrets of the Beyond. At the moment of death, however, when the soul comes to earth, the angel extinguishes

the light of knowledge burning above it, and the soul, enclosed in its earthly envelope, enters this world, having forgotten its lofty wisdom, but always seeking to regain it."

The dream which brought this beautiful legend to the dreamer's mind is an excellent example of the operation of the ego-Self axis which brings into consciousness an awareness of the ego's origin and meaning and awakens the symbolic life. The figure of the old man, the rabbi-priest, is a representation of what Jung has called the archetype of the old wise man. He is a spiritual guide, a bringer of wisdom and healing. I would consider him to be a personification of the ego-Self axis. In the combination of priest and rabbi he unites two separate religious and symbolic traditions although the tale he has to tell does not belong to any particular religious system. The theme of the prenatal origins of the ego is an archetypal image of which we can find many examples. For instance there is Plato's doctrine of prenatal ideas as elaborated in the *Phaedo*. According to this myth all learning is a recollection of prenatal knowledge which is innate but forgotten. In psychological terms this means that the archetypal forms of human experience are preexistent or *a priori*; they only await incarnation within a particular individual life history. This Platonic theory of reminiscence is sometimes expressly stated in dreams. A person may dream of being involved in a significant happening which he dimly realizes has happened before and is following some predetermined plan. As one dreamer described such a dream:

"It was as though I was experiencing the dream on two levels simultaneously. On the one hand it was unique, spontaneous, and unrehearsed. On the other hand I seemed also to be playing a role and re-enacting a story I had once known but forgotten. The two levels were inextricably connected. I was playing the role perfectly just because I was really living it at the same time. I made up my lines as I went along but I seemed to be helped by the fact that I had once known the story. When each situation came up it struck some chord of memory which came to my assistance."

Another parallel is an old Gnostic tale which has many similari-

es to the Jewish legend previously quoted but carries it a step further by showing how the soul awakens and remembers its heavenly origin. Modern translators have entitled this text "The Hymn of the Pearl." I quote it, somewhat abridged, from Hans Jonas' book:

"When I was a little child and dwelt in the kingdom of my Father's house and delighted in the wealth and splendor of those who raised me, my parents sent me forth from the East, our homeland, with provisions for the journey. . . . They took off from me the robe of glory which in their love they had made for me, and my purple mantle that was woven to conform exactly to my figure, and made a covenant with me, and wrote it in my heart that I might not forget it: 'When thou hast come down into Egypt and bringest the One Pearl which lies in the middle of the sea which is encircled by the snorting serpent, thou shalt sit on again thy robe of glory and thy mantle over it and with thy father, our next in rank, be heir in our kingdom.'

"I left the East and took my way downwards, accompanied by two royal envoys, since the way was dangerous and hard and I was young or such a journey. . . . I went down into Egypt, and my companions tried from me. I went straightway to the serpent and settled down close by his inn until he should slumber and sleep so that I might take the Pearl from him. . . . I was a stranger to my fellow-dwellers in the land. . . . I clothed myself in their garments, lest they suspect me as one coming from without to take the Pearl and arouse the serpent against me. But through some cause they marked that I was not their countryman, and they ingratiated themselves with me, and mixed me [drink] with their cunning, and gave me to taste of their meat; and I forgot that I was a king's son and served their king. I forgot the Pearl for which my parents had sent me. Through the heaviness of their nourishment I sank into deep slumber.

"All this that befell me, my parents marked, and they were grieved for me. . . . And they wrote a letter to me, and each of the great ones signed it with his name.

"From thy father the King of Kings, and from thy mother, mistress of the East, and from thy brother, our next in rank, unto thee our son in Egypt, greeting. Awake and rise up out of thy sleep, and perceive the words of our letter. Remember that thou art a king's son: behold from thou hast served in bondage. Be mindful of the Pearl, for whose

sake thou hast departed into Egypt. Remember thy robe of glory, recall thy splendid mantle, that thou mayest put them on and deck thyself with them and thy name be read in the book of the heroes and then become with thy brother, our deputy, heir in our kingdom.'

"Like a messenger was the letter. . . . It rose up in the form of an eagle, the king of all winged fowl, and flew until it alighted beside me and became wholly speech. At its voice and sound I awoke and arose from my sleep, took it up, kissed it, broke its seal, and read. Just as was written on my heart were the words of my letter to read. I remembered that I was a son of kings, and that my freeborn soul desired its own kind. I remembered the Pearl for which I had been sent down to Egypt, and I began to enchant the terrible and snorting serpent. I charmed it to sleep by naming over it my Father's name, the name of our next in rank, and that of my mother, the Queen of the East. I seized the Pearl, and turned to repair home to my Father. Their filthy and impure garment I put off, and left it behind in their land, and directed my way that I might come to the light of our homeland, the East.

"My letter which had awakened me I found before me on my way; and as it had awakened me with its voice, so it guided me with its light that shone before me, and with its voice it encouraged my fear, and with its love it drew me on. [Then, as he approached his homeland his parents sent out to him his robe of glory and his mantle.] And I stretched towards it and took it and decked myself with the beauty of its colors. And I cast the royal mantle about my entire self. Clothed therein, I ascended to the gate of salutation and adoration. I bowed my head and adored the splendor of my Father who had sent it to me, whose commands I had fulfilled as he too had done what he promised. . . . He received me joyfully, and I was with him in his kingdom. . . ."

This charming tale is a beautiful symbolic expression of the theory of analytical psychology concerning the origin and development of the conscious ego. The ego begins as the child of a royal, heavenly family. This corresponds to its original state of identity with the Self or objective psyche. It is sent away from this original paradise on a mission. This refers to the necessary process of conscious development which separates the ego from its unconscious matrix. When it reaches the foreign country it forgets its mission

and falls asleep. This situation corresponds to ego-Self alienation and the state of meaninglessness. The letter from his parents awakens the sleeper and reminds him of his mission. Meaning has returned to his life. The connecting link between the ego and its suprapersonal origins has been re-established. I would equate this happening with the awakening of symbolic awareness.

At this point there is a particularly interesting parallel between the story and the dream of the priest-rabbi. In the dream, you will recall, after listening to the words of the old wise man the dreamer remarks, "As he talked he put me back in touch with something I had known a long time ago—before I was born." Similarly, in "The Hymn of the Pearl," after the hero reads the letter, he says, "Just as was written in my heart were the words of my letter." In each case the individual is recalled to something he once knew but had forgotten—his original nature.

In "The Hymn of the Pearl" the awakening is brought about through the agency of a letter. The protean nature of this letter suggests that it is a true symbol whose full meaning cannot be encompassed by a single specific image. It is a letter but it is also an eagle. In addition, it is a voice that became wholly speech. When it was time to make the return trip, the letter underwent still another metamorphosis and became a guiding light. Whenever we encounter in dreams an image which undergoes such numerous transformations, we can be sure we are dealing with a particularly potent and dynamic symbol. Such a symbol is the letter-eagle-voice-light image in this story. A letter is a means of communication from a distance. The eagle, stated in the text to be the king of birds, reminds one of the fact that birds have always been considered the messengers of God. I once treated a psychotic patient who told me that he was receiving messages from God. When I asked him how he got these messages, he said that birds brought them. Birds also suggest the dove of the Holy Ghost which is the connecting link between God and man. The voice reminds one of the call or the vocation which means literally a calling. This theme has always expressed an experience of awakening which leads the individual out of his personal preoccupations into a more significant destiny. The letter as guiding light is paralleled by

the star of Bethlehem which guided men to the birthplace of Christ, the manifestation of deity. All of these amplifications go to show that the letter in its various aspects symbolizes what I call the ego-Self axis, the line of communication between ego and objective psyche. Consciousness of this axis has an awakening, transforming effect on the personality. A new dimension of meaning is discovered which conveys value to subjectivity.

Another example of the archetypal theme of the prenatal origin of the soul is found in a nineteenth-century poem. Let me read you a few lines from Wordsworth's ode: "Intimations of Immortality."

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,

And cometh from afar;
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
And by the vision splendid;
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day."

At this point Wordsworth's hero reaches Egypt, forgets his mission, and falls asleep. He never does receive a definite letter of awakening, but he has premonitions of one.

"... in a season of calm weather
Though inland far we be,
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea

Which brought us hither,
 Can in a moment travel thither.
 And see the children sport upon the shore,
 And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore. . . .
 Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
 Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
 To me the meanest flower that blows can give
 Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

In the last two lines there is a definite allusion to the symbolic life. An external object, in this case a flower, is subjectively experienced as a dynamic symbol producing thoughts too deep for tears.

Dreams are expressions of the ego-Self axis. Every dream is a letter sent to Egypt to awaken us. We may not be able to read the letter, but at least we should open it and make the effort. I know of a man who had no use for analysis and dream interpretation. He had studied his own dreams and reached the definite conclusion that dreams have no significant meaning whatever. They are caused only by one's physical sensations while in bed—having one's feet tangled in the covers, lying on one's arm, and that sort of thing. It is interesting to note what kind of dreams a man with such a conscious attitude had. He had several frequently recurring nightmares. He dreamt he was in a quagmire up to his knees sinking deeper and deeper, unable to move. At other times he dreamt that he was blind and sometimes that he was a crippled paralytic.

Sometimes dream images refer directly to the functioning of the ego-Self axis. This is true of the dream I have already given you about the priest-rabbi. I have encountered several dreams which use the image of an island needing a communication system with the mainland. Here is an example of such a dream.

A man dreamt that he was on an island several miles off the mainland. A great pile of telephone cable comes up on the beach. It is connected with the mainland and the dreamer feels he has rescued it from destruction by recognizing what it is. It is an important advance in communications. His neighbors think it is ugly and want it thrown back into the sea but the dreamer is able to persuade them of its value.

I don't want to discuss this dream in detail. I present it only as an example of how dreams can refer to the ego-Self axis. The fact that the neighbors object to the ugliness of the telephone cable is significant. The dreamer has a highly developed aesthetic sense. Indeed, his major value judgments are based on aesthetic considerations. In order to accept the new communication pathway with the mainland, that is, the objective psyche, the dreamer must depose the tyranny of aestheticism which recognizes no values other than its own. This is an illustration of the fact that the ego-Self axis and the symbolic life are encountered through the inferior function, the weakest portion of the personality. Only by awareness and acceptance of our weakness do we become conscious of something beyond the ego which supports us.

Let me give you another dream which I consider to be a beautiful example of the ego-Self axis and of the numinous impact it can have. The patient had this dream about one year prior to beginning analysis with me, during a time of considerable distress.

"I am on the roof of a room completely surrounded by water when I hear wonderful music coming across the water. The music is being brought by four 'wise men' standing in small boats and each is coming from one of the four directions. They are magnificently robed and as they proceed across the water through a blue-gray dawn I realize that the music each one brings bears the characteristic of the 'direction' from which he comes. These four musical qualities blend and merge into a sound which affects me as powerfully in writing about it three years later as it did when it occurred in the dream. The four 'wise men' ascend stairs at each corner of the room. I am overcome with a feeling of great reverence and excitement, and as they reach the roof it has grown lighter. The nearness of them is overwhelming. I realize they have come to prepare me for the doing of some work. I then must go downstairs and complete some task which requires prolonged diligence and concentration. When I come back I see the four 'wise men' going back across the waters in their small boats. Though there was a sense of disappointment the music seemed more glorious than before, even triumphant. There was definitely a sense of having succeeded or passed the test. Then I saw that in the place where each 'wise man' had stood

there was now a stone idol which though abstract not only intrinsically represented the 'wise man' but indeed all that was implied by the culture and mores of the direction from which he had come. There was a sense of being thankful that I would be able to prove that they had been there.

"Then I turned my attention to the four 'wise men' each returning to his own direction in the small boats, and the music became even greater. Once more I heard with special clarity the special personality of each of the four directions blending mysteriously into a 'supermusical' sound and the day became brighter until an electric blue surrounded me and a sense of the most intense well-being I had ever known filled me as the dream ended."

I do not want to discuss this dream in its personal aspects but only to the extent that it illustrates the function of the ego-Self axis. The drama of the dream takes place on the roof of a room which is a kind of platform raised above the water with steps at each of its four corners. This reminds one of the early Egyptian concept of the God Atum. He was represented as the world mound rising out of the primeval ocean. According to Clark, this primordial mound symbol "was soon formalized into an eminence with sloping or battered sides or a platform surrounded by steps on each side. . . . It is probably what the step pyramids represent." Another analogy is the Babylonian ziggurat, likewise a holy mound with steps on four sides leading to a platform on top which housed the shrine of Marduk. The top of the holy mound was thought of as the navel of the world, the point where divine creative force is manifested, and the place of meeting between god and man.

The image of wise men bringing gifts immediately reminds us of the story of Jesus' nativity and the three wise men. This theme of bringing gifts to the newborn child is part of the myth of the birth of the hero which, we can add, is also the myth of the birth of the ego. But what is the significance of four wise men instead of three? There is a legend that when Jesus was born, not three but four wise men were supposed to have come to him from the four corners of the world, but the fourth was delayed and did not arrive in time. The fact that there are four wise men coming from the

four directions alludes to mandala symbolism and indicates that the wise men are functions of the Self, of psychic totality. The wise men thus represent a fourfold ego-Self axis. They are messengers and gift-bringers from the land beyond the sea come to establish communication with the ego. We are reminded of the previous priest-rabbi dream where likewise an old wise man served to connect the dreamer with her suprapersonal origins.

I would draw your attention to the light symbolism in this dream. The dream begins at dawn. It grows lighter as the wise men reach the roof and becomes still brighter at the climax of the dream. Light represents consciousness. All peoples have myths of creation which depict it as the creation of light. Such myths refer to the creation of the ego which is the light of consciousness born out of the darkness of the unconscious. Similarly, dawn is the daily birth of the light of the sun and is an apt image to represent emerging consciousness. Thus we can understand this dream as referring to a growth or increase of consciousness on the part of the dreamer. This interpretation would also correspond to the significance of the wise men whose attribute is wisdom. Wisdom is light in the psychological sense. The wise men are bringers of the light of consciousness.

Another feature of the dream is that each wise man leaves behind an idol or image of himself which epitomizes the direction from which he comes and provides tangible proof of the reality of his visit. This is most interesting. I understand it as a representation of the symbolic process itself. The archetypal forces, represented by the wise men, bring images of themselves as gifts to the ego, symbols that remind the individual of his suprapersonal connections. These images would correspond in their function to the letter, eagle, and guiding light in "The Hymn of the Pearl." They are connecting links between ego and objective psyche which transmit meaning. This dream would permit much more detailed elaboration. However, I shall only repeat that it is a most beautiful example of the functioning of the ego-Self axis.

In conclusion, I would remind you of the etymology of the word symbol.⁹ The word symbol derives from the Greek word *symbolon* which combines two root words, *syn*, meaning together

or with, and *bolon*, meaning that which has been thrown. The basic meaning is thus "that which has been thrown together." In original Greek usage, symbols referred to the two halves of an object such as a stick or a coin which two parties broke between them as a pledge and to prove later the identity of the presenter of one part to the holder of the other. The term corresponded to our word tally concerning which Webster's unabridged dictionary states: "It was customary for traders, after notching a stick to show the number or quantity of goods delivered, to split it lengthwise through the notches so that the parts exactly corresponded, the seller keeping one stick, and the purchaser the other." A symbol was thus originally a tally referring to the missing piece of an object which when restored to, or thrown together with, its partner recreated the original whole object. This corresponds to our understanding of the psychological function of a symbol. The symbol leads us to the missing part of the whole man. It relates us to our original totality. It heals our split, our alienation from life. And since the whole man is a great deal more than the ego, it relates us to the suprapersonal forces which are the source of our being and our meaning. This is the reason for honoring subjectivity and cultivating the symbolic life.

1. C. G. Jung, *The Symbolic Life*. Transcript of a lecture given in 1939 from the shorthand notes of Derek Kilchlin. London: Guild of Pastoral Psychology, Guild Lecture No. 80, April 1954.
 2. Objective psyche is a more recent term for the collective or transpersonal aspect of the unconscious which functions autonomously or objectively in relation to the ego.
 3. C. G. Jung, "Answer to Job" in *Psychology and Religion: West and East*. Translated by R. F. C. Hull. G. W. * XI, 1958, p. 359 ff.
 4. I am indebted to Storr for pointing out this amplification. (A. Storr, "The Psychopathology of Fetishism and Transvestism," *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, Vol. 2, No. 2, July 1957, p. 161.)
 5. E. F. Edinger, "The Ego-Self Paradox," *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Jan. 1960, p. 3.
 6. Gerhard Adler, *Studies in Analytical Psychology*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1948, p. 120 ff.
 7. H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1958, p. 113 ff.
 8. R. T. R. Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*. New York: Grove Press, 1960, p. 38.
- * The letters C. W. refer throughout to *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*. Bollingen Series XX. New York: Pantheon Books.