

EREL SHALIT



THE CYCLE OF LIFE

THEMES AND TALES OF THE JOURNEY

Also by Erel Shalit

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Themes and Tales of the Journey

Erel Shalit



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Acknowledgements

During the years of writing *The Cycle of Life*, a parental generation passed away, leaving its imprint, having, to the best of their ability, passed on the bucket of living waters, and generations of wisdom, for which I am grateful.

And a generation of grandchildren are being born, bringing joy, hope and prospects for what is, axiomatically, an uncertain future, lovingly guided by their parents, attended to by their grandmother.

I want to thank all those who have granted their permission to borrow from the wisdom of their souls, often expressed by the images in their dreams. I am indebted to my colleagues and other professionals who have read and commented on my manuscript, and to you, the reader of my labor. I value and appreciate the time you spend reading, your thoughts and reflections, whether you share them with me or others, or keep them to yourself.

I am grateful to Mel Mathews and Patty Cabanas of Fisher King Press, who with the generosity of their hearts and with professional skillfulness have brought this treatise into its own life.

A primary tenet of my perspective on the journey through life is the confluence of fate and destiny, how conscious choice and the unexpected turns of the tide flow together. Little did I anticipate that this would become apparent in my search for a cover image, the face of the book. I traveled along rivers of time and traversed cultural continents, ending up, so it seemed, with a coverless book in my hands. Then, in a sudden bliss, I remembered a painter whose name was at the tip of my tongue. As I extracted his name, Benjamin Shiff, from the layers of my memory, I was reminded of the balance between lyric harmony and pensive concern, which characterized the painting I recalled.

As I traced the pictures on Shiff's canvas, my eyes fell for the first time upon his painting, 'Life' (1990). Undoubtedly, I had found the grail. The candles' soft light of life is poised against the painful inevitability of burning out. Yet, as long as they burn, there are shades and colors; there are the distinct faces of transient existence, and there are those of obscurity, hidden in distant nature; there is a lyrical melancholy, as well as a tense harmony.

The pain of death and extinction reflects the subtle strength and beauty of life. Only an unlit candle will never burn out. A fully lived life extracts the awareness of its finality. Mortality as the ultimate boundary of physical existence, serves as the container of human life.

I came across Benjamin Shiff's painting 'Life' in May 2011, only to learn that he died in March. As it turned out, not only did we live but half an hour apart, but his daughter, Orit Yaar, is also a Jungian analyst. I knew Orit, but had no idea that she was Benjamin Shiff's daughter.

With the sadness of having lost the possibility of meeting Benjamin Shiff in life, I hope that his painting 'Life' which provides *The Cycle of Life* with a face, will serve as a candle honoring and reflecting upon his life and work.

I wish to thank Shosh Shiff, who granted permission to feature this profound painting on the cover of *The Cycle of Life*.

PREFACE

The Grimm Brothers tell the story of how God decided about the duration of life, and the dire consequences of man's demands:

When God created the world and was about to determine the duration of life for all the creatures, the donkey came and asked, "Lord, how long am I to live?"

"Thirty years," replied God. "Does that content you?"

"Ah! Lord," answered the ass, "that is a long time. Think of my painful existence! To carry heavy burdens from morning until night, to drag bags of corn to the mill so that others might eat bread, only to be cheered along and refreshed with nothing but kicks and blows! Spare me a portion of this long time."

So God had mercy and gave him eighteen years. The donkey went away satisfied, and the dog made his appearance.

"How long would you want to live?" said God to him; "thirty years are too many for the donkey, but you will be satisfied with that long."

"Lord," answered the dog, "is that thy will? Just think how I shall have to run. My feet will never hold out so long. And what can I do but growl and run from one corner to another after I have lost my voice for barking and my teeth for biting?"

God saw that he was right, and settled for twelve years.

Then came the monkey. "You will certainly like to live thirty years," said the Lord to him; "you need not work like the donkey and the dog, and will always enjoy yourself."

"Ah! Lord," he answered, "it may seem as if that were the case, but it is quite different. When it rains porridge, I have no spoon. I am always to play merry tricks and make faces for people to laugh, but when they give me an apple and I bite into it, why, it is sour! How often is sorrow hidden behind a joke. I shall never be able to hold out with all that for thirty years!"

God had mercy and gave him ten years.

At last man appeared, joyous, healthy, and vigorous, and begged God to determine the duration of his life.

"Thirty years you shall live," spoke the Lord. "Is that enough for you?"

"What a short time!" cried man, "when I have built my house and my fire burns on my own hearth; when I have planted trees that blossom and bear fruit, and am just beginning to enjoy my life, then I am to die! Oh, Lord, lengthen my time."

"I will add to it the ass's eighteen years," said God.

“That is not enough,” replied man.

“You shall also have the dog’s twelve years.”

“Still too little!”

“Well, then,” said God, “I will give you the monkey’s ten years as well, but you shall have no more.”

Man went away, but was not satisfied.

Thus man lives for seventy years. The first thirty are his human years, which are soon gone; that is when he is healthy and happy; works with pleasure, and is glad of his life. Then follow the donkey’s eighteen years, when one burden after another is laid on him; he carries the corn that feeds others, and kicks and blows are the reward of his faithful services. Then come the dog’s twelve years, when he lies in the corner growling, and has no longer any teeth with which to bite. And when this time is past, the monkey’s ten years bring man to the end. Now man is weak headed and foolish, does silly things and becomes the laughingstock for children.¹

This grim(m) story tells a fundamental, though not absolute truth of life. It provides a healthy and bittersweet compensation for our common belief in and virtual worship of seemingly eternal, or at least life-long youth, with the concomitant repression of life’s darker sides and the denial of death. In fact, Ernest Becker claimed that man’s hope and belief is that the things created in society shall be “of lasting worth and meaning, that they outlive or outshine death and decay.” That is, Becker considers the very basis of civilization to be a defense against human mortality.²

When cosmetics and plastic surgery mold a stiff and unyielding mask of youth, or rather of fictitious youthful *appearance*, old age cannot wear its true face of wisdom. By flattening out the valleys of our wrinkles, we erase the imprints of our character. Fixation in a narcissistic condition of an outworn mask silences the inner voice of meaning in our life.

Jung defines life as the “story of the self-realization of the unconscious. Everything in the unconscious seeks outward manifestation, and the personality too desires to evolve out of its unconscious conditions to experience itself as a whole.”³ The purpose of this book is to describe some of the principal archetypal images at play as we navigate our journey through the cycle of life. In each stage of life, there is an image, or rather a cluster of psychological themes that pertain to that particular

1 Grimm Brothers, *The Complete Grimm’s Fairy Tales*, pp. 716-718.

2 Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*, p. 5.

3 Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 3.

period, such as the divine child and the orphan child. Usually, these themes and images do not correspond to actual events or traumata, but reflect internal, archetypal experiences. The feelings related to being an orphan are universal, and a vital facet of growing out of certain states of childhood; sometimes, however, the *archetypal image* of the orphan may devastatingly strike a child by the *traumatic loss* of a parent. Traumatic experiences often cause fixation; the archetypal image becomes frozen in the psyche of the traumatized person, rather than serving as a transitory psychic constellation, eventually integrating into the fullness of the personality.

Furthermore, sometimes we are struck by the disparity between a predominant archetypal image and the prevailing developmental stage, as for instance when we see a *senex-child*, that is, a child who seems to speak the old person's tongue, rather than to be dwelling in the world of childhood play. Or, for example, a mother of four teenage children, all of whom thought of her as a 'child-mother,' immature and childish. Even when they were small, they felt that she wanted them to be parental children taking care of her.

The archetypal idea of *a journey through life* is outlined in chapter I, in which Jung's theory of the stages of life, as well as other perspectives, will be reviewed.

A focus on the river of life as an image of the journey will help illustrate the process of transformation from predetermined fate to individual destiny. Hermes, god of thieves and merchants, souls and roads, will guide us toward the Hermetic aspect of life's journey, infusing the experience of life with meaning, when graced with those soulful gifts that alter life's course.

The first actual stage we encounter on the journey is unavoidably *The Child*, whom we tenderly receive in chapter II. Archetypally, childhood is the *idea* and the *image* of the child rather than the concrete experience. The *divine child*, such as the child-god Eros, dwells in the vicinity of the gods, while ego-reality still seems far away, in a future that shall all too soon whirl up at the horizon. The ego germ dwells as but a prospective seed in *the waters* of the self. However, even at the archetypal level childhood is not pure splendor; behind existence in paradisiacal divinity lies the deep, dark and threatening abyss of *chaos*, of *tohu-va-vohu*, as it is called in the Bible.⁴ Moreover, after reclining on the blissful couch of paradisiacal innocence, the necessary feelings of

⁴ The term 'tohu-va-vohu' can be understood as 'waste and wild, wonder and bewilderment.'

abandonment creep up upon us, as the fleeting moments of divine existence escape us, finding ourselves in the misery of life's orphanage.

In this chapter, as in those that follow, dreams and tales will illustrate the archetypal images of life's stages, considering as well the pathology of the cycle of life, and the meaning that abides in it.

The *Puer* and the *Puella*, the young man and the maiden, rush into the pages of the book in chapter III. They hold *the fire* and *the spirit* of the gods, trying like Prometheus to bring it to the use of *man*—man, sometimes being the threatened father who tries to wrestle the fire out of his son's hand, extinguishing the flame and strangling the spirit, and sometimes in the image of the protective mother, carefully harnessing it by keeping the hearth's fire burning.

As *hero*, the young person brings the fire of the self to the use and benefit of the ego, and exposes in the light of consciousness that which lingers in the dark. The task of the *puer* is to bring the Promethean fire and the spirit to combine with *earth*. However, the young ones are always in danger of tripping off into unfocused associations, or falling recklessly to the ground, onto the harsh earth, drunk by the wine, burned by passion or overtaken by the spirit.

In chapter IV, we shall stand on the firm ground of *The Adult*. The King in the fairytales is the ruler on *earth*, the dominant principle of collective consciousness, powerful in a man-made world. While ours is a world of limits and limitations, borders and boundaries, kings tend to get inflated with their hubris, disregarding the fact of their supposed appointment by divine decree. Kings often forget that they merely represent the unfolding of an archetypal image in the human realm. In the fairy tales of our psyche, the king is the ruler of ego and consciousness, of the self's constellation in the ego, in the adult world of science, cities and organizations. The ego's rule on earth may be a mirror image of the self, the terrestrial replication of the celestial city, and of nature's order and organization, as we find it in a multitude of wonders, e.g. the beehive or the planets' course in the universe. However, inflation is often the insignia of royal rule, whereby the spirit is lost, the earth dries up, and hunger and starvation transpire, since the softness and transparency of the soul are not nourished by material wealth. When inflation possesses power over the king, the feminine soul leaves his fairy tale, escaping like a grasshopper to avoid being squeezed between the pages, as the angry king slams shut the annals of his royal book. But alas the king himself dies—the ink of his pen has dried, the remainder of his page in history remains unwritten. When the waters of childhood are

dry, and the fiery spirit of youth is obsolete, the collective consciousness of norms and rules often becomes repressive and oppressive.

In chapter V. i, we shall look for, and hopefully catch sight of the *Senex*, the old man or woman,⁵ who moves toward corporal invisibility, who leaves ego behind to melt into that greater Self, the world soul, that we can only intuit in the *wind*. He or she stands at the ultimate crossroads of corporal dis-integration and meaninglessness on the one hand, and a sense of humble participation in the unfolding of a greater scheme that relies on the way man shapes his consciousness and carries his destiny, on the other.

In chapter V. ii, we pay homage to Sophocles and his masterful play *Oedipus at Colonus*. We shall ponder upon the perhaps never fully resolved or resolvable conflict between meaninglessness, stagnation and disintegration versus a sense of purpose, meaning and transcendent connection.

We need to balance all these ages of individual development along the life cycle. The proportions change, however, and for instance a too earth-bound young person may set too severe limitations on his spirit, too soon. In the concluding chapter V. iii, we shall see how the puzzle may come together in a meaningful way, as the ego turns toward the Self.

As concerns psychology, we find that Freudian psychology is based primarily on the child archetype, as unfolding in childhood, in spite of, or perhaps because of the fact that Freud himself was quite a neurotic adult. The Jungian approach is more of a *senex*-psychology, in the sense that central importance is placed on the quest for meaning. While Jung remained quite a playful child throughout his entire life, building towers and castles at the shores of the lake, he plunged into his introverted mind in search for meaning.

In so far as there is a nucleus of archetypal images at the center of each stage of life, the archetypal *essence* of each age is present in us all, throughout life, even if in various proportions and changing manifestations.

Jung spoke about the need for a modern myth based not only on ego-consciousness but individuation, which we may define as a vital,

5 While *senex* principally is the old, not necessarily wise man, it is here applied regardless of gender, just as senior, seniority and senility pertain to and affect men as well as women.

dynamic and meaningful relationship between ego and self (or Self⁶), an ever-changing relationship through life, which we shall explore as it unfolds through the seasons of our life. As Thomas Mann says, “Myth is the foundation of life; it is the timeless schema, the pious formula into which life flows when it reproduces its traits out of the unconscious.”⁷

6 Jung did not capitalize the Self as archetype. It is, however, useful to capitalize the Self as archetype of wholeness and center, in distinction from the self as representation in the ego.

7 Thomas Mann, ‘Freud and the Future,’ *Daedalus*, p. 374.

I

THE JOURNEY

As you set out for Ithaka
hope the voyage is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
angry Poseidon—don't be afraid of them:
you'll never find things like that on your way
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,
as long as a rare excitement
stirs your spirit and your body.

Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
wild Poseidon—you won't encounter them
unless you bring them along inside your soul,
unless your soul sets them up in front of you.

Hope the voyage is a long one.
May there be many a summer morning when,
with what pleasure, what joy,
you come into harbors seen for the first time;
may you stop at Phoenician trading stations
to buy fine things,
mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
sensual perfume of every kind—
as many sensual perfumes as you can;
and may you visit many Egyptian cities
to gather stores of knowledge from their scholars.

Keep Ithaka always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you are destined for.
But do not hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,

so you are old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you have gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.

Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her you would not have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.

And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
you will have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.

—Constantine Petrou Cavafy, *Ithaka*⁸

Stages and Seasons

Freud defined and described the stages of psychosexual development in childhood, while Jung brought to light human development during the second half of life. Daniel Levinson, a portal figure in modern life cycle research, who outlined the *Seasons of a Man's Life*, says, "Freud was inclined to regard adulthood primarily as a scene in which the early unconscious conflicts were re-enacted, rather than as a time of further development."⁹

Psychoanalysis outlines what are presumed to be universal, archetypal patterns of development. It is the task of every individual to navigate safely between the stages of development, and to face the challenges that confront the child at each stage. Failing to do so, pathology ensues. In *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1915) and 'The infantile genital organization' (1923), Freud outlined the oral, anal, phallic, (period of) latency and genital stages of development in childhood and puberty.¹⁰ The individual is expected to reach psychosexual maturity by successfully resolving the conflicts and challenges of each particular stage, while unresolved conflicts will cause fixation. For instance, because of too harsh, demanding and controlling parenting during the anal stage, an anal-retentive personality may develop, characterized by obsession and compulsion, orderliness and suspicion.

⁸ Constantine Petrou Cavafy, 'Ithaka,' in *Collected Poems*, p. 36f.

⁹ Daniel Levinson, *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, p. 4.

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on Sexuality*, in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works* (hereafter SE) 7, pp. 125-172; 'The infantile genital organization: An interpolation into the theory of sexuality,' SE 19, pp. 141-148.

Later, Erik Erikson expanded this basic pattern. In *Childhood and Society*, he outlined eight stages, or *ages*, as the title of his chapter pertinently indicates,¹¹ of man. From crib to old age, the human child and adult are confronted with a series of polarities, which he or she must negotiate.

The unfolding of the successive stages follows an innate pattern, according to which each stage presents the individual with a crisis, based on physiological development as well as environmental conditions and requirements. In infancy, the child grapples with the polarity of *basic trust* versus *mistrust* of the oral sensory stage, while the adolescent asks, "Who am I?" That is, the central question that he or she has to deal with concerns *identity* versus *role confusion*. Then, in the final stage of maturity, the old person faces *ego integrity* versus *despair*. Integrity is found "in him who in some way has taken care of things and people and has adapted himself to the triumphs and disappointments adherent to being," while *despair* is the fate of someone who, when facing him or herself in the mirror of death feels that "the time is . . . too short for the attempt to start another life."¹²

In *The Life Cycle Completed*, Erikson and his wife Joan added a ninth stage, where "the dystonic element [is placed] first in order to underscore its prominence and potency." Thus, as the truly old looks back on the road taken, and gathers the polarities of his or her ages, mistrust may paradoxically prevail over trust as a basis for hope, when the elder "rejoice[s] to see [the sun] rise brightly every morning."¹³

In *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, Daniel Levinson divided the life cycle into four partly overlapping eras of roughly twenty to twenty-five years each, defining them as childhood and adolescence, followed by early, middle and late adulthood. From his perspective, Levinson emphasized that each era has its own "distinctive and unifying qualities, which have to do with the character of living."¹⁴ These qualities account for biological, psychological as well as social factors.

The stage of pre-adulthood, i.e., childhood, adolescence and transition into early adulthood, is considered a prelude to adult living. In our present era, however, when the world allegedly belongs to the young

11 Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, Ch. 7: Eight Ages Of Man. As I see it, a *stage* would limit the discussion to a linear, developmental perspective, while *age* enables us to look at the archetypal kernel these stages, or ages, embrace.

12 *Childhood and Society*, pp. 241-2.

13 Joan M. Erikson, in Erik H. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*, pp. 106-7.

14 *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, p. 18.

(increasingly paid for by the no-longer-so-young), the stages of adulthood may rather be termed post-youth (at least for the supposedly unfortunate with whom Botox, peeling or lifting have not successfully obliterated the traces of age and aging).

Early adulthood presents young men and women with a series of major choices and decisions, such as occupation and life style. This is also, generally, an age of energy and potential, as well as social pressure.

In the stage Levinson terms 'Middle adulthood,' approximately from age forty to sixty-five, the qualities of strength and productivity may ripen into judiciousness and breadth of perspective. However, it also entails the midlife transition from youthful narcissism to awareness of one's mortality.

A primary task of late adulthood, says Levinson, resonating the voices of Erikson and Jung, is "to find a new balance of involvement with society and with the self."¹⁵ Furthermore, by finding meaning and value in one's life, the old person may be better equipped to face up to death and dying.

Following Edinger and Neumann, we may say that the journey through our life develops along the ego-Self axis, in four prominent stages: *ego thriving in self*; *ego-self separation*; *ego-affirmation*; *ego-self re-union*, in a continuous process of alternating *ego-self union* and *ego-self separation*.¹⁶

In the first of these stages, the infant's ego dwells as a germ in the unconscious habitat of the primary Self. The early sense of being and playing enables life to rise from the divine waters, and for the ego to emerge from its dwelling in the objective psyche, and the depths of the collective unconscious.

Later, it becomes the task of the puer and the puella to light the torch with the fire of the gods, so that the flame and the spirit can be brought to human ground, where the adult stands, works, disciplines and delineates the boundaries required for the regulation and fulfillment of the individual and human society.

The ego assumes social roles and obligations, fulfilling superego demands, and becomes the core of the law-abiding, committed and contributing citizen. The essence of individuation in the first half of life,

15 *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, p. 36.

16 Edward Edinger, *Ego and Archetype*, Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*.

according to Jung and Neumann, is the establishment of a conscious identity and a well-functioning and well-adapted ego.

In the *second half of life*, the ego needs to realize that it is not the owner of the house, but a temporary tenant in the dwelling of this life. The ego is required to turn toward and reunite with the Self—the Self, which provides the ground-plan, the blueprint of the house, of the personality we inhabit through life, and which is the invisible, gravitational force that enables the ego to keep the house erect. In the senex-part of our life, the ego must approach the deeper, inner layers of existence, the invisible and transparent dimensions of soul, in which the sense of meaning in one's life can crystallize.

These stages are not merely linear, but alternate constantly through life. As we go to sleep at night, the ego resigns its control and lets the Self preside, and when we rise in the morning, the ego turns on the light and dresses anew to meet the tasks of every day.

Jung's Stages of Life

Jung introduced the idea of studying and defining the goals of the second half of life. Daniel Levinson thus considered him “the father of the modern study of adult development.”¹⁷

Jung originally published his essay ‘The Stages of Life’ in 1930,¹⁸ about twenty years before Erikson drew his epigenetic chart of psychosocial development. Jung emphasized the contrary directions of man's focus during the first and second halves of life. Whereas in the first part of life, the development of a firm ego that takes its foothold in the world predominates, in the second part of life, the individual must turn toward Self and spirit.

‘The Stages of Life’ appeared in 1933 in Jung's book *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. It had initially been published as ‘Die seelische Probleme der menschlichen Alterstufen’ in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* in 1930, but was later revised. His ideas regarding the stages of life will be our point of departure and guiding light throughout our discourse.

When Jung set out to “discuss the problems connected with the stages of life,” he devoted several pages of this brief essay to discuss the notion of *problem*. He claims that *problem* is the kernel of culture and

17 *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, p. 4.

18 Carl Gustav Jung, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 8, par. 749-795.

NOTE: CW refers throughout to *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*.

consciousness. “There are no problems without consciousness,” says Jung. Confronting a problem instigates toward consciousness, and due to the development of consciousness, problems come into existence.¹⁹ Furthermore, Jung emphasizes the psychological truth that serious problems can never be fully resolved—if they appear to be, then “something has been lost.” The meaning as well as the purpose of problems lie not in their solution but, rather, in being constantly worked on.²⁰ Similarly, happiness and welfare do not lie in wait to be found at the end of the rainbow, but are aspects of the process and of our attitude, with sadness and misery appropriate company at times of pain, difficulty and loss. The journey entails both the road we take and *how* we take that road, our conscious *attitude*.

Unmistakably, Jung’s conceptualization of the stages of life pertains to living the *conscious life*.

The first stage of life concerns the child’s evolving consciousness, which is based on perceiving the connection between different psychic contents. However, lacking a continuous memory in early childhood, consciousness is sporadic, rather like “single lamps or lighted objects in the far-flung darkness.”²¹ Only when there is continuity of ego-memories does the ego-complex constellate, with a budding sense of subjective identity, whereby the child comes to speak of itself in first person.

Problems arise, says Jung, with the psychic birth and “conscious differentiation from the parents” in puberty.²² This is not only an external process. By internalization, the external limitations become internal divisions, for instance, between opposing impulses. That is, the rise of consciousness both creates and is the result of an inner division between the ego and the perceived *other*—whether that other is an internal instinct or an external object, an autonomous complex detracting energy from the ego, or a split-off shadow.

The period of youth entails the transition from what Jung considers to be the dream of an essentially problem-free childhood to the harsh demands of life. The problem may be external, due, for instance, to “exaggerated expectations, underestimation of difficulties, unjustified optimism, or a negative attitude.” Nevertheless, problems unmistakably may arise, as well, from internal conflicts and disturbances in the

19 CW 8, par. 750, 754.

20 CW 8, par. 770.

21 CW 8, par. 755.

22 CW 8, par. 756.

psychic equilibrium; Jung mentions the sexual instinct and feelings of inferiority.²³

It is in youth, says Jung, that the individual needs to recognize and accept “what is different and strange as a part of his own life,” in spite of the desire to cling “to the childhood level of consciousness,”²⁴ that is, a wish to avoid unpleasure, and to regress into a conflict-free existence.²⁵

Achievement and usefulness, says Jung, “are the lodestars that guide us ... to strike our roots in the world,” to find a place in society, which is essential in the first half of life. Development of a wider consciousness, “which we give the name of culture,”²⁶ is left, however, for a later stage in life. Therefore, while the child struggles to shape its individual ego, the aim in youth—or young adulthood—is to gain a place in society.

Jung’s main concern as expressed in this essay is the arrival at midlife. “The social goal,” he says, “is attained only at the cost of a diminution of personality. Many—far too many—aspects of life which should also have been experienced lie in the lumber-room among dusty memories; but sometimes, too, they are glowing coals under grey ashes.”²⁷

Jung notes that around the age of forty, a slow process of character-change takes place. Interests and inclinations alter. Simultaneously, however, moral principles tend to harden and grow rigid, “as if the existence of these principles were endangered and it were therefore necessary to emphasize them all the more.”²⁸

Jung ascribed the neurotic disturbances of adults to the common desire to prolong youth, and a reticence to crossing the threshold into maturity. The neurotic is someone “who can never have things as he would like them in the present.”²⁹ Typically, the neurotic person projects the cause of his suffering onto the past or the future, and we often hear him or her say, “if only this or that would/would not have happened,” or “if only ... then ...” The cult of youth and the widespread difficulty of accepting old age, typify the pathology of our era.

23 CW 8, par. 761, 762.

24 CW 8, par. 764.

25 Cf. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, SE 18. The word *unpleasure* is “used to translate the German ‘*Unlust*,’ the pain or discomfort of instinctual tension, as opposed to ‘*Schmerz*,’ the sensation of pain. The pleasure principle is correctly the pleasure-unpleasure principle.” (Charles Rycroft, *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, p. 174).

26 CW 8, par. 769.

27 CW 8, par. 772.

28 CW 8, par. 773.

29 CW 8, par. 776.

The fear of midlife is not of death, claims Jung, but of the sun's descent, which means "the reversal of all the ideals and values that were cherished in the morning. ... The sun ... draw[s] in its rays instead of emitting them. Light and warmth decline and are at last extinguished."³⁰

However, it seems to me that ultimately the fishing rod of midlife fears does indeed dip into the lake of death, when light and warmth are extinguished. This, then, may be compensated by, for instance, what for many may be a reassuring faith and belief in existence after death, or, alternatively, the ambition to live a meaningful life. In his essay 'The Soul and Death,' published in 1934, Jung does state that,

From the middle of life onward, only he remains vitally alive who is ready to *die with life*. For in the secret hour of life's midday the parabola is reversed, death is born. The second half of life does not signify ascent, unfolding, increase, exuberance, but death, since the end is its goal.³¹

The challenge in midlife is to come to terms with hitherto neglected features, sometimes conflicting with one's conscious attitude and recognized values. Jung mentions, as well, how bodily characteristics of the opposite sex can be discerned in the older person.

The psychological and biological changes that a person undergoes in the second half of life may thus blur the distinction between male and female traits, though this may be a far cry from the erotic character of juvenile androgyny. Consequently, the man must now put his feminine substance to use, and, says Jung, the woman "her hitherto unused supply of masculinity."³² According to Jung's *Weltanschauung*, certainly influenced by the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of his time, he associated the masculine with *logos* and the feminine with *Eros*.

Thus, in midlife it may happen that "the husband discovers his tender feelings and the wife her sharpness of mind."³³ These changes are dramatic and, says Jung, may lead to marital catastrophe. If so, I suppose that the wife's sharpness of mind may be more threatening to the man, than showing his tender feelings would pose a danger to his wife.³⁴

30 CW 8, par. 778.

31 CW 8, par. 800.

32 CW 8, par. 782.

33 CW 8, par. 783.

34 As in some other instances, Jung's formulation here is quite archaic. Sharpness of mind is not egodystonic to women, whether young or old. Also, many a young man today need not wait till midlife to expose his tender feelings.

Jung expressed the essence of midlife transition beautifully when he says that, “what was great in the morning will be little at evening, and what in the morning was true will at evening have become a lie.”³⁵

In the second half of life, man must withdraw from external preoccupations, and seriously prepare for old age, death and eternity—which amounts to a (not necessarily formal) religious attitude. “An old man who cannot bid farewell to life appears as feeble and sickly as a young man who is unable to embrace it,” says Jung sharply and poetically.³⁶ Rhetorically he wonders if not culture, beyond the nature to which family and children pertain, is the “meaning and purpose of the second half of life.”³⁷

To sum up, Jung’s ideas on the stages of life pertain to the development of consciousness as it manifests in the life cycle. The essence lies in the *problem* that faces the individual at each stage; a problem less to be resolved, but rather to be confronted and challenged. Jung thus emphasizes life as a process of becoming conscious, which transforms the experience of life into a living experience.

As the individual traverses the arc of life, he or she may be resistant to the problems posed by each transition, such as an expanding ego consciousness; striking roots in society; confronting the decline and integrating the opposites, including those of gender; and then death and eternity. Jung says that, “the art of life is the most distinguished and rarest of all the arts.”³⁸ For some travelers along the journey of life, the art of life becomes increasingly conceptual, for others more and more esthetic; for some minimalistic, for others increasingly abstract.

The second half of life should not merely be a repetition of one’s youth and young adulthood, but rather a period that enables integration by accentuating those matters of one’s psyche that have not been taken care of well enough.

Jung divides life into four parts. We shall elaborate here on the respective stages less from a developmental perspective, but rather as an effort to extract the archetypal images at the core of each age.

35 CW 8, par. 784.

36 CW 8, par. 792.

37 CW 8, par. 787.

38 CW 8, par. 789.

All the World's a Stage, and a Stage of Life

There is an archetypal idea of the journey through life, unfolding in successive stages from a point of origin, across the summit, to a point of conclusion. Daniel Levinson says, "to speak of a general, human life cycle is to propose that the journey from birth to old age follows an underlying, universal pattern on which there are endless cultural and individual variations."³⁹

It is an ancient idea that the human goes through universal stages of life, wherein he or she has to remove the garment of the previous stage, wear a new mantle and face new challenges. We find a wealth of descriptions of life's stages and its seasons in different cultures. It was a common theme in poems and profane iconography during the Middle Ages.⁴⁰ Has anyone described it more succinctly than Shakespeare, with his bittersweet British irony?

All the world's a stage,
 And all the men and women merely players.
 They have their exits and their entrances,
 And one man in his time plays many parts,
 His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
 Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.
 Then the whining school-boy, with his satchel
 And shining morning face, creeping like snail
 Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
 Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
 Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then, a soldier,
 Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
 Jealous in honor, sudden, and quick in quarrel,
 Seeking the bubble reputation
 Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
 In fair round belly with good capon lined,
 With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
 Full of wise saws and modern instances;
 And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
 Into the lean and slippered pantaloone,
 With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
 His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
 For his shrunk shank, and his big, manly voice,

39 *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, p. 6.

40 Cf. Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, p. 21ff.

Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
 And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
 That ends this strange, eventful history,
 Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
 Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.⁴¹

In the world of ancient Greece, the fate of one's life was spun at birth by the three Moirai, or Parcae, in Roman mythology. The three goddesses, as Hesiod describes in his *Theogony*, allotted mortals their share of good and evil.⁴² According to Hesiod, they were the daughters of Zeus and Themis, goddess of divine order and law. However, they have also been ascribed daughterhood of Nyx, goddess of the Night. Furthermore, Ananke, goddess of Necessity, has likewise been said to be their mother.

Hillman, following Plato, outlines the relation between Necessity and the human condition, and sees Ananke as the mother of the Fates.⁴³ Sanford, who also calls attention to how closely Ananke is related to the three Fates, says she lays upon us "the necessity to create in whatever way is appropriate for us, for when creative energy is not expressed, then it turns against us."⁴⁴ Ananke demands of us not to deviate from necessary fate, be it the inborn gifts we have received, the limitations imposed upon us, or the call of our destiny.

Every individual carries personal responsibility to let the gifts one has been given unfold. At the beginning of our journey, we have been given a talent, a gift has been handed over to us, and it is our obligation to enable its materialization, to the extent that circumstances permit.

At birth, the predetermined *fate* of a person's soul was spun, but not one's personal *destiny*. Clotho was the spinner, Lachesis allocated one's lot in life, the "unalterable events and circumstances" one encounters, and Atropos represented the inevitable end to life. Described differently, the Fates held the thread of life allotted to each human soul. Clotho chose the thread, Lachesis measured it, and Atropos cut the thread, marking the end of a person's existence, at his or her "predetermined time of death."⁴⁵

41 William Shakespeare, *As You Like It* (act 2, scene 7), in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, p. 666.

42 Hesiod, *Theogony*, in Richard S. Caldwell, *Hesiod's Theogony*, p. 41.

43 James Hillman, 'On the Necessity of Abnormal Psychology: Ananke and Athene,' in James Hillman (Ed.), *Facing the Gods*, p. 15.

44 John A. Sanford, *Fate, Love, and Ecstasy*, p. 22.

45 *Fate, Love, and Ecstasy*, p. 70.

From this perspective, Fate overrides free will. Not even the hero, who stands up against the gods, escapes predetermined fate. His task is to break away, to wrestle himself out from the archetypal bonds that restrain the human ego. Yet, however strong his will and determination, his strength is limited by the boundless power of Fate. However, when Fate is reined in by Necessity and by the urge to follow one's path, individual destiny may take precedence over god-determined fate.

Prometheus, to whom we shall return later, tells the chorus, who claim he is neglectful of his own misfortunes,

Not so nor yet hath all-determining Fate
 Ordained the end, but, when ten thousand pains
 Have crushed my body, from bonds shall I escape.
 For Art is weaker than Necessity.

He then tells the chorus that Zeus is less powerful than Fate and Necessity, unable to "alter that which is ordained."⁴⁶

On our journey through life, an incessant tension prevails between predetermined fate and free will, between archetypal patterns as opposed to individual distinctiveness. For example, at the end of his journey, Oedipus claims innocence of his horrendous deeds, because he was "still unborn when that decree was spoken."⁴⁷ We shall later return to Oedipus at Colonus, and ponder upon such questions—are we guilty of our fore-doomed fate? Are we responsible for the genes we inherit?

Parents are to some extent transitional figures between the fate of the ancestors and the individual's free will. In modern psychology, the parents often carry the blame for the child's difficulty in resolving its complexes. From the child's point of view, the parents are the representatives of the rule and laws of the ancestors and what came before. They thus carry the chains of predetermined fate from which the child eventually needs to break away. We might say that the parents are representatives of the past who the child needs to oppose in order to establish his or her independence. While individuals differ in the quality of their parenting, *parents* constitute a target for the negative projections that are necessary, in order to express the sense of abandonment and neglect that necessarily accompany the growth toward independence.

Existentially oriented psychoanalysis tends, however, to emphasise the person's own freedom to decide, to find meaning, and responsibil-

46 Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, p. 22.

47 Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, in *The Theban Plays* p. 101.

ity in formulating his or her destiny, with the concomitant anxiety this freedom causes.

Martin Buber tells the tale about the tzaddik, a righteous man, who while in his cell awaiting trial, converses with the chief of the gendarmes about God, man and the Scriptures. At one point he tells his warden, "In every era, God calls to every man: 'Where are you in your world? So many years and days of those allotted to you have passed, and how far have you gotten in your world?'"⁴⁸ This reflects the Talmudic saying that everything is foreseen, and everything is laid bare, yet everything is in accordance with the will of man. It concerns, as well, the saying, ascribed to Akaviya Ben Mahalalel, a contemporary of the sage Hillel the Elder (beginning of the contemporary era),

Know where you came from, where you are going, and before whom you will in the future have to give account and reckoning. Where you came from—from a fetid drop; where you are going—to a place of dust, worms and maggots; and before whom you will in the future have to give account and reckoning—before God, the King of kings.⁴⁹

Whether viewed in religious terms of a transcendent God, or psychologically, as an internalized God-image, the unaccounted-for life lacks the feeling of being rooted in a sense of meaning.

In Judaism we find two accounts, which seem to mirror each other of man's progression through life. In *Pirkei Avot*, we find the following highly ethical outline, man arriving at the end of life at a surprisingly advanced age:

Yehuda ben Tema used to say: At the age of five, one is fit for the study of the Scriptures; at ten, for the Mishnah [the Jewish law, first part of the Talmud]; at thirteen, for fulfilling the commandments; at fifteen, for the study of Gemara [commentaries on the Mishnah, second part of the Talmud]; at eighteen, for the bridal chamber; at twenty to pursue a calling; at thirty, for the peak of strength; at forty, for understanding; at fifty, for counsel; at sixty, for mature

48 Martin Buber, *The Way of Man: According to the Teaching of Hasidism*, p. 5f.

49 From *Pirkei Avot*, Sayings (literally 'chapters') or *Ethics of the Fathers*, a Mishnaic tractate; notice that 'Fathers' here means fundamental principles rather than persons. Akaviya Ben Mahalalel seems to have been a lousy politician; after the death of Shammai, Hillel's eminent opponent yet his vice-president of the Sanhedrin, the ancient Jewish Council, Akaviya was offered the position on condition he retracts some of the opinions he had expressed, for which he refused. He declared, "Let it not be said that, for the sake of office, I changed my views" (Avrohom Davis, *Pirkei Avos*, p. 79).

age; at seventy, for the fullness of years; at eighty, for spiritual strength; at ninety—bent beneath the weight of years; at a hundred—as one that is already dead, who has passed away and ceased to be in this world.⁵⁰

However, in the beginning of Ecclesiastes,⁵¹ Kohelet (that is, Solomon), proclaims, “Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” He wonders,

What gains a man from all his labor at which he labors under the sun? One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides for ever. The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to its place where it rises again. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; to the place from where the rivers come, there they return again. That which has been, is what shall be; and that which has been done is what shall be done; and there is nothing new under the sun.⁵²

Despairingly he argues, “That which is crooked cannot be made straight; and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.” With sorrow, he acknowledges that there is much grief in wisdom, and “he that increases knowledge increases sorrow.”⁵³

In the exegetic text ‘Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) Rabbah,’ we find an interpretation of King Solomon’s reflections and exclamations about the vanity of life,

R. Samuel bar Isaac said in the name of R. Simon ben Eliezer: The seven times Kohelet mentioned ‘vanity’ correspond to the seven worlds a man beholds. At the age of one, he is like a king lounging in a canopied litter, being hugged and kissed by everyone. At two and three, he is like a pig, sticking his hands into the gutters and putting whatever he finds into his mouth. At ten, he leaps about like a kid. At twenty, he is like a neighing horse, making himself attractive as he goes looking for a wife. Once wed, he has a saddle put upon him, and he works like an ass. After he brings children into the world, he has to brazen his face

50 Adapted from Hayim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky, *The Book of Legends*, p. 578. The Mishnah is a compilation by Judah haNasi of Jewish Oral Tradition, c. 200 CE. Whereas the Mishnah is the first part of the Talmud, Gemara comprises the second part, a commentary on the Mishnah.

51 Greek, translated from Hebrew *Kohelet*, ‘addressing an assembly,’ referring to King Solomon.

52 Ecclesiastes 1:2-9.

53 Ecclesiastes 1:15, 18.

like a dog in order to provide food for himself and his children. When grown old, he is [bent] like an ape.⁵⁴

The experience of human life as an animal, in pleasure as well as hardship, and certainly in its downward fall, seems to be universal, stretching beyond both the wise teachings of the Talmud, and the astute lessons of the Grimm Brothers.

The outline of the four stages of life, the Ashramas in Hinduism, however, leads toward a different perspective on the (ideal) path of the second half of life.

The first formative, student stage is one of practical and spiritual education. It is followed by the Householder stage, in which family and professional life dominate. Ideally, when the obligations as householder come to an end, the age of the Hermit follows. As described in the Laws of Manu, “when a householder sees his skin wrinkled, and his hair white, and the sons of his sons, then he may ... go forth from the village into the forest and reside there.”⁵⁵ While this is usually not entirely practical for most modern men or women, the essence of withdrawal, of bringing the sacred fire “from village to forest,” and carrying out the sacrifices that may add sacredness to one’s life, may be psychologically valid in our era as well.

In the fourth Ashrama, the person renounces home and attachment, desires and responsibilities, and becomes a wandering beggar. Thus, with worldly ties broken, the sanyasi, devoid of attachment, devotes himself entirely to spiritual concerns. Again, while most of us whose existence is too worldly to allow us to come anywhere near the fulfillment of such ideals, we may reflect upon them as archetypal essences of the ages, or stages, of life. It is therefore important to let these core elements endow us with the soulfulness and spirit that they hold, so that they can accompany us, rather than be deleted from the chronicles of our journey.

The Journey through Life

Willingly or not, everyone has to make the journey. The neurotic, however, is a reluctant traveler, who, as Otto Rank said, refrains from taking the loan, that is, the load of life, because one day he will have to pay

54 *The Book of Legends*, p. 577f.

55 *The Laws of Manu*, c. 1500 BCE, translated by George Buhler; <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/india/manu-full.html>.

it back. The way through life is to some extent a given, following constitutional imprints and genetic tracks. Sometimes fortune as well as misfortune are determined by fate, while at other times we may claim the credit for our achievements. And sometimes, we must personally carry the burden of guilt for our wrongdoings. As we shall see toward the end of our journey, upon arriving at Colonus the old, blind and dying Oedipus, former King of Thebes, confronts the question of guilt, the debt we need to pay in our life. And now and then, we need to be grateful to another person for the happy turn of events, while at times we want to blame that other, whether human or transcendent, whether rightly or wrongly, for the calamities that have befallen us.

The perspective of life as a cycle lived through its stages enables us to bring the archetypal and the personal dimensions together. Heraclitus stated, as did Plato, that you cannot step into the same river twice,

The river
 where you set
 your foot just now
 is gone—
 those waters
 giving way to this,
 now this.⁵⁶

Man cannot step into the same river twice, says Bachelard, because, “in his inmost recesses, the human being shares the destiny of flowing water.”⁵⁷ However, the neurotic person refrains from stepping into the river even once. He, or she, prefers to watch it from a far, or suffers from the absence of a river streaming through his body and soul. The absence of living his life *consciously* is not the neurotic’s problem, but rather *living* his life.

While the river preserves its identity, it is incessantly moving and changing, simultaneously being and becoming.⁵⁸

The journey of life’s river flows along relatively stable riverbeds, such as genetic traits, that hardly or only very slowly change their route. Within these tracks, however, the character of the river may vary: in one, the bubbling water gushes forth, the beds splash with sparkling water at the slightest turn of the river, while along the route of another one’s river, the water seems to have dried up, the weak stream more

56 Heraclitus, *Fragments*, translation by Brooks Haxton, fragment 41, p. 27.

57 Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, p. 6.

58 Plato, *Symposium and the Death of Socrates* (Phaedo 71), p. 151ff.

reminiscent of an old man's urination than the river's joyous scream at springtime's new beginning. Moreover, in the span of a lifetime we might encounter stormy weather and upheaval, during which "[t]he waves of dark and bright rivers rush together, crashing over one another."⁵⁹ Dramatic, and sometimes traumatic turns and tides, may cause us to doubt the value of our journey, or even the possibility of ever realizing it.

If we consider the allegorical journey along the river of life, what relationship do we find between the universal, archetypal route, and one's individual course? In a small Swedish book from 1941 called *The Four Ages of Man*, which I found in a second hand bookstore in the Old City of Stockholm, the author, a wise doctor by the name of Jacob Billström, asks if a person changes during life. His answer is, "yes and no," and he continues,

In a way, the personality is unchangeable and identifiable all through life. One can always hear if a violin, a flute, a French horn or a piano is being played, even if at one time it is a lullaby, another time a march, then a symphony, and at last "Silent Shadows."⁶⁰

In myth and lore, as well as in the development of human civilization, life is often pictured as a journey, and many are the images that portray the journey through life. Sometimes we are summoned to endure the hero's challenges, to wander a sacred path in awe, or to bravely traverse the narrow bridge of hope that has been delicately stretched over the abyss of despair. For some, life's journey is like the seafarer who navigates across the great sea.

The essence is that the journey is not merely an instinctual and heedless passage through time, but the quest for an interrelated and meaningful life. Consequently, the pilgrimage to the center, or the way out of the labyrinth, serve as archetypal images of the journey.⁶¹ "Only in him who in some way has taken care of things and people," says Erik Erikson, may the fruit gradually ripen, referring to the soulful journey through life.⁶²

In the first half of life, the task of the young traveler is to depart from home, to step out into the world in search for his or her adventure, to

⁵⁹ C. G. Jung, *The Red Book: Liber Novus*, p. 317.

⁶⁰ Jacob Billström, *Människans Fyra Åldrar*, p. 6. *Silent Shadows* is a poem by the Swedish poet Erik Gustav Geijer, sung by choirs at funerals.

⁶¹ Cf. J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, p. 165.

⁶² *Childhood and Society*, p. 268.

find his or her own individual path. However, in the second half, we find ourselves on what often amounts to a very long journey in search of Home. In many a tale, the hero, for instance Gilgamesh, sets off to find life's elixir, while other stories, such as the Odyssey, revolve around the hero's long and arduous journey home.

This archetypal journey of life is constantly repeated throughout the never-ending process of individuation. We find ourselves returning to this venture repeatedly, every night, as we set out on our nightly voyage into the landscape of our unconscious. Many dreams begin by being on the way, for instance, "I am on my way to ...," "I am driving on a road that leads into the desert ...," "I am walking through one room after the other in a long corridor-like building ...," "I am walking towards my office, but it looks different than in reality," "I walk on the pavement and on the opposite side of the street someone seems to follow me ...," "I go down into an underground parking...," "I am in my car, but someone I don't know is driving," or, "I have to go to the place from where I came ..."

Prominently, we are familiar with the journey of Dante, who at the very beginning of his *Divine Comedy* finds himself "midway along the journey of our life." Dante writes about *our* life, seemingly indicating that this is not an entirely personal venture, but a path toward a higher goal. Having "wandered off from the straight path," he finds himself in the dark, savage, bitter wood of midlife, which we often, just like Dante, enter without knowing how we got there, suddenly waking up from unconsciousness; "I had become so sleepy at the moment when I first strayed," reflects the poet, acknowledging his lack of consciousness.⁶³

The following dream reflects how Danit, a woman midway through her life but seven hundred years after the *Divina Comedia*, finds herself in a similar awakening, in a dark cellar not very different from Dante's "wood of wilderness,"

I am in a lit-up house. It's a conventional small-town or suburban house. I start walking around the house, as if I am somnambulistic, as if I am walking while sleeping in my own dream. I get down into the cellar, without knowing how I got there. The cellar is dark, frightening, cold and dirty, with dead animals and perhaps dead people there as well. I don't know how to find my way out.

63 Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, p. 67.

Similar to the poet, this dream triggered the process to search for her soul, which seemed to have been lost in the little boxes of life's routines and obligations.

The core of many a fairy tale is the search for the missing *anima*, the elusive essence of soul and life. The king's stiffened heart, or the barrenness of the country, reflect a lack of vitality, a need for soul and renewal. The crucial and painful battle ensues between the cruelty of an empty, unrelated and meaningless existence, and the depth and fullness of a soulful life. For the lucky few, individuation and tending to the archetypal, divine core comes naturally, while the rest of us need to consciously embrace the Self to create an animated life.

Consequently, the cycle of life pertains not only to man's inevitable development along the stages of life, but to the archetypal essence of *meaning* around which each age constellates.⁶⁴ As Jung says,

There is a thinking in primordial images, in symbols which are older than the historical man, which are inborn in him from the earliest times, and, eternally living, outlasting all generations, still make up the groundwork of the human psyche. It is only possible to live the fullest life when we are in harmony with these symbols; wisdom is a return to them.⁶⁵

Thus, wisdom according to Jung, is the return to eternal symbols, so that life can be fully lived. The following is a dream of Oshra, a forty-four-year-old woman, who felt depressed and estranged from herself,⁶⁶

I am on my way home, but on an unknown road, which seems not to be fully ready yet. I arrive at a grove, and find myself walking on a narrow path, in between trees. Then suddenly the path comes to an end, at the edge of a steep mountain. A short black man, not a dwarf though, helps me very carefully to descend the mountain. Then, it is like a valley or a canyon, and I set my foot on the banks of a broad river with streaming water. A group of black men

64 In so far as we assume that every phenomenon, including ego and complex, has an archetypal nucleus that defines its meaning, and to the extent that we consider the Self as the central archetype of meaning, the Self induces each age with its particular nucleus of meaning. The fully lived, conscious and experienced life is thus rooted in the Self.

65 'The Stages of Life,' CW 8, par. 794.

66 This name, like all others, has been altered to preserve anonymity. Names have often been chosen to express a characteristic trait of the person or a phenomenon relevant to the subject under discussion. 'Oshra,' for instance, means happiness, felicity.

and women of all ages do things—they sing, wash clothes, etc. I cross the river, and walk along its other bank. I come to a place where an African woman sits. She sits on an old almost broken plastic chair with a small old plastic table in front of her. She hands me a key with a big ring, and tells me I am heading for a wedding. I continue on my way, but can't remember if I still have the key in my hand.

This woman's road home to herself has yet to be paved in order to become known to her—and no less, the road needs to become known, to become conscious, in order to materialize. On her way, the dreamer needs to walk through the grove, to dwell in the vicinity of Ashera, goddess of the grove, in order to restore her feminine self.

In the Bible, the male, patriarchal and monotheistic One God, fought relentlessly against the Goddess of the Grove. For example, in Judges 6:26, Gideon is told to "offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the Ashera which you shall cut down." *Ashera*, goddess of the grove, poses an immediate threat to Yahweh, whose name has been understood as 'ehyeh *asher* ehyeh,' in a splendid combination of multiple meanings, wherein the repressed and battled goddess remains, uncannily but naturally, positioned at the very center of the victorious God.⁶⁷ As regards man's psyche, Jung says, "Our true religion is a monotheism of consciousness, a possession by it, coupled with a fanatical denial of the existence of fragmentary autonomous systems."⁶⁸

But the dreamer goes further into her internal depths. She is carefully led into the depths by an unknown animus, the short black man. Her life energy is rejuvenated by the stream of the river. To hear the singing and to feel the music, even in everyday tasks such as washing dirty laundry, of purifying the garment so that it can be worn in pleasure and delight, is healing to her depression.

In her dream, this woman performs the important task of crossing the river into a yet deeper, more alien realm of her journey, receiving a key on her way to the wedding, aiming at an internal integration of aspects that until now she had neglected. But the value of the gift may lie not so much in receiving the key, but to hold on to the awareness that it may be lost to consciousness, slipping into oblivion, the way we often all too easily forget the gods' most precious gifts. We often receive these gifts of Hermes when we least expect them, by unimposing people (or for instance by animals or trees or unexpected little creatures), so that we easily may neglect them, or even take notice. For Oshra, the

67 See below, p. 164.

68 CW 13, par. 51.

African woman's old and simple chair and table held a message—to see and respect what is so easily passed-by, arrogantly ignored. On the road to one's Self, to the experience of a meaningful life, the key needs to be constantly cared for. This is only possible by appreciating its value.

The River of Life

The river receives its energy from the water with which Father Sky impregnates Mother Earth, who provides the material container, which shapes the water into its particular character, for instance as river. "River is vital fluidity," moving through the upper as well as the lower world. There are rivers of "fertility and prosperity, rivers of forgetting, rivers of binding oath, ... rivers of rebirth, rivers of death, rivers of sorrow, all presided over in our mythic history by beneficent deities, dreadful nixies or changeable river spirits."⁶⁹

Rivers are holy and worshipped in many cultures. They are often the source of civilization, and have played a central role in the development and formation of human culture. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister wrote,

The Ganges, above all is the river of India, which has held India's heart captive and drawn uncounted millions to her banks since the dawn of history. The story of the Ganges, from her source to the sea, from old times to new, is the story of India's civilization and culture, of the rise and fall of empires, of great and proud cities, ... ever changing, ever flowing, and yet ever the same Ganga.⁷⁰

The basins at the rivers of Euphrates and Tigris in Mesopotamia, today's Iraq, provided the cradle of civilization of the ancient world, around three thousand BCE. Not only does the river reflect the life of man, but life and humankind have developed along the rivers. Those were the first highroads, notes Mumford, enabling transportation and exchange of goods.⁷¹ Cultures could connect with each other by sailing the rivers. Hence, control of the waterways became essential. Obstruction of the flow of merchandise could be a cause for warfare between cities.

⁶⁹ The Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism, *The Book of Symbols*, p. 40.

⁷⁰ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, p. 51.

⁷¹ Lewis Mumford, *The City in History*, p. 71f.

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Erel Shalit is a Jungian psychoanalyst in Ra’anana, Israel. He is the author of several publications, including *Enemy, Cripple, Beggar: Shadows in the Hero’s Path*, *The Hero and His Shadow: Psychopolitical Aspects of Myth and Reality in Israel*, *The Complex: Path of Transformation from Archetype to Ego*, and *Requiem: A Tale of Exile and Return*. Dr. Shalit lectures at professional institutes, universities, and cultural forums in Israel, Europe, and the United States.

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