

THE VALUE AND MEANING OF DEPRESSION¹

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It is some years now since I began collecting material about the Wilderness, which is perhaps the most apt symbol for depression. It symbolizes a psychological condition or experience when one has the feeling of being in a desert place, or in a wilderness - a feeling of being lost, lost in an inhospitable region, so lost that one is in a state of despair.

For the wilderness or desert is of course a place where there is no water. Life is precarious, human life almost impossible. A human being in the wilderness is alone, isolated, his life in great danger. The springs of water, of life-giving water, have failed and no rain falls from heaven. Heaven and Earth seem to have forgotten their children.

The name "wilderness" means wild-land, the uncultivated, usually unproductive "surround" to the relatively small area tamed by the group. In the Old Testament, much of the narrative relates to small groups living in oases, supported by wells. The wilderness surrounded these small groups who gradually made the beginnings of an "establishment" where the rules, written and unwritten, concerned the welfare of the in-group, all the rest of mankind being considered barbarians, the inhabitants of the wilderness.

Whenever the wilderness appears in myth or in dream it refers to a place or state of stagnation, where there is no life, where everything is arid and nothing can grow. Indeed the wilderness only comes to life in the brief period of the spring rains. Then as the Bible says: "the desert shall blossom as the rose," as anyone who has been to the Arizona desert in the spring has seen and marvelled. All the rest of the year the desert is barren, stony, subject to extremes of heat and cold, the only living things usually being thorns and thistles - again I quote from the Bible story, while poisonous serpents, stinging insects and other noxious things usually abound.

Now when the wilderness appears in myth or dream it obviously refers to a psychological condition having these same characteristics - a condition where the flame of life sinks. All energy disappears into the unconscious and the individual suffers from depression and inertia. Life seems to be slowed down. We have probably, each of us, experienced such a depression at some time in our lives. This state may be shortlived, merely a passing mood, or it can be prolonged so that we can no longer look upon it as a passing mood, but must consider it as a sickness - of the soul - of the psyche. In its worst form such a depression can amount to a psychosis, a melancholia or the depressive phase of the so-called manic-depressive insanity. Such a depression, whatever its degree, depends on a withdrawal of libido into the unconscious, an "abaissement du niveau mental."

Most people have at some period of their lives suffered from the state of depression of such severity that it could aptly be described as being in the wilderness. A spirit of dullness and gloom and hopelessness falls upon one at such a time, and nothing seems worth while. Life

has temporarily lost its savor. This condition may be nothing more than a mood, such as Kipling describes. He compares it to a camel's hump, a burden on the back that one cannot get rid of. In typical extraverted fashion he advises exercise and the outdoors as a means to dispel the sultry inertia it induces. "...The cure for this ill/ Is not to sit still/ And froust with a book by the fire/ But to take a large hoe end a shovel or so/ And dig till you gently perspire."

What Kipling is advising, however, is not just physical exercise and a willed attempt to rouse oneself to throw off the burden. Important as this change of attitude is, something more is needed. And Kipling's advise is far more than that, for he suggests that the sufferer should no longer merely toy with a book or even immerse himself in mental distraction, but should instead go back to Mother Nature to evoke the primitive, the original man in himself by digging in the earth.

Laurens van der Post tells us that to the Bushman of Kalahari desert in Africa (The Heart of the Hunter, Wm. Morris and Co., P. 233-4) water has the meaning of spirit, while rain is personified as the Bull of Heaven. There is a legend that when the rain came to earth in the form of the Bull he found a woman, the First Woman, and fell ardently in love with her, as Zeus, in the form of a Bull fell in love with Europa. She returned his affection and, also, like Europa, she mounted him, and guided him to a tree in a ravine where he fell asleep. On waking he thinks the woman is still with him and so he returns to his own element plunging into a spring which rises in the center of a pool in the ravine. Van der Post interprets this as meaning that the male water or spirit, is contained in the female, earth, like a fountain of water springing out of the earth.

Van der Post first learned this story when he was in the desert with a band of Bushmen. It was a time of terrible drought before the rains came. At that time he thought of the earth as a women talking to the rain as if it were a lover. When he came to the camp a woman sitting beside the camp fire began to sing:

"Under the sun
the earth is dry,
by the fire alone I cry

All day long the earth cries
for the rain to come and take me away."

Then a man replied:

"O listen to the wind
You woman there,
The time is coming,
The rain is near.
Listen to your heart,
Your hunter is here."

Van der Post continues: "This linking of the dryness of the earth with the state of loneliness in the woman's heart: the coming of the rain to the earth with the hunter, seemed to me now anticipated and explained in these Bushman myths of the wind and the rain." (ibid p.234)

This legend is similar to the Mayan ritual of the Rain-God. In Yucatan there are no surface springs and rivers or brooks, for water sinks down through cracks in the limestone of which the land made. So all life, animal and vegetable is dependent on the supreme God of the Rain. And should the rains fail the Mayans performed a magic ceremony to lure the Rain-God back to earth. A young maiden was chosen to be the bride of the God and was sacrificed to him by throwing her into the sacred cenote, a huge dingle-like hollow. This is a natural hollow, very deep with steep sides, and in its center is a pool of water, which was believed to be the horne of the rain god. If he accepted the maiden as his bride there would be rain, but if he rejected her, and she came to the surface again, the rains would fail and the unfortunate girl was killed as having been rejected by God.

So to the Bushman the rainless wilderness speaks of the spiritual dryness and depression which the coming of the rain, the spirit, would dispel. For the rain is indeed the creative moisture of the Spirit. And not infrequently in everyday life if when one is in a depression one can get back to nature, life does begin to flow again. This is true, whether one digs in the earth of the outdoors, or whether one digs into oneself to find the instinctive primitive person in the unconscious. It is as if the waters of the spirit that had been dammed up in one's depression begin once more to moisten our aridity. As the alchemist Philalethes advises, "Moisten the dry earth with its own moisture." Whatever the cause of one's depression may be contact with the earth - either the inner ground of one's being or the outer earth of our marvellous world - such a contact often has a healing effect.

In serious cases of depression travel and change of scene are often prescribed, for instance in the hope that the lost libido, the lost interest, may be intrigued by distractions and that in this way the individual may begin to take an interest in life once more. But these distractions are rarely of lasting help, the sufferer soon falls back into his depression again.

Now the cause of depression may be some set-back in life - a trivial and transitory one - perhaps, disappointment because something one had anticipated has failed to materialize, or a cherished plan has fallen through, or an ego wish has been frustrated. When the depression is more serious, it may be due to a block in one's whole life - the death of a loved one, the break-up of a marriage, serious illness, failure in business, or the collapse of all one's hopes and ambitions. These and such-like misfortunes are the experiences that may cause depression. But whatever the cause, the determining cause, as we call it, may be, the mechanism of depression is loss of libido. The life energy and interest disappear into the unconcious, and the concious life is left high and dry, sterile, arid, miserable and isolated. One feels oneself to be in a barren place, a wilderness or desert, where nothing grows and no life can flourish.

There is, however, another cause for depression. In the situations we have been considering the libido falls into the unconscious because its outward flow has been frustrated, and conscious desires checked. But there are situations where the libido is withdrawn from consciousness because some unconscious content, some unknown element, that has a tendency to rise into consciousness, exerts an attraction on it. The feeling of emptiness and sterility and depression are very similar in the two cases, but the significance of the happening is very different. In the former situation the depression is due to a regression, in the latter it is due to a preoccupation of the libido with an inner unconscious content that is demanding conscious attention. This is a creative depression and if the individual can recognize the nature of his trouble and can cooperate with the movement of the libido he may be able to bring the unconscious content up into consciousness in a creative act.

Now this term creative act does not refer only to some artistic product, writing, painting and so on. It can also refer to any unconscious element that belongs to the wholeness of the individual, whether this be "good" or "bad." Such an element may have been experienced formerly only in projection, but now it is ready to be recognized as a valid part of the total individual. For instance, if one has, till this moment, only seen some element of one's shadow in projection to another person, it may happen that a hint, a suspicion, of the truth, very tentative, very vague, may intrude itself on consciousness. And for a fleeting moment one questions whether he or she really meant what one had formerly assumed was due to hostility. Could it have another explanation? In other words the projection has been challenged, and one isn't happy about it. Now to follow up this hint requires courage and involves a creative act. If it is successful one reaps the reward, but it will take hard work.

Usually, however, the term "creative act" is only used of making something new, outside of oneself, some object or art product which is entirely new, but of course such creations also come from the riches of the unconscious and their moulding into a form that is acceptable in the world is the task of the creative individual. In his book, The Journey Home, Richard Church speaks of the experience of a creative net as being frequently preceded by depression. He points out that such a depression is not merely a state of boredom and low spirits and distaste for life, but it is usually accompanied by restlessness and dissatisfaction and frequently with a vague sense of guilt, that can only be assuaged by work, not extraverted work, such as Kipling advises regarding "the camel's hump" but introverted work. The artist by taking up his tools can sometimes find peace, the writer and the poet by starting to write. But it is not only the artist who suffers from this kind of depression. Richard Church writes: "First and last things were still all important (to me) but now, by being constantly busy I had an almost plausible excuse for postponing consideration of them. This is a dangerous condition (he continues). It is the cause of those languors which overcome most people in middle life. That "darkness at noon," that accidie which halts the traffic between earth and paradise, is the direct result of the loss of creative leisure." (ibid. p.104) I shall have occasion to speak of the traffic between earth and heaven again later.

The history of religious people contains many accounts of similar experiences. Accidie, empty dryness of the spiritual life is described as a universal experience on the quest for spiritual maturity, and many religious books tell us of the "Valley of the Shadow" that all must pass through or the "Night Sea Journey" that the hero must undertake on his quest.

This brings us to the need for a further look at the title of our paper. I have called it "The Value and Meaning of Depression." One value of depression has already emerged namely that when we are over-extended, concerned with too many things, too many distractions, when "the world is too much with us" and "Waking and sleeping we (have been) wasting our powers" - then presently our physical and psychological reserves are depleted, consciously at such times we suffer from a let-down, and naturally we feel empty. We are cut off from the springs of living water within, the water that Jesus spoke of to the woman at the well. He told her that if she drank of the water that he would give her, it would become in her a spring of living water springing up to eternal life. When we are cut off from access to this water naturally we are depressed. One value of such a depression is that it calls a halt to our over-expenditure and demands that we stop for a while to recuperate our energies.

The meaning and value of such a depression are obvious. But in the more serious and longer lasting experiences I am talking about we have to carry our investigation further. The value of

depression can still be explained in part as calling a halt to our incessant busy-ness, but then the question of what the meaning of the experience may be, has to be faced. The dictionary defines "meaning" as "significance and purpose." This is very apt for the meaning of the word, but is far from satisfactory to convey the inner sense of meaning that we are concerned with. For the meaning of meaning is not conveyed by a definition, that only covers the semantic aspect of the word, but unless the emotional aspect of an object or a situation is grasped, is felt, its true meaning escapes us; and furthermore the meaning of either a situation or an object is contained also in its purpose. Meaning answers the question "What is it for." I once read an analysis of the way very small children think. When I was a child we were taught that a noun is the name of a thing, and that children learn to speak first by the use of nouns only. In some measure this is true, but the writer of the article I was speaking of suggested that to a little child it is the purpose of the object that conveys meaning to him. So he might say: "A ball is to play;" "shoes are to walk;" "cereal is to eat," and so on. According to this idea meaning as such is not only concerned with intellectual understanding in a static sense, but implies a purpose, it has a teleological quality, it leads to the future and is concerned with oneself. It is this quality of meaning that evokes an emotional participation, and which makes it significant to us.

So when we fall into a severe depression, one that could truly be described as a night-sea journey, or the valley of the shadow of death, perhaps the worst part of the experience is the loss of a sense of meaning. It seems that life has come to an end and we might as well give up. In his Memoirs, Jung says "Man cannot endure a meaningless life." It takes a heroic act to stand one's ground in such a "dark night of the Soul." In his diary "Jottings" Dag Hammarskjöld wrote that when such a mood of despair came upon him, and the task ahead seemed to be entirely beyond both his wisdom and his strength, he recalled to mind a night he had once spent alone high up on a great mountain, when he was compelled to bivouac on a narrow ledge, cold, hungry, weary to death, alone and in great fear. And he had said to himself: "This is the time when you must not give up." The memory of this night of ordeal steeled him to face the many crises at the U. N. when again at times he was alone in a critical situation and there seemed to be no possibility of avoiding disaster. And so in loneliness and danger he played the hero role and was able to pull through.

In speaking of the hero we come at once into the realm of mythology where this human, this all-too-human experience, can be found in its archetypal manifestation. Both the regressive and the progressive aspect of this universal happening are portrayed in legend and myth. In his lecture series on Moby Dick, Dr. Edinger pointed out how Melville begins his story by describing the mood of his hero, Ishmael. "It was a Novemberish mood" of dull depression and Ishmael says that when he got into such a mood he instinctively turned to the sea, there to seek and find a renewal of his life energies. The sea is of course the unconscious and the story tells how during the voyage on which he embarked, not only did he find Moby Dick, the mythological carrier of unconscious life forces, but also the lost parts of himself embodied in or projected upon the other characters of the story.

Dante was in a desolate place when he was led to the exploration of the three realms of the inner world. Poliphyle awoke in a dark and lonely wood leading to a wilderness, as a prelude to his exploration of the inner realm where he found his lost Lady. Holly, in Rider Haggard's SHE was in a similar state of depression when the call came to him that led to his exploration of the land where "She" dwelt.

It is interesting and significant that in each of these cases, with the exception of Moby Dick, the lost value is represented by a loved woman. She is obviously, the anima, the embodiment, for a man, of his relation to the treasure in the unconscious. The anima had been aroused in him by love, not by affection, not by agape, but by the kind of "love" we call "falling in love," due, as the ancients realized, to something that struck one, as by the arrow of a God. When this connection is lost, or has never been found, one is indeed in the wilderness.

Many other examples could be cited of the veritable heaven of life-giving water which falling in love produces, and which is lost when, as unfortunately so often happens, one "falls out of love" again, and many of us in this room have had experiences of corresponding nature. When it is as if one were in a desert place, lost in an inhospitable region, so lost that one is in despair. Sometimes this is an active despair, more often, perhaps, one's mood is one of inert misery, or of hopeless indifference. It is a state of inner dryness and boredom, when all capacity for feeling has dried up. One may see that the world is beautiful, but one cannot feel it; or one may find oneself quite unable to feel the love that one knows or believes one has for one's dearest friend. One is dry and empty. Most people have at some time in their lives experienced a mood of this kind. But for many today, it is a permanent condition, a psychic climate that leads, inevitably, to inertia or to a futile anger, like the "angry young men," and those students who find their only outlet in revolt and rebellion, an attitude that only too often results in antisocial acts and hatred of one's fellow man. Some, who are suffering from this kind of boredom, merely try to get through the day mechanically, while others resort to artificial stimulants or tranquilizers to deaden their realization of their hopelessness and misery. Others more adapted to conditions as they are, have accepted the necessity for restrictions and as a result have achieved what might be called a normal successful life. But a time may come when the restrictions of life which were accepted as part of the price of success become all too powerful and restrictive. In middle life such a man may begin to realize that he has not even begun to explore all the possibilities of his own littleness, as Jung calls it, while he has entirely forgotten, the necessity to find and maintain a relation to the infinite. In consequence his life becomes sterile and he either grows increasingly rigid or some sort of break-down is likely to occur. For he is cut off from his true self and from the most important values of life - in effect he is cut off from God.

Such a state of mind is found today in all degrees of severity, from sullen inertia, to active despair, either of which may lead to neurotic illness or perhaps to more serious mental disturbance resulting in suicide or in alienation from oneself and one's fellows. To be in such a case is indeed an archetypal experience that may well be called the Wilderness. One falls into the wilderness as a consequence of being alienated from oneself, from humanity and from one's deepest values, that is to say one finds oneself in the wilderness where one is cut off, alienated from oneself, from the community and from God.

Kierkegaard called this condition the sickness unto death and stated that everyone suffers from it, whether they know it or not. It is a despair that feels like death, like dying, but its characteristic is that it does not result in death. He points out that such despair does not have to do primarily with the body, although it may result in various bodily ills; it has to do with the non-material part of man, his spirit, and the spirit, he states, is not subject to mortal death. Indeed one of the most painful features of this kind of despair is just exactly that one cannot die. Death would be a relief. For one who could die would look forward to an end of his suffering, and so his condition would be one of hope, not of despair. Kierkegaard writes: (The Sickness unto Death, p24) "It is indeed very far from being true that, literally understood, one dies of this sickness, or that this sickness ends with bodily death. On the contrary, the torment

of despair is precisely this, not to be able to die.” Kierkegaard defines despair as of three forms or degrees. The first form is ”that of not willing to be one’s own self, or willing to get rid of oneself.” The Danish word vill, here translated ”willing” has a very active sense, so that the sentence could perhaps better be rendered: ”The first form is that one does not will to be oneself, that one wills to get rid of oneself.” This is the condition of alienation from oneself.

The second form of despair is not being able to will to be oneself. The third, according to Kierkegaard, comes from the fact that as one did not make oneself, all one’s efforts to overcome the lack of relation to one’s self are doomed to failure, because one’s self has been ”constituted” by another. Consequently, the lack of relation to one’s self ”reflects itself infinitely in the relation to the Power which constituted it.” That is to say, if one is not rightly related to one’s self, one is automatically in a wrong relation to the Power that created one, or at the worst one has no relation to it whatever. One is alienated from it. And Kierkegaard states that the eradication of despair can only come about when one is related to one’s own self and is actively willing to be one’s true self, then the self is grounded once more in the Power which posited it (paraphrase of *ibid.* p.18). In other words one is no longer alienated from one’s self, or from one’s deepest value, that is from the author of one’s being.

The prevalence, in the present day, of the kind of experience we are talking about is connected with the profound change in the religious attitude that has gradually come about as a result of the rise of the scientific and mechanical revolution of the last two and a half centuries. So long as men believed implicitly in the objective reality of the unseen world, provided they had availed themselves of the sacrifice of Christ and of the services and sacraments of the Church to cleanse them from sin, they did not feel themselves to be alienated from God. They were related to the unseen divine Power and to themselves.

This is not to imply that the wilderness experience was unknown then, but for the most part it was an individual experience rather than a general one. Today, the simple fact is that many people, perhaps the majority actually live in the wilderness alienated from God and from themselves, though as Kierkegaard points out, they may be unaware of this fact. It is shown, however, in the very common desire to be someone other than oneself. ”If only I were gifted like so-and-so - if only I had their conditions rather than my own,” such wishes mean that one is not seeking actively to be one’s self. And since it is obvious that one can never be anyone other than one’s self, one is obviously longing for an impossibility, and this is surely a reason for despair, or so Kierkegaard argues.

Unless this fact is recognized consciously and the conflict of values that underlies it is faced, it is not likely that even our best efforts to deal with the symptoms it produces - depression, ill health, delinquency, and so on - will meet with more than sporadic and temporary success. Kierkegaard diagnosed the cause of the disease of our time correctly and offered a solution in the terms of Christianity, that, still in 1848, could rest on a hypostatization of the figure of Christ, but this is no longer valid for many people today. Jung, who also realized that the root of the disease of our time lies in man’s alienation from himself and his deepest values sought a psychological way for its cure, not through faith, but by a new experience of the source of our being that lies hidden in the unconscious. The psychological approach to the deeper layers of the inner world, not explored nor even recognized by Freud, that Jung discovered, could reestablish a contact with those very values from which we have been alienated by our too exclusive concept with the outer world. In The Undiscovered Self (Little Brown & Co. 1957, p111) Jung writes:

”At the beginning of the Christian era, so again today we are faced with the problem of the moral backwardness which has failed to keep pace with our scientific, technical and social developments. So much is at stake and so much depends on the psychological constitution of modern man. ... Is he conscious of the path he is treading, and what the conclusions are that must be drawn from the present world situation and his own psychic situation? ... and finally does he know that he is the makeweight that tips the scale? Happiness and contentment, equibality of soul and meaningfulness of life - these can be experienced only by the individual and not by the State. The social and political circumstances of the time are certainly of considerable significance but their importance for the weal or woe of the individual has been boundlessly overestimated in so far as they are taken for the sole determining factors. In this respect all our social goals commit the error of overlooking the psychology of the person for whom they are intended.”

The establishment of contact with the springs of life in the unconscious is an individual task and by pursuing his own individual path an individual may be healed of his own most personal and intimate distress and despair. It is as if the unhealing wound of our time evidenced by all our social woes, may perhaps be healed at least in the case of the individual person, through, the fulfillment of this task, namely the obligation to find his own individual way. But what about the general wound from which so many people suffer? In the Grail legend, Amfortas, the Fisher King, the priest and guardian of the Grail, was unable to carry out his functions because of an unhealing wound that broke out afresh every time he attempted to perform the duties of his office. As a consequence, not only were the people deprived of the grace that was dispensed by the Grail, but, in addition, the whole land had dried up from lack of rain, the grace of heaven, or, as it is called in the Bushman legend, the Spirit. And the once fertile land had become as sterile as a desert. When at last the King's wound was healed, the service of the Grail could be resumed and its spiritual grace could flow once more for mankind. In addition, the rain fell and the drought that had laid waste the land ended.

This is the prophesy of the Arthurian myth, but in T. S. Eliot's version of the Grail, the legend is left unfinished, the state of drought is not healed. His poem WASTELAND in which he uses the Grail material, was written in the years between the two world wars, when a blight, a psychological drought, a veritable wasteland experience fell on western civilization. The hope of universal peace, to be established by negotiation, came to nought, and instead of prosperity based on cooperation and the mutual exploitation of all natural resources, financial collapse and world-wide depression were the bitter aftermath of the "war to end all wars." In his poems written during that period Eliot makes use of the Grail legend, but at the end of his poem, the Fisher King is shown sitting "upon the shore, fishing, with the arid plain behind him." (T.S. Eliot, Poems 1909-1913, "The Wasteland.") So the prophesy that "The desert should blossom as the rose" (Isaiah 35:1) was not fulfilled. This prophesy has always been taken as referring to the coming of the Messiah with his message of spiritual healing, and indeed, during many centuries, for believing Christians, their despair and dryness were healed, and as Isaiah's poem predicts, "in the wilderness waters (did) break forth and streams in the desert." and, he continues: "A highway shall be there and a way, and it shall be called: the way of Holiness," clearly indicating that it is the finding of a way that can heal the aridity of despair and the sense of lostness that results from alienation from one's own self and from God.

The Christian dominant that had guided Western Civilization for well-nigh 2,000 years has fallen into the unconscious for many people, and the world outlook of Christianity has changed. Trismosin, an alchemist of the sixteenth century tells in Splendor Solis (a M.S. in the British Museum: Alchemical Treatise of Solomon Trismosin, in English 1920) how the "Old philosophers declared that they saw a Fog arise, and pass over the face of the earth, they also saw the impetuosity of the Sea... and saw the king of the earth sink, and heard him cry out with eager voice, "Whoever saves me shall live and reign with me forever in my brightness on my royal Throne." Jung quotes this passage in Mysterium Coniunctionis (C. W. Vol. 14, pp.331,332) and comments: "The king sinking in the sea... corresponds to the Christian dominant, which was originally alive and present in consciousness but then sank into the unconscious and must now be restored in renewed form." There are several accounts of similar symbolic images in alchemical literature. They correspond to the material of the Grail legend in that; the King, the ruling power or dominant, is incapacitated, in the Grail legend by mortal sickness, and in the alchemical visions by the threat of drowning. So that this theme of danger to the King is not to be disregarded as merely a legend, a fable, an old poetic fantasy. Rather it must be considered as the expression of an archetype. In this case one of collective significance. But we also find similar symbolic images in individual cases, where the life process seems to have become blocked. And Jung has told us, and I myself have seen, how many an individual has found his way out of the living death of the wilderness into new life through a renewed connection with the unconscious, through learning to know and accept himself, and to accept, as well, the authority of the inner guide, represented by the King rescued from drowning in the ocean of the unconscious. To experience the transformation that results is numinous, and in face of it one can only say: "It is a miracle!"

The experience of the Wilderness may be met at two different stages of psychological development and they must be considered separately. The first occurs, as a rule, in youth. A young person breaks away from home with anger and resistance only to find himself alone and miserable. He feels alienated from his family and his roots, while what had seemed so important when he was in the state of rebellion, no longer seems to be the most important thing in life. Or, having committed some sin against the parental order, or having asserted his will against his parents, or perhaps, having indulged in some instinctive activity, taboo, as he thinks, in his society, he feels himself to be alienated, outcast from the family circle and from God. In his suffering and isolation, he becomes embittered, angry and hostile, or sullen and obstinately negative, unable to accomplish anything of value for himself to replace the lost security of his relation to his home. Or perhaps, if he is a stronger character, he may launch out on his own and possibly "make good" as we say while he tries to ignore the psychic wound that he carries deep inside him. Sooner or later, however, his sense of guilt and of inner dissatisfaction may become so unbearable that he resolves to do something about his plight. If he then goes to an analyst, the problems that he has buried out of sight in the personal unconscious, will begin to obtrude themselves on his attention. His shadow, his unacceptable alter ego, will rise up to confront him. And, as Kierkegaard says, it will take an attitude of will, of resolution, if he is to come to know this dark side of himself. The terror, the anxiety, such an encounter can produce is well portrayed in Charles William's book Descent into Hell, where the heroine has repeatedly encountered her alter ego, coming towards her, in a waking vision or hallucination. She is understandably terrified by this encounter, and not until she is able to invite this "other" into the house with her, is she released from her anxiety and near despair. This she is enabled to do through her transference to an older man, who undertakes to stand by her "spiritually", and to carry her burden for her. And so, too, anyone who encounters his shadow will find himself under necessity of

accepting himself as he is, in all his weakness and insufficiency. He will have to come to terms with this unacceptable alter ego and stop projecting his darker side to others. Only then, having been reconciled with his inner brother, can he be reconciled with his outer brother, his fellowman, from whom he has been alienated on account of his own unacknowledged weakness and guilt, which lie behind his sense of despair and meaninglessness.

This whole experience is like a journey through the wilderness and it often appears in dreams under the symbol of the "Night-sea Journey." But when the problems of the personal unconscious have been met and dealt with in analysis, a sense of inner unity and renewal is usually found. This is often accompanied by glimpses of deeper values, of the Self, for instance, that are frequently couched in the terms of religious symbolism. The analysant feels that he is once again reconciled with himself and with God and so he can go back to his ordinary life with renewed zest. The wilderness is no longer barren, his life blossoms and bears fruit.

Many people are satisfied with the insights they have achieved on this level and they may rest content with their new psychological understanding. They can now live more creatively and they will enjoy a renewed sense of aliveness. Others who have become intrigued with the exploration of the inner psychological realm and the treasure they have discovered there will want to continue the search, or, perhaps, after a period of a renewed sense of life they again fall into the doldrums. Such people may continue to work on their unconscious material by exploring their dreams and taking note of their reactions to the happenings of the day. In the terms of religious teaching, such a man leads "the examined life." Usually the unconscious is rather quiescent during this period. The daily introversion tends to prevent too great deviations from the right road, and in consequence the role of the ego increases once more. The individual feels himself to be "an analysed person," who needs no more guidance. In a monastery, the postulant considered himself "a religious," and so the ego, once more, usurps a larger and more important place as the ruler of the life and arbiter of value. Naturally, the ego should take the lead in the outer life, but if the unconscious is forgotten there is danger of ego inflation, for the individual's aim may gradually shift from the goal of individuation to that of making himself the best, the most effective person he can, an attitude that inevitably means an alienation from God, a separation from the supreme value lying hidden in the unconscious. It corresponds to the attitude Kierkegaard gives as the third aspect of despair, namely, the lack of relation to the Power that constituted the ego-self.

And so a time is likely to come when the unconscious withdraws further and further, dragging the conscious libido with it, into unaccessible depths, and a second experience of the wilderness will be encountered on a different, a more profound level. The analysant whose attention has been concentrated increasingly on the outer world finds his interest waning and a time comes of sterility and emptiness when nothing satisfies him any more.

Jung points out that a man in the afternoon of his life may find that the life task he undertook in youth with enthusiasm and delight, has grown and prospered. But now it imposes increasing responsibility and care upon him. And, as he passes the zenith of his physical powers, it may become an intolerable burden that threatens to crush or suffocate him. Then he is likely to find himself again in the wilderness. All that was formerly so fascinating and important, has lost its power to interest him. And as Solomon said: "The grasshopper has become a burden."

If, feeling bound by his life commitments, he goes on in this way, he may very likely suffer from some sort of collapse, physical or psychical, possibly a nervous break-down. If he, then, remembers the road to unconscious and begins to take his inner states seriously, he may find a way out of his distress. The neurotic symptoms themselves may point to the cause of the trouble, if they are taken as symbols, or a dream or fantasy may show him that he is in the wilderness, or is lost in a void. St. John of the Cross tells us that a revelation and consciousness of God's presence, with its accompanying feeling of grace and the joy of salvation, is frequently followed by a period of aridity and despair. For the experience of God's presence brings with it the danger of a subtle ego inflation. St. John is talking out of his long experience as director of conscience in a monastery, where the monks devoted themselves to the search for God. And he reports that this condition is a very common, almost a universal experience.

For, in spite of a conscious sense of humility and dependence on God for his grace, a little inner voice insists: "But you are the one who has had this experience. You are a chosen one, a superior one." And so ego pride, hybris, creeps in and destroys the sense of oneness with God. This sequence of events is illustrated most forcibly in the dramatic story of Elijah's encounter with the prophets of Baal. The Israelites were, of course, worshippers of Jehovah but when Ahab came to the throne he, probably for political reasons, thought this was a great mistake and that they would be much better to conform to the religion of all the surrounding tribes who worshipped the Magna Mater and her son Baal. He proceeded to root out all the prophets and priests of Jehovah and forbade the celebration of his holy days. In this he was abetted and egged on by his truly terrible queen, Jezebel, who took the priests of Baal under her patronage and protection.

Meantime a dreadful drought had fallen on the land and had lasted three years, so that the harvests had failed and the livestock were dying. At this moment Elijah came out of hiding and at the risk of his life confronted Ahab. He reproached him, for his neglect of Jehovah and the persecution of his people and asserted that the drought was a direct effect of this attitude. He then suggested a trial between himself and the prophets of Baal to test who was the true God. The prophets of Baal should make a sacrifice to their god but not put any fire under it. He would do the same in the name of Jehovah. They should each then call upon their god, and the god who answered by fire from heaven would be known as the true god.

Well, you remember the outcome, how when the prayer to Baal was not answered by fire Elijah mocked the prophets saying Baal must be busy or asleep or he had gone on a journey, till his priests get quite frantic and slashed themselves with knives and so on.

Then as evening fell, Elijah rebuilt the altar of Jehovah and placed the offering on it but put no fire under it, and to emphasize the expected miracle he ordered the young men to pour barrel after barrel of water over it and into the trench around the altar though water was a most precious thing in those days of drought. And then as the sun went down, the hour of the evening sacrifice, Elijah prayed to God and his prayer was answered. Fire fell from heaven upon the altar and the sacrifice was consumed and all the water was licked up.

Elijah then did a terrible thing: he called on the young men to seize and kill all the prophets of Baal, 400 of them. Meantime a cloud as big as a man's hand appeared over the hill and shortly the whole sky was covered with clouds and the rain began to fall and continued for three days. So the drought was broken.

But it is the second act of this story that is important for our theme tonight. For as might have been expected Jezebel hit back and sent her people to capture Elijah and kill him. But he escaped to the wilderness and sat down under a juniper tree. All his enthusiasm and elation left him, he felt completely emptied and in his depression he longed to die. He sat there for three days when the angel of the Lord came to him and said, "Arise and eat," and when he looked up he found bread and a cruse of water beside him. This happened again the following day. He stayed in the wilderness for forty days and finally he came to the Mount of God and lodged in a cave there. Then one day he heard a voice saying, "What doest thou here Elijah?" And he began to justify himself saying, "I have been very jealous for God, and I have overcome all the prophets of Baal, and now I am fleeing for my life." As though to say "It just isn't fair." And the Lord said to him, "Go and stand outside the cave" and there all the manifestations of power passed before him, a tornado that blasted the mountain, an earthquake that shook the ground, followed by a great fire that swept across the mountain, but God was in none of these. And after that a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it he wrapped his mantle about his face, for God was in the still small voice. And God told him how there were many besides himself who had not bowed the knee to Baal. So Elijah learned it is not the manifestation of overwhelming power but rather the inner voice heard in stillness and humility that demonstrates the presence of God.

This sequence of events is very frequent in those seeking the inner way, and occurs not only in religious communities. It is dramatically portrayed, for instance, in the series of fresco pictures on the walls of the initiation chamber of the *Villa dei Misterii* in Pompeii, where, after her initiation to Dionysus in the underground chamber, the initiate emerges carrying the liknon, the winnowing basket, containing the sacred mystery, probably a phallic object. She also carries the torch she had taken to guide her in the dark of the underground chamber and which is the emblem of the puberty initiation of maidens, but it has gone out, perhaps meaning that from the religious point of view she has passed from the state of the maid to that of the woman. Her attitude and gesture in this picture, speak eloquently of her state of *hybris*, and when she starts to unveil the mystery in her basket, an avenging angel swoops down from above, carrying a whip and forbids the desecration. This scene is followed by one of humiliation where she is severely whipped for her presumption. But, apparently, she is truly repentant, for the series ends with her acceptance as one initiated. (I am indebted for this interpretation of the pictures to Linda Fierz-David's lectures on the Villa given at the Zurich Institute.)

These pictures give a true representation of a very common series of events that also occur during an analysis, and they may be found in the search for truth by an individual who is not working according to any particular discipline. For no sooner does one take the grace of God, wherever found, to oneself, as evidence of one's own special election than one is separated, inevitably, from one's true self and from one's fellows and one becomes isolated. In religious terms, the self-satisfaction brings a *hybris* that alienates one from God, the author of one's being and the source of life.

This is a very common experience among those who are dedicated to the religious life. St. John is not the only Director of conscience to describe it. In addition to the active despair characteristic of the "dark night" there is also another condition that is similarly found to follow an experience of enlightenment, which I indicated earlier, called "accidie." This is not an active despair, rather it is a state of inner emptiness, of sterility and dryness in which the accustomed religious exercises bring, no inner joy and even the sense of their reality and value disappears, while the religious seeker languishes in the wilderness. Both these

conditions are well known, not only to those who follow the path of religious disciplines, but also to those who follow the way to individuation. It is also described by alchemists as a regular happening during their opus, their attempt to transform the ignoble substance into pure gold.

With the alchemists this inner darkness is called the state of nigredo, darkness or blackness. They observed it as it occurred in their retorts, but some of the philosophical alchemists (of the Sixteenth Century) recognized that when this condition was judged by the principle of "correspondences" it also represented or indicated a psychological condition in the alchemist himself. For, as Jung points out, "The nigredo not only brought decay, suffering and death, and the torments of hell visibly before the eyes of the alchemist, it also cast the shadow of melancholy (literally blackness) over his own solitary soul. In the blackness and despair which was not his own, and of which he was merely the witness, he experienced how it turned into the work and poisonous dragon." (C.W. Vol. 14, p. 350) The darkness and lostness can be interpreted psychologically as man's confusion and lostness. Following this state of darkness, the alchemists report that light begins to dawn, due to the rising moon, which psychologically means the beginning of insight gained through paying attention to the unconscious, to the night happenings, to dreams and so which through a light on one's inner condition. The moon also refers to Eros, relatedness through feeling. In other words, when the nigredo, the blackness, has been accepted and taken to oneself, instead of being blamed on outside situations and other people, one begins to see that it is one's own withdrawal and loss of feeling one's own shadow, that is the true cause of the darkness. Then the moon rises and in recognizing that one is suffering, not just a personal ill, but is participating in a human experience common to all mankind, feeling returns, feeling and compassion for the plight of one's fellows. That is the feminine eros; the lesser light begins to shine in the darkness of the night.

Following this, according to the alchemists, the sun rises, the greater light, the light of consciousness increases. The sun also brings warmth, which Jung interprets as referring to an emotional reaction with which the individual begins to confront his situation. For when anyone recognizes that his dryness and despair arise from attitude of pride and egoism vis-a-vis the author of his being, he is likely to have a pretty strong reaction. The mere nearness of such a recognition produces a passionate emotionality and Jung points out that emotional outbursts usually occur in cases of insufficient adaptation resulting from unconsciousness of one's own state. (C.W. vol. 14, p.295)

A very similar situation is described in the Pilgrim's Progress, though it is extremely unlikely that Bunyan, an uneducated man, had any access to alchemical literature. He tells how Christian had become elated after his experience at the cross, and then fallen asleep by the wayside, doubtless feeling that as he had been blessed there was no longer any need to be alert, and so he fell first into the Valley of Humiliation and, following that, into the Valley of the Shadow of Death. That is to say his depression, even despair, got deeper and deeper. But then, when at last he recognized that his very life depended on his relation to God, he not only found a companion but also, we are told, the sun rose and gave him light and warmth where before all had been darkness and cold.

There is another story with which I am sure you are all familiar. I refer to the Bible story of the rivalry that existed between the brothers Esau and Jacob. It is the typical story of "sibling rivalry." In this case exaggerated because not only were the two boys twins, in a culture where the right of the first-born was strictly observed, but they were of very different

temperaments. Esau, the elder, was their father's favorite, partly because he was the first-born, but also because he loved hunting and all masculine pursuits. This of course kept him away from home a great deal. His brother, Jacob however, was the mother's favorite, and perhaps for this reason he stayed close to the tents where his mother was and took care of the flocks and also cultivated a garden. As we noted the boys were twins, so that the age difference was a matter of minutes not of years, but still Esau was definitely first in the father's affections and Jacob not unnaturally felt himself to be unfairly treated, and, probably in unconscious compensation, became his mother's favorite. He was a mother's boy and, as so often happens in such cases, when he felt himself to be overlooked, he learned to use the feminine way to get what he wanted, that is be used guile instead of the masculine impulse to use force. So, for instance, he took advantage of Esau's exhaustion when he came home from hunting one day, famished and tired out, and sold him a tasty dish of lentils he had prepared, in exchange for the birth-right of the eldest son, which was by custom Esau's. He could get away with this trick because Esau never looked ahead. He was hungry and exhausted and said: "I am at the point of death. If I die what use will my birth-right be to me" or words to that effect, and so bartered it for present satisfaction. And then a little later when their father, Isaac, felt himself to be at the point of death and called Esau to come and receive his fatherly blessing, Jacob again got the better of his brother. This time, however, the plan was not his own but his mother's, whose favorite he undoubtedly was. Then when Esau discovered the trick and what happened as a result and in his rage and disappointment planned to kill the younger man, Jacob fled to the wilderness planning, at his Mother's suggestion, to take refuge with her people.

The story continues in typical fashion. Jacob fled in haste through the wilderness and presently night fell and he could go no further. And then his rather desperate situation began to come home to him. He was completely alone, a prey to loneliness and fear and doubtless his thoughts were occupied with the situation that had led to his present difficulties. In his eyes, of course, all the trouble arose from Esau's maddening assumption that the half hour or so of seniority meant that he would receive all the blessing and all the inheritance, unearned. The arrogance and greed were his, or so Jacob thought. And like the little boy who complained bitterly: "Isn't my brother greedy. He took the biggest piece of cake, that I wanted." It never for a moment occurred to him that he, too, was arrogant and greedy. Esau was to him a typical shadow figure, carrying all the negative qualities that Jacob needed so badly to recognize as also his own. And then night fell, not only in actual external fact but also in his inner consciousness, and he must have experienced fear and anger and dreadful loneliness. At last he decided to lie down and go to sleep. He found a suitable stone for a pillow and lay down with the starry sky above him. And before he knew it he fell asleep and had a marvellous dream. It seemed that the heavens opened and he saw a ladder stretched up from the earth to the very heavens. And the angels of God were walking up from the earth into heaven and returning down the ladder to earth again. And he awoke with the awe of the dream still upon him and he exclaimed: "Surely God is in this place." The Hebrew word used for THIS PLACE is M'combe, and it has a special meaning, namely: this very place, emphasizing that this is the place where God is, this place of loneliness and despair, of complete isolation and the inevitable communing with one's own thoughts. And surely Jacob must have come to some realization that he, too, was not innocent of greed and deceit. The fault was not all Esau's. And then he dreamed, and the dream demonstrated that THIS place was where God dwelled and where He could be found.

Surely in the story of Jacob we glimpse something of the possible meaning of depression. It is a time of enforced loneliness and isolation. For when we are depressed, not only are we

incapable of experiencing beauty and the richness of life, but also we may know that we love our dear ones, but we cannot feel it, we are dead inside. It was at such a time that Jacob found a place where God was. He was exactly in that place. And, at the realization, life and the possibility of love and courage came flooding back. Jacob set up an altar there so that he and his children would always remember this revelation that had come to him in his sore need. And we, too, would do well to mark such days as red-letter days to be constantly remembered in the hours of darkness, which surely come again.

Jacob had recognized his shadow and had come to terms with it. And through all the years of patient waiting and hard work that followed before he could be united to the girl he fell in love with, his character changed. When, years later, he met Esau again, his attitude was indeed different. He met him with repentance and friendliness. And strangely a similar change in attitude had taken place in Esau, too-not unrelated, I suspect, to the death of the parents which had occurred in the meantime. But during the years before the brothers could meet again, Jacob had had to face the problem of the two animas. One, the loved one, and the other her elder sister, not loved but forced upon him by a trick-surely reminiscent of the trick he had, himself, played on Esau. Again the problem of sibling rivalry, this time between two sisters, or viewed from the point of view of Jacob's psychology, it is the typical rivalry between two aspects of the anima, one determined to have its own way, calling on the rights of the elder for support, and the other carrying the feeling values. And Jacob had to pay dearly for this split which reflected the split in his conscious self, before he could marry Rachel, his beloved.

To what extent Jacob's story is history and to what extent myth I don't know. But however that may be, it follows a mythologem and for that reason is a most instructive story for us today, so many years after the incidents described. And in its study we can indeed find a very common cause of depression, namely unconsciousness of an important element in our psyche, in this case the shadow. That is frequently the cause of our depression. The reason then becomes clear. An important element that rightly belongs to our wholeness has been left unattended to in the unconscious. At length, nature can no longer tolerate the unwholeness of her child and the neglected element begins to call or attract libido from its exclusive concern with daily life. A time has come when we might be more conscious, when we might take a further step in assimilating this important element of our wholeness of which we have up till then been unconscious. This moment is usually marked by an increase of affect regarding the projected material, whether it is part of the shadow, or of the anima or animus, or whatever the projection may consist of. So long as we are seduced by the projection and occupy ourselves in fighting it in its projected form, that is, in blaming the other for the difficulty, we are shut out from real life; the problem sucks all the libido into itself and in consciousness we are left in an arid state of misery. We are in the wilderness. But then, if we deliberately turn our attention within, it presently becomes evident what the trouble is, and if we are fortunate, as Jacob was, we discover the presence of God in that place. We find out that it was not just our bad luck that we are so depressed, that we cannot blame someone else for our misery, even that we are not the objects of persecution and misunderstanding, but the trouble is that we are divided from our true selves. Then the grace of God becomes available to us once more, and, as in Jacob's dream, we find a ladder set up from earth to heaven, away, difficult perhaps and hard, but we discover that access to the other world is open to us. For when all conscious ways fail and we are in the wilderness, we learn that God is indeed in that very place.

And so one meaning of the experience of depression is that our wholeness, our individuation, the Self, can no longer wait while we follow egotistic ways or even seek for legitimate ego fulfillment, and so the Self brings us, drives us, into the wilderness of depression. For God waits in that place, and communication between earth and heaven is even then about to be revealed to us, if only we will attend to the vision.

¹ M. Esther Harding: *The Value and Meaning of Depression*. *Psychological Perspectives: A Quarterly Journal of Jungian Thought*. Volume 12, Issue 2, 1981. pages 113-135.

² Mary Esther Harding (1888–1971) was an American Jungian analyst who was the first significant Jungian psychoanalyst in the United States.