The Quest for Meaning

The Inner Journey of Odysseus

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Introduction

When I was 26 years old, I dove into the unknown waters of the entrepreneurial ocean, taking on the full-time duties of chairman and president of two fledgling companies—companies I had started a year earlier with three friends from college. (I saw no problem in starting two companies at once; I would just work eighty hours a week instead of the normal forty).

After five years of round-the-clock effort, as I reached the ripe old age of 31, we had finally learned to swim in the treacherous currents of the entrepreneurial world. It seemed amazing to us at the time, but it had taken a full five years from that first plunge before we mastered the tasks we had undertaken. (Of course, this amazement might be related to the twin facts that [1] we were young and naive, and almost completely oblivious to the time it takes to accomplish anything in the real world, and [2] being extremely ambitious as well as young and naive, we had set very ambitious goals for ourselves.)

Don't let me skip over those five tortuous years too quickly. Contrary to what you might at first assume, those years could not be accurately characterized as a steady progress toward success. Rather, they were five years of hanging over the edge of a precipice, constantly looking down into the face of complete failure—of imminent, total collapse. (Unless, of course, we refused to look—which was not uncommon for any of us during this time). An image swimming into memory that begins to capture the experience involves five years of continuous effort without a break, without a pause, without even coming up for a breath of air. It was dangerous to surface, you see, for there were bankers and creditors constantly banging on the top of the pressure cooker, asking (not always politely) just what was going in that money-eating cauldron we had created. But after five years of hanging on for dear life, we were beginning to turn the corner. Metaphorically speaking (if the aquatic imagery will serve for one last round), having learned to swim reasonably well, we were beginning to put together a rowboat as we swam, and were learning how to keep it afloat.

By the time I reached the age of 35, we had a fantastic success on our hands. We were starting to make substantial profits, and our prospects seemed almost unlimited. Our rowboat had grown into a decent-sized schooner. To mark this momentous accomplishment, I sold the majority of my stock in the companies and retired.

What Is There to Do When You Retire at 35?

For a young man who had worked night and day for years, retirement seemed like an incredible luxury and a blessing. Having made enough money to be free of the need to work—if I managed the money wisely—I could now explore all those things I had had no time to even think about during the preceding years. I could read, travel, romance. I could do nothing for a while. I could sleep. (And sleep I did, staying in bed as late as I wanted each day.)

As it turns out, there is an incredible feeling of freedom associated with being able to stay in bed day after day until you are ready to get up. Perhaps that's why the French philosopher René Descartes stayed in bed till noon; it set his mind free to explore whatever thoughts might arise. But staying in bed every morning without a good reason also feels slightly decadent, as if one is placing oneself outside the natural human state, is setting oneself outside the normal human necessities. Perhaps that's why the vice of sloth was created. (Isn't that a great word—*sloth*?)

In my experience of this state, as the weeks and then months rolled by, I began to discover that the model around which I had formed my image of retirement—that of an extended vacation—became less and less relevant. Slowly it dawned on me that a vacation is only a vacation when you are getting away from something. Retirement is quite different, for in retirement you have no external identity, no role in the world. There is nothing you are going back to which will give structure to your days, or a definition of who you are and what your life is about. Most ominously, you don't have an answer to that terrible "What do you do?" question. (This insistent, probing, demanding monster of a question pops up constantly: What do *you* do? What *do* you *do*?) If you don't have a good answer, such as "Oh, I'm a lawyer—I'm just successful enough to take a long vacation," then the moorings of your world begin to shift. You begin to feel the pressure to Do Something, to Be Somebody, from friends and family. (I quickly learned that many people in our culture simply do not know how to relate to, how to place in the social hierarchy, a person who has "retired" at 35.)

After a few months in this environment, I began to consider another job, another career. However, I had already explored and eliminated several other career paths before my business days. For instance, educational administration was a field I had considered during college, so immediately after graduation I'd accepted a job on the administrative staff of my alma mater as advisor to fraternities and assistant to the dean of students. It was interesting, but after a year it was clear to me that I was looking for something different.

I had also explored another career path before my entrepreneurial plunge—that of politics and government. If anything had seemed like my calling when I was growing up, this was it. Thus, in 1966, I pitched myself into Howard Baker's campaign for a seat in the U.S. Senate. And he won! (There's nothing like that first successful campaign effort for a political junkie.) After the victory, I worked part time on Senator Baker's staff while finishing a master's degree in history and philosophy. Then, in 1968, I moved to the national scene and became the head of a division of Nelson Rockefeller's campaign for president. (To keep things in perspective, I should convey that it was a very small division: my role was that of director of special groups, better known as "famous people for Rockefeller." *I* wasn't famous, of course. My role was to line up the endorsements of people who were.)

During the campaign I met Dr. Henry Kissinger, Rockefeller's foreign-policy advisor, and roped him into recruiting other famous scholars to provide endorsements for the campaign. (Notwithstanding all of these endorsements, Rockefeller lost. It almost seemed that the populace wasn't paying attention to what all these famous people thought, or to the results of my labors. How could that be?) Anyway, when Kissinger became Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs under a president he had not supported (isn't it fascinating how these things work?), I joined his team at the White House as a member of the National Security Council staff.

What an incredible experience for a young man of 25. I can't say anyone paid much attention to my opinions about foreign policy, but I had a fascinating seat from which to observe how the presidency works and how foreign policy is made. After a year at the White House, as if riches were tumbling forth from the horn of plenty, I was asked to serve as campaign coordinator, chief speechwriter, and issues director for a candidate for governor in my home state.

It was a hard decision to leave the White House, but I had a strong interest in running for office myself, and working in a campaign in my home state seemed like a good place to start that process. When my candidate won, I had another wrenching, life changing decision—whether to accept a position on the new governor's staff or to take the entrepreneurial route described above and attempt to make my fortune. (Political power or wealth, which should an ambitious young man pursue first?) As you already know, I chose to seek my fortune first.

Needless to say, however, such a strong interest in politics and government did not just disappear during my entrepreneurial days. In 1972 I was appointed to the Tennessee Board of Regents (the ninth-largest system of higher education in the country), and by the time of my retirement I had begun to serve in leadership positions on the board. Further, as we started to turn the corner in our business ventures, I became involved in numerous civic organizations and worked in several political campaigns. (I had to find something to do with those extra twenty to thirty hours a week that had been freed up as I cut my business week down to only fifty or sixty hours.)

Anyway, by the time of my retirement these political experiences had led a number of people to encourage me to run for public office, including serious encouragement to run for mayor of Knoxville. (Several friends even urged me to undertake a race for the U.S. Senate.) All these political ambitions finally coalesced in 1978, when a good friend announced his gubernatorial campaign. I threw myself energetically into the campaign, and after a long and tough battle my friend won the race. Anyway, when Kissinger became Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs under a president he had not supported (isn't it fascinating how these things work?), I joined his team at the White House as a member of the National Security Council staff.

Now, I would like to think that the above list of achievements is not bragging—not mostly, anyway. I would like to view it as a way to give you, the reader, the context of what was to happen next, and thereby to explain my special interest in the story I am about to tell. What I hope to convey is that I had considered a number of career alternatives for my life, and I seemed to have several promising choices. But because of these early experiences, by the end of 1978 I had begun to develop a sense that neither a career in politics nor a career in education was the right path for my life. The why of this feeling wasn't clear, but the feeling was strong, so an inclination was

growing to honor it. I therefore declined the cabinet position and took on the mantle of retirement. (Since using this word "retirement" for my condition has always seemed a bit strange to me, it probably does to you too. Believe me, I tried to describe my state many other ways. None of them worked. What I gradually realized was that the question 'What do you do?" in our culture means what is your "job", how do you earn a living? And since none of my planned activities had to do with making a living, the most accurate answer to the question of "What do you do?" seemed to be - "I'm retired". Perhaps I should also confess, however, that I sometimes enjoyed the shock value of this "retirement" response.)

I hadn't traveled far into this unknown territory, however, when I began to realize that if I wasn't going to take a regular job—at least for a while—then I had to find a definition for my life that seemed meaningful and worthwhile. I had to have a reason to get up each morning that seemed meaningful, at least to me. As a way of filling this vacuum, the idea of exploring some of the important aspects of life that had been pushed aside during the preceding ambitious years began to emerge. I began to spend more time on relationships, both fraternal and romantic. I traveled extensively, marveling at the incredible diversity of both people and places that this earth of ours is home to. I read many books, exploring the fantastic world of images and ideas that we human beings have constructed for our enjoyment and edification. I renewed my acquaintance with an earlier love, philosophy. I spent a lot of time with a new acquaintance, the psychology and philosophy of the Swiss thinker Carl Jung. Finally, I began to explore the meaning of that age-old admonition of Socrates and the ancient Greeks: "Know thyself." And I contemplated what it meant that Solomon, when asked what he most wanted, replied "Wisdom"—and that all else he received in life came to him because he made this lady his primary purpose and goal.

As I began these inner explorations, one day in 1979 I found myself in a workshop at the Jung Institute in Zurich. The day ahead was devoted to, of all things, fairy tales. Now, when I was growing up fairy tales weren't very big in my house, and they certainly were not considered relevant to an adult's life. So what could this possibly have to do with my quest? On that fine spring day in Switzerland, I was not really looking forward to the program. *Maybe I should just go and explore the beautiful Swiss countryside*, I thought to myself. But before I could make my escape, things took a turn for the worse (at least it seemed so from my perspective at that moment). It was announced that Marie Louise van Franz, the world expert on fairy tales who

was supposed to conduct the workshop, was ill. She was to be replaced by a man no one in the group seemed to know anything about. Not an auspicious beginning for an already uninviting day.

As I sat there mustering my courage to walk out, considering whether I had enough energy to endure another attack of one of my old demons, the self-doubting voice that says "What will people think," a quiet British man appeared who was to be our substitute leader for the day. Without much of an introduction, he began to read a fairy tale in a low, flat voice. It was a slow, uninspiring beginning. Since he had begun, however, I felt I was trapped. I didn't want to hurt his feelings. He finished reading and began to ask about the possible meaning of the fairy tale for our lives. And the strangest thing happened. Under his quiet but skilled guidance, the room was soon bursting with energy, with ideas and feelings and personal connections pouring out of the participants. And the room remained vividly alive all day. It was a truly magical moment for many of the people in that room. Including me.

A magical day with *fairy tales*? you ask incredulously. Yes, fairy tales. And before you rush to judgment about this experience, consider the fact that fairy tales have been used to shape the values and mold the lives of human beings since the time before recorded history began. This, of course, does not prove that these stories are relevant to our lives today. Nevertheless, after my day in Zurich I began to consider this question for myself. As I thought about it, I started to realize that stories had played a much larger role in my own life than I had supposed. For instance, the stories of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, of Abraham Lincoln and Benjamin Franklin, formed my early views about politics and government, about the interaction of principles and power. Stories from the Bible shaped my beliefs about what was truly important, about how I should act, about what the major issues of life would be. Stories about sports heroes, political heroes, and business heroes gave me my first images of what I thought I would be when I grew up. Stories, especially in movies, formed my early views about romance and relationship. Stories about real people closer to me—family members, family legends, people from my own town—provided models that made the possibilities and lessons much more real, more accessible; if these things could happen to people I was related to or people from my town, they could happen to me.

At the next stage of my life, stories told among friends and schoolmates about what was "in" and what was "out" dramatically affected my values and beliefs. Also, in those teen years, stories of rebels—people who saw things in a way that differed from the conventional wisdom—made me aware of the problems of my world, and gave me models for how I might attempt to change things if I chose to try.

These reflections on the importance of stories in my life led to the growing realization that my very identity—the person I believed myself to be—was in one sense the product of a story. In a way, my conscious identity was simply the continuing story I told myself about where I had been, where I was going, and what I was currently about. Isn't it the same for you? The story we tell ourselves about our lives creates our conscious understanding of who we are and what our lives are about. (This observation does lead to several difficult questions, such as these: Can we simply decide to tell ourselves a completely different story, and thereby change ourselves? How does our internal story relate to the story others tell about us, and to the "real" external reality? What is truth, anyway? Hmm, maybe we'll save those questions for later.)

In the same way, it is the story others tell themselves about us that creates their conscious understanding of who we are. Consider the difference between the story that would be told about your identity by a person who likes you and the story that would be told by someone who is angry with you. Compare the two and you begin to get the sense of how your identity in other people's minds is created by the story they put together about you—by the small selection they make from the large pool of available facts that makes up your entire identity. (Again, questions arise. Which of the two stories is really True? Which of the descriptions is really you? But these questions are getting us into deeper water than I can handle at the moment, so let's take a look at the role stories play in the human community.)

Exploring the Storytellers' Legacy

Another adventure during this period of my life was attending a conference in Boston whose title was something like "Storytelling, Myth, and Dreams." For three days a group of storytellers told humorous and, more important, sacred stories to a small group of captivated listeners. As I listened to these stories of wisdom and compassion, I began to reflect anew on the role that stories have played in human culture. It

became increasingly clear that as long as human beings have existed, there have been stories with us. In every land there have been stories of how the world began, of how each culture came to be the way it is—stories of the tribe's relationship to nature, to others, to the gods.

What was the purpose of these stories? Were they simply designed for entertainment on a cold winter's night around the campfire? Were the teaching stories designed only to educate the young? Certainly everyone would acknowledge these two functions of the world's great stories. But is there more? Do some of these stories still carry some hieroglyphic meanings that we somehow intuit, yet find it very hard to unravel?

As I reflected on this question, I thought about the epic stories of India, of the American Indians, of Scandinavia, and of many other cultures, and I began to see that for many people in the past the answers to life's most important questions came from their stories. Anyone who reads (or is lucky enough to hear told by a true storyteller) the Sufi, Zen, and Jewish teaching stories begins to see that many of these stories are designed to help people wrestle with the central questions of life. Or consider the great plays of the Greeks and Romans, and of Shakespeare. These plays create in me the distinct impression that I am in the presence of people grappling with life's most fundamental questions. And if I bring to mind the numerous parables and stories in the Bible, I definitely feel that the storytellers and narrators are trying to convey what they have learned about the meaning of life.

The more I thought and read about this aspect of story, the clearer it became that stories have always shaped the beliefs and carried the values of human culture. The great stories were constantly used by our forebears to help them understand who they were and what life was about. This is so much the case that one writer declared, "The universe is made of stories, not of atoms."[1] This thought sounds strange at first. But as you think about it, consider the possibility that the world you see, the way you organize the information that arrives in your brain, comes largely from the assumptions you have already made—which are based on the way you have previously come to understand the world. Consider further that your prior assumptions and understandings arose to a great extent from the stories that molded and shaped you as you grew up. If you begin to consider the quotation in this light, its simple profundity is almost breath-taking.

This thought arises in part from one of the crucial insights of philosophy in the last three centuries. The brilliant Scotsman David Hume, followed by the philosophical giant of the 18th century, Immanuel Kant, developed the idea that the world we see is not some hard, objective fact, but that what we see and experience is greatly determined by the assumptions and beliefs we hold in our minds at the moment of each new experience. We do not just record facts from the outer world. Our minds select the facts they want to register and organize them in a sequence that is meaningful to us, based to a great extent upon the current state of our understanding of the world and of ourselves. What we believe (both our conscious and unconscious beliefs) about reality at any given moment, therefore, greatly determines how we will experience and understand the next thing that happens to us. In this sense, the mind creates the reality that we see. This also means that another observer of the external world might well experience a different reality than the one we are perceiving. (As my ole grandpappy used to say, it's enough to make a body wonder about "truth.")

As the conference in Boston progressed, several people asked if I was connected with the National Storytelling Festival. I kept replying that I had never heard of it. But I had already learned enough to know that it might be wise to discover the reason for this question. As it turned out, in a small town ninety miles from my home, a nationwide organization had recently been created to bring together the best storytellers from all over the country in a yearly festival. Yet I had never heard of it; I had to go to Boston to find it. This brings to mind the story of a young man from a small Polish town during a turbulent, dangerous period in Polish history.

Once upon a time a young man by the name of Abraham had a crazy dream: go and search underneath the bridge leading to the King's castle in Prague, and you will find a great treasure. Trouble was, he lived many miles from Prague, and it was illegal for a Jew to make such a journey, on penalty of death. And he was a Jew. He therefore tried to put the dream out of his mind.

A few nights later, the dream returned with even more insistence. This time it was hard to ignore (which is true for most of us when we have a recurring dream). But he still felt great fear about making the journey. So he did what many of us might do: he set up a difficult test for this dream voice. Bargaining with the dream-maker, he promised, "If you send me this dream one more time, I will be persuaded and I will make this dangerous journey."

As you might guess, a few nights later he had the dream a third time. So he reluctantly packed a small bag and set out in the dead of night to fulfill his destiny. After a treacherous journey of several days, traveling only at night to avoid the many guards stationed along the roads, he arrived undetected at the road leading to the bridge. But then another obstacle arose, for the bridge was heavily guarded.

After waiting until the dead of night, he carefully made his way to the place where the bridge began, and slowly climbed down beneath the trusses. He had just reached the spot he had seen in his dream when a very large guard jumped from the bridge and grabbed him roughly by the neck. "What are you doing here?" the guard demanded. Shaking with fear, the young man could think of nothing to say but the truth, so he blurted out the whole story of his dream. For a long moment the guard paused; then he burst into laughter, shouting, "That's the strangest story I've ever heard. But I'm going to let you go, because on three different nights in the last month I've dreamed that if I went to a small village in the south, and looked behind the fireplace in the home of a man named Abraham, I would find my treasure. Aren't dreams the most ridiculous things in the world?" And again he howled with laughter.

Needless to say, our hero hurried home, dug behind his fireplace, and found his treasure. (Let's not decide now whether the treasure was gold, or whether "treasure" was symbolic of something other than financial reward.) [A]

So I thought of this story, I returned home to Tennessee, and I started attending the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough. And I found much treasure there. What kind of treasure? you ask. Well, by this point on my journey, the questions I had begun to wrestle with were, to be melodramatic, "What is the meaning of my life?" "What is the purpose of my existence?" "Does it really matter whether this person I think of as me is alive or not?" And as I have been relating, I was beginning to discover that one way to approach these questions, a way that has existed since the dawn of human culture, is through the wisdom of the storyteller.

The Mythological Perspective

[A] This is the way I heard the story, but there are many versions, one famous one is from Martin Buber, concerning Rabbi Eizik of Cracow, who had a dream that there was a treasure to be found under the bridge leading to the King's castle in Prague.

To enter into this realm of story, however, it is important to understand that the wisdom is by no means limited to fairy tales. In fact, there are other, more elaborate stories that have served as the foundation stones, the building blocks, of all the great cultures the world has known. Sitting in a studio loft in upper Manhattan, I spent many days listening to a master storyteller, Joseph Campbell, tell the great myths of human history and describe in detail their impact on human culture. The legends of King Arthur, and how these great myths of the late middle Ages gave rise to the Renaissance—and too much of modern Western culture as well. How Hindu and Buddhist myths gave rise to the culture of India, and how these stories radiated out to influence the beliefs and values of the surrounding world. How the American Indian myths shaped the world in which the tribes lived out their lives. How the telling of her visions by the medieval saint Hildegard of Bingen gave listeners a powerful and fresh experience of the Christian message, helping to renew its vitality. And in modern times, how James Joyce attempted to capture in his novels the mythmaking and myth-created nature of humankind. And much, much more.

On the personal side of this unfolding journey, I had also begun to learn that the road along the path of inner exploration takes many a sharp turn, often doubling back on itself. At least that seemed to be the path for me. And doubts were a natural part of the territory to be explored. Often after my excursions into the world of stories and myths, I would return to my daily life and wonder anew whether that other world really had anything to do with real life—with my questions. How many times I asked myself, *Can these stories really help me find the path to a more meaningful life? Are they truly relevant to my life today as I wrestle with the issues of how to live? Can these stories, in our modern world, really help me answer this "meaning" question for myself?* Such questions were especially relevant for me because the old stories, the myths that had guided humanity for much of its existence, were given little attention or respect by most of the people I knew. In fact, in my world the old stories were usually encountered only as boring schoolwork, to be escaped as quickly as possible.

As I continued my explorations, however, I began to have a new perspective on my doubts. Doubts were not to be ignored, but at the same time they were not to be given too much power or control over one's life. In fact, doubts could be valuable allies on the journey. All that was required was to begin examining the doubts themselves. Where did they come from? Did they arise out of a deep wisdom, or were they simply the voice of fear—the part of me that resisted all change, the part that

feared anything new? Through such questioning the valid concerns seemed to become more solid, and the fears tended to diminish in strength. (The fears would seldom disappear completely, however. I could usually find them lurking around in the shadows, waiting for a weak moment to reassert their position.)

Living for a time with the possible value of story and myth in my heart, weighing it against the doubts, I began to consider the fact that there are stories and then there are stories. Many stories, especially in modern times, seem designed strictly for entertainment—to help us escape for a moment from our troubles. The main value of such stories is to deaden us to the pain we feel within ourselves, or to the horrors we see in the world about us. In addition, many modern stories are simply selling a point of view. And some are providing a useful but temporary emotional release. Thus, if I doubted the wisdom of the old stories—if I didn't always see their relevance—perhaps I was viewing them in the light of these much more limited modern versions, rather than looking beneath the surface for their deeper, hidden meanings. Perhaps if I would only consider the old stories afresh, I would truly find help in the struggle to make sense of my life—especially if I resisted the assumption that the old stories, like most of the new, were created mostly for entertainment or escape.

As you have gathered by now, I decided to explore this path. As for your decision, if you are hesitant, if your intellect would like a little more convincing that there is a treasure to be found, consider the argument provided by Carl Jung. He proposed that the old stories arose out of a fundamental set of images that are shared by all humanity. These images, present in our unconscious at birth, are as much a part of our birthright as our physical features or the numerous instincts we observe in all humankind. To better understand this concept, think for a moment of the instincts we see in animals—for instance, the ability of migrating birds to fly alone thousands of miles to a particular location without ever having been there before and without ever having been shown the way. Consider how some birds raised by humans, never having seen a nest, can build a nest just like the rest of their species—on the first try. Think of the fact that some male animals will spontaneously perform the mating dance of their species even though they have never seen it before. Consider how new parents of many species will begin to care for their young just as their forebears did, even if they were not cared for in this way, and even if they have never seen these methods of caring performed.

In this context, Jung suggested that just as instincts are with us at birth, so are some of our fundamental images of what life is about and of how we should live. In this context, the great stories and myths have endured precisely because they capture the collective wisdom of humanity, are the repositories in which are stored for this language-based creature called "human being" some of the answers to the riddles our collective past deposits in us. Because of this, in the great stories and myths we find lessons that speak to our shared human needs and aspirations, distilled into entertaining events and moving drama to capture our attention and touch our souls.

In my own journey, as I considered the potential value of these stories in my quest for meaning, it became increasingly clear that there are truly those certain stories, stories handed down from generation to generation, first by word of mouth, then by pen and press, that have fired the imagination and stirred the soul—stories of a particular power that have fascinated and entranced generations of adults, and yet carry meanings that are not immediately clear. More and more these stories came to seem like great buried treasures, hidden beneath the path we tread each day. Thus, if I wanted to engage in a quest for meaning, the opportunity was closer at hand than I had supposed. I had only to dig down a little in that old, familiar path, and I would begin to uncover the treasure to be won. It was a chance I was more than willing to take.

Choosing a Guide - The Journey of Odysseus

As we start our adventure down this pathway, we immediately come to a junction with signs pointing in different directions. And we must now make a critical choice. Which story shall we follow? There are many, many stories woven into the fabric of our culture.

Well, let's begin at the beginning. At least with the recorded beginning of western culture, with the stories of the ancient Greeks. Let's begin with that old Greek who many consider the master storyteller of all time. Let's begin with Homer. As western culture began to emerge from the mythic past, we set forth on our journey guided by the myths of Homer, by the images and ideals embedded in his telling of the stories handed down from the even more distant past.

It could easily be argued that, besides the Bible, the stories of Homer had a greater impact on the development of Western civilization than did the work of any other

individual or any other book. (The case would be that the stories of Homer molded Greek culture more than any other body of work, and that ancient Greek thinking influenced the development of Western culture more than any other body of thought except the Bible.) Insofar as this is true, the nearest competitor to Homer for this second-place honor would probably be another of the ancient Greeks — Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle. But since Homer was earlier and had a profound influence on the others, he seems a fitting place to begin our quest.

We could also begin with the Bible. But since the stories of the Bible are still told and retold continuously in hundreds of thousands of churches and synagogues all over the world today, perhaps it would be valuable to focus for a moment on the second, somewhat neglected pillar of Western civilization, the wisdom of ancient Greece. This classic way of seeing the world is so deeply embedded in our blood, so rooted in our very being, that to unravel its mysteries might just help us unravel our own.

So come with me for a little while, and help me imagine the storyteller Homer, standing alone before the assembled citizens of an entire community, reciting – no, not reciting – performing a drama, playing all the parts himself, night after night for six consecutive nights. On each of these nights, his performance would last up to four hours. It was a drama that he had created out of the raw material of the stories he had heard in his own youth. (Probably not written; Homer quite possibly did not read or write.) Try to imagine a particular performance in a particular city in the Aegean world of the eighth century B.C. This performance would probably be the culmination of a great festival season, and the performance would contain for those in attendance the religious teachings and the history of the culture. In many ways this performance would fill the combined roles that the theatre, great literature, television, and the cinema fill for us today.3 Imagine this scene, and you begin to get a sense of the importance of The Iliad and The Odyssey to the ancient Greeks. In fact, it could be argued that these works were as important to their world as a combination of the Bible, the history of the founding of our nation, and Shakespeare are to many Americans today.

These stories were referred to constantly to answer questions about how people should behave, about what was important in life, about the nature of the universe — and about one's proper relationship to it. These stories were so important to the ancient Greeks, yet are so unappreciated in our world today, that it is difficult to find

the right perspective from which to understand them today. To do this, we must first acknowledge that these stories, although important, have little of the power and relevance for most of us that they had for their listeners when they were first told. On the other hand, it is equally important to recognize that our way of thinking - especially our values and our goals - was dramatically influenced by the thinking of this ancient world. Moreover, these ancient Greeks spent a lot of time considering the very same questions we are beginning to consider here. In fact, it was out of their encounter with these questions that the foundation of Western knowledge and Western civilization arose. This is so fundamentally true that it is almost impossible to imagine our culture without taking into consideration the influence of Homer and the Greek thinkers that followed him. Perhaps, therefore, it will prove especially valuable in our quest to explore what this old Greek has to say. Who knows, if we truly wish to look beneath the surface of our lives, and explore the hidden meanings others have found, perhaps the best place to begin is with the earliest stories that shaped and molded us, with the stories that helped create the culture in which we live. Perhaps hidden within these stories are hints and clues to the riddles of life that have troubled the sleep of Westerners for 3000 years.

Choosing a Hero

Within these stories of Homer there are many different characters we could follow, but none is more relevant to our current aim than Odysseus, the greatest surviving hero of the Trojan War. (The Romans also told the story of Odysseus, but in Latin he was known as Ulysses.) In The Iliad, Odysseus leaves his wife and very young son to join the Greek army in the Trojan War. In the pages of The Iliad we see the causes and the characters that led up to this great war, and we see the battles ebb and flow as the characters play out their lives.

The specific reason for this adventure is that Helen, "the most beautiful woman in the world," has run away with a Trojan prince, and the Greeks have vowed to bring her back to her Greek husband. She has to be brought back, you see, because she has run away with a Trojan prince – and this is not a very complimentary thing to do to Greek pride, especially male Greek pride.

Odysseus is still a young man when the war begins, but he is already the King of Ithaka, one of the richest islands in the ancient world. (As you read the quotes that

follow from The Odyssey, it will help to remember that the Greeks are also referred to as the Achaeans, as the Danaans, and as the Archives.) From his island he leads a force of many ships and many men, joining similar forces from other Greek city-states, to make up the Greek army under Agamémnon, the most powerful Greek king and the brother of Helen's husband. The war continues for ten long years, and at the close of The Iliad the Greek army is encamped outside of Troy, and the greatest Trojan warrior has been slain. The Greek forces now have a clear advantage. But, surprisingly, here The Iliad ends. The conflict is not resolved.

In The Odyssey, we gradually learn what happened at the final battle of Troy. Even though the Trojan champion had been slain, to capture a major walled city like Troy was still a formidable undertaking. Yet if the Greek forces had failed, their ten-year struggle would have been in vain, for Helen would not have been returned to her husband.

Into this propitious moment steps Odysseus, who devises a plan to build a gigantic wooden horse and leave it outside the gates of Troy. To the Trojans, the horse is meant to appear as a tribute to an unconquerable foe. When the huge horse is deposited on their doorstep, the Trojans debate at length what to do, and finally decide to accept the horse as a token of tribute from the Greeks. They take the wooden horse inside their city walls. [This is a big mistake.] That night, there is celebration and drunken revelry in Troy. But when most of the Trojan soldiers are drunk and asleep, the trap is sprung. Odysseus and a few of his men who have hidden in the hollow horse climb out, surprise the soldiers they encounter, and open the gates of the city to the Greek forces outside. Troy is destroyed, and Greek supremacy is established in the eastern Mediterranean for hundreds of years to come.

(There is still debate about how much of this story actually happened, and how much was simply the invention of the storyteller. My own belief is that this myth does refer to an actual struggle for dominance between what is now Greece, and the coast of what is now Turkey. At the level of history perhaps the Trojan War is about the clash of two powerful cultures and the ultimate victory of the emerging Greek world over the city-states on the coast of Asia Minor, led by the city of Troy. If this is true, then this battle had a significant impact on our own culture, for if the Greeks had failed, Troy and Asia Minor would have played a much more dramatic role in the unfolding of western culture. (Put in map.) But here we are not so concerned with the currents of

world history as with individual journeys, and especially with the journey of Odysseus. Thus for our inner journey, whether the story is historical or not is of no real consequence.)

So now we have the hero Odysseus, a middle-aged man who stands at the absolute pinnacle of worldly accomplishment. He has emerged as the greatest living hero of this monumental war, without peer among those still alive. He is the hero of his nation, a man of unmatched cunning, an unrivaled strategist. He has proven beyond question that he is a great warrior, that he is bold, clever, and courageous. He is a hero among heroes, soon to become the subject of ballad and legend.

But this is not the end of The Odyssey. The great victories of Odysseus' youth are not the end, but only the beginning of this story, for The Odyssey is not about Odysseus' victory at Troy. That is but background. The Odyssey is the story of Odysseus' ten-year-long journey home after the war. And what a journey it is, another ten years made up of people, places, and events whose names have become synonymous during three thousand years of Western culture with the attitudes, issues, problems, and emotions they describe – words and phrases such as "an odyssey," "a mentor," "Lotusland," "the siren songs of life," "Skylla and Kharybdis" (if you don't know this one, you should, and you soon will if you stick with me), "lashed to the mast," and many, many more — phrases which are now irrevocably imbedded in our culture and language.

For the Greek world of that time, there is no question that The Odyssey was more than just an adventure story. There is no question that for the people of that time and place it was a central carrier of history, of values, of religion. But can this story still have meaning for us today? Could it be that the reason this particular story has had such power to fascinate and grip people for one hundred and fifty generations lies in the fact that Odysseus' journey home is also an inner journey in search of the meaning of life, a journey in search of meaning after the challenges and victories of youth?

(Bill Bridges presented an excellent introduction to this way of approaching The Odyssey on a tour he was leading to ancient historical sites in England and France. It was a fascinating and valuable encounter, and I am grateful for it. Part of his thinking on the subject is contained in *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*, pp. 47-52.)

In the book, Bill describes it in just this way: "This is no simple trip, but rather the journey of personal transformation that becomes possible after an individual has done the world's business for long enough." Or to put it the other way around, could the lamp that this story has held before us, generation after generation for nearly three thousand years, be shining on a path along the trail of the quest for meaning? And if so, what hints does it offer to those of us who must make this journey ourselves?

Overcoming an Obstacle

If we are to take this story seriously, however, and gain whatever boon it has to bestow, most of us must overcome a significant obstacle. We must remember that we first encountered The Odyssey, as well as most of the world's great literature, as a class assignment in school. But The Odyssey was not written primarily for people of that age or that time of life. It was written to be performed for the royal court on the most important occasions. It was written primarily for adults struggling with the major issues of their adult lives. Yet since most of us read parts of The Odyssey in Miss Minerva's English 101, when it is mentioned to us later in life we have a tendency to say, "Oh, I've already read that!" and to believe that we have gained all the wisdom it has to offer.

But the Odyssey, as with most great literature, has many levels of meaning, and only the first levels reveal themselves on the first reading. And some answers only have relevance when a person has wrestled with the appropriate question for a time in his or her own life. In fact, it could be that the truly great works have gifts to give at each stage of life if we will open our minds and our hearts to receive them. But this requires that we overcome our lingering memory of what we thought of that one passage we read the night before the football game, or the day before the senior prom.

In the case of The Odyssey, it is especially difficult to get beyond this obstacle because the story was good reading for many of us even in the above circumstances. Because it worked for us then, the perception is reinforced that we "got" what it had to say back then. And we probably did get what it had to say to us at that time in our lives. But could there be more? Let's take a chance and find out.

A Successful, but Very Human Character

Before jumping into the story and the search for the wisdom it might contain, let us note two things about Odysseus that seem particularly important. The first is that he is an especially human character. At various points in the story he "exhibits all kinds and degrees of human behavior and, without seeming inconsistent, can, depending on circumstances, be brave or cowardly, wise or foolish, cautious or foolhardy, and so on, through the whole range of human possibilities." [B] This is a person with whom most of us can identify, and in whom, during our reflective moments, we have the chance to see the various sides of ourselves.

Secondly, although Odysseus has many failures and many defeats in his journey, in the end there is a feeling that his life is fulfilled, complete. This is in great contrast to so many figures from literature and history who have accomplished much, but who seem in the end to be finally overtaken by defeat, betrayal, or premature death. Think of Hamlet and Macbeth, Alexander and Napoleon, Julius Caesar. Think of the many stories of heroes meeting their downfall in countless ways. In fact, it was a belief in the ancient Greek world that victory - and the pride that usually accompanies it - contains within itself the seeds of failure. The Greek name for this force was nemesis, and its effect is seen again and again in Greek literature - and in much of the literature of every culture and every age. Yet its power is not limited to the world of literature. It is just as present in the lives of real people in our world today. For instance, bring to mind the images of Howard Hughes, Richard Nixon, Marilyn Monroe, Jimi Hendrix, or Elvis Presley – people who seemed to have it all, yet who's lives ended in tragedy or early death. In this area, life does seem to "imitate art."

So what makes Odysseus different? Why does his life seem fulfilled, meaningful, complete? It will take a while to try to answer this question. But if you have a moment, let us begin.

The "Necessary" Defeat

As our story begins, the subterfuge of the wooden horse has brought the ten-year war between the Greeks and the Trojans to a glorious end (glorious at least from the point of view of the Greeks). Agamemnon and his forces have entered and ransacked the city of Troy. Helen has been reunited with her husband. After much celebration, after the dividing of the spoils, the armies of the Greeks are preparing for their journey

[B] Cliff Notes of The Odyssey, p. 27 (You use a good quote no matter where it is found.)

home. What a spectacle that must have been. Thousands of troops, still flush with the intoxication of victory (as well as of wine) gaily loading their ships with the hard-earned spoils of war. Imagine the exhilaration and the pageantry of that moment. One by one the ships finish their rituals of departure and move slowly from the harbor, gaining speed as they catch the draft of the favoring wind. Imagine with me now what must have been going through the mind of each Greek warrior as he thought of his return. "Well, I made it after all. After ten bloody and difficult years, in no time I'll be home. And a hero's welcome it'll be for me. Maybe it was worth it after all."

But as we all know from our own experience, thoughts do not always create realities. And such was to be the case with Odysseus and the Greek warriors from Ithaka. The first event of their voyage of return gives a premonition of the years to come. Oh, this encounter starts well enough:

> The wind that carried west from Illion, brought me to Ismaros,
> on the far shore, a strongpoint on the coast of the Kikonês.
> I stormed that place and killed the men who fought. (p. 146)

But after the initial victory on the coast, Odysseus cannot persuade his men to return to the boat:

> My men were mutinous, fools, on stores of wine.
> Sheep after sheep they butchered by the surf, and shambling cattle,
> feasting, while fugitives went inland,
> running to call to arms the main force of Kikonês. (p. 146)

At dawn the Kikonês army attacked Odysseus and his men. Although the Greeks fought bravely:

> . . . When the sun passed toward unyoking time,
> then the Akhaians, one by one, gave way.
> Six benches were left empty in every ship that evening
> when we pulled away from death.
> And this new grief we bore with us to sea: our precious lives we had,
> but not our friends. (p. 147)

Thus Odysseus begins his long journey home with something very new for him – defeat. If this is a symbolic journey about the meaning of life, what is the message here? One possibility is that we cannot expect to go endlessly from victory to victory

throughout life. Perhaps even for those who have had the greatest victories and achievements, there comes a time when they must choose to turn their attention away from outward achievement — at least temporarily. Perhaps even for the heroes and heroines there comes a time when they must make the turn from achievements and victories to meanings and essences, or, if they fail to make this turn, then somehow fate, or destiny (or perhaps their own unconscious) begins to give them nudges and hints that something must change. Perhaps through a defeat, or illness, or simply the loss of savor for the old way of life, each person begins to get the message that it is time to move on, time to turn their attention to other things, time to search for a deeper meaning in their lives.

But what a painful process this can be. In many ways, the more successful we have been, the more difficult the transition, for how can one turn one's back on the skills and abilities, the ways of seeing the world that have led to great victories? For those who have been successful, perhaps only through a series of defeats does the turning have a chance to take place. Why else would most of us not just go on with our victorious, merry way?

However, if the old ways of being no longer seem to work; if, like Odysseus, we begin to recognize that we cannot go endlessly through life from victory to victory; if at some point in our lives we begin to realize that eventually will come — even to us — fading powers and, finally, death; if we reach this point, then we have reached the place where defeat and loss begin to be our teachers, the place where these one-time enemies become friendly alarms to wake us to other realities and to other levels of being. At such a place, perhaps we too will begin to grapple with the question of the meaning of life. Such is the journey on which we are about to embark.

1

The Night Sea Journey

After the defeat at Ismaros, Odysseus and his remaining ships are buffeted by storms and suffer further losses. But then a remarkable thing occurs, a mysterious shift that strongly suggests the nature of the adventures to come. Following the storm, Odysseus and his men find themselves in an enchanted land, a land of giants, nymphs, and enchantresses; a land of sea monsters and spirits of the dead. And they remain in this mythical landscape for ten years. What could be the meaning of this "night-sea" journey? Is it just entertainment? Joseph Campbell, one of the great scholars in this field, argues persuasively that this could only be a symbolic journey. [2] In such a journey the fantastic encounters represent, in exaggerated form, the events we will each encounter in our own lives if we undertake a search for meaning. (It is therefore heartening to remember at the outset that in this adventure Odysseus, representing the potential journeyer in each of us, comes to a happy end.)

As Professor Campbell paints the picture of this voyage and compares it to similar journeys in other cultures, we see unfolding before us the slow and difficult process of bringing one's unconscious world into harmony with life in the external world, the world in which we live out our daily lives. Seen through this lens, Odysseus' magical adventure represents the lessons he had to learn on his journey to understanding, lessons he had to learn inside – thus the mythical landscape.

The other famous mythologist of the 20th century, Mircea Eliade, argues that there is a clear demarcation between sacred space and time, and profane space and time. The profane world is the world of our daily lives, and meaning can never arise from that realm. It is only the sacred realm, the mythological realm that can provide an encounter with meaning.[3] So let us be off to this mythic realm of Odysseus, and see if it will provide any hint of an answer to our question.

Forgetful of Our Homeland

The first stop on this ancient "magical mystery tour" is the land of the Lotus Eaters:

> Then I sent out two picked men and a runner
> to learn what race of men that land sustained.

> They fell in, soon enough, with Lotus Eaters,
> who showed no will to do us harm, only
> offering the sweet Lotus to our friends . . . (p. 147)

Thus the first encounter in this mythic realm starts as a pleasant one, with no apparent danger or threat. However, the dangers in this realm are not always obvious, for among the crew:

> Those who ate this honeyed plant, the Lotus,
> never cared to report, nor to return:
> they longed to stay forever, browsing on
> that native bloom, forgetful of their homeland. (p. 148)

If we leave the world of our everyday existence, we also leave all those rules, obligations, and expectations that help us know who we are and what life is about. We enter a world of daydreams, a fantasy world, and in that place it is very hard to remember that we are on a journey and that there is a true home to be found, for the Lotus Fruit stands "for all that makes us forget the journey itself and our real destination."[4]

We forget our homeland, and then there is great danger that we will simply drift through our days with no goals, no intentions, no motivations – lost in our fantasies and daydreams. Extreme cases of this condition populate our mental institutions. But does not this condition also dramatically remind of all those in our world today who have been snared in the net of excessive use of drugs, and have forgotten everything but where the next "hit" will come from? Does it not even remind us of the many among us who are moderately addicted to alcohol or prescription drugs — or even television? Perhaps even those addicted to the everyday routines of life are lost in this Lotusland, if the routines of life have lost all significance and savor. All those in this condition are then, in the words of T.S. Eliot, "measuring out their lives with coffee spoons."[5] (A slightly different variation of this disease seems to afflict a certain percentage of those born into wealth. Raised with everything, there are no necessities in their lives. However, they do not seem to experience the freedom that can come from transcending the rules and obligations of normal life. Rather, never having to move through the normal goals and expectations of life, they are perpetually adrift in their own variation of this Lotusland, their lives filled with one attempt after another to escape the crushing boredom they feel.)

Whatever brings one to the land of the Lotus Eaters, those who tarry have left the confines of the original drives of youth; left the territory of the normal, everyday world of duty, ambition, obligation. Perhaps they have left for the right reasons. But rather than proceeding on with the inner journey, the journey to self-understanding, they have stopped – for a time or forever – in the land of the Lotus Fruit, the land of forgetfulness.

Of course, at any given moment this is not an unpleasant state, so why leave? In this context, perhaps the first message of *The Odyssey* is that when you come to this spot on the pathway, you must not tarry, but must quickly find a way to move on. The message at this stop would seem to be that life's meaning is not hidden in this land of forgetfulness. It must be noted, however, that our hero does enter this land as his first stop on the mythic journey. Perhaps everyone must pass through this place on a true inner journey. But each person must then find the will, the resolve, to move on — if he or she is to continue with the journey home.

Wanting It All - The Kyklopes[A]

Having safely escaped, at least for the moment, this land of forgetfulness, our hero and his crew sail on to the next island in their path. An exploratory party from the ship, led by Odysseus, moves inland and finds a cave that is clearly the home of something, either man or beast. As they wait inside, suddenly there appears:

> . . . a brute
> so huge, he seemed no man at all of those
> who eat good wheaten bread; but he seemed rather
> a shaggy mountain reared in solitude. (p. 150)

What they have found is the cave of a Kyklopes – a great, man-like giant with a single eye in the middle of his head. With this encounter, let us pause for a moment. Here each reader must make a crucial decision before we can continue our journey in the footsteps of Odysseus. One way to understand the Kyklopes, and all the other characters to come, is to view them as cartoon-like characters invented to make an entertaining story. Another way, pioneered in this century by Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, is to view the characters and events of this journey as symbols of the stops on

[A] Also spelled Cyclops. Many of the proper names from The Odyssey are spelled differently in different translations. For instance: Kyklopes-Cyclops; Kirke-Circe. I will use Fitzgerald's spelling throughout.

life's journey – images that stand for parts of each of us at the inner level. In this view, the images we encounter in the mythic realm stand for something beyond, something behind the surface that we first see. They represent unknown parts of ourselves, bringing to life unconscious fears, desires, and fantasies that are a part of us, but a part that we seldom recognize or admit to ourselves. They make vivid for all who will listen the incompatible goals and over-lapping ambitions within each of us. And if we listen well, they also point the way to solutions to the problems they uncover. For my part, I believe that it will be of greater value in my search to follow Jung's view of the Kyklopes, and all the fantastic characters to come. Will you join me?

If we look at our one-eyed giant in this way, who might he be? In the story it is related that:

> Kyklopes have no muster and no meeting,
> no consultation or old tribal ways,
> but each one dwells in his own mountain cave
> dealing out rough justice to wife and child,
> indifferent to what others do. (p. 148)

At another point Odysseus observes:

> . . . for in my bones I knew some towering brute
> would be upon us soon– all outward power,
> a wild man, ignorant of civility. (p. 151)

Perhaps, then, in the symbolic realm this giant stands for the urge within each of us to live outside all rules, outside all restraints — even the restraints that are necessary if we are to live in relation to other people. Perhaps the Kyklopes stands for the urge to go through each day doing exactly what we want, when we want; the desire to answer to no one about anything. Thus the Kyklopes, and each of us at some moments in our lives, want to live by outward force alone – meeting our needs by brute force as we alone wish. Have you ever felt this urge in yourself? [B]

B Also, does this remind of children beginning the terrible two's? Could the stages in this journey be compared to the transitions one makes as one grows up?

In this fantasy of complete freedom to fulfill all one's desires by force, symbolized by the Kyklopes, we would not even till the soil, for that would bind us too tightly to the land.

> In ignorance leaving the fruitage of the earth in mystery
> to the immortal gods, they neither plow
> nor sow by hand, nor till the ground, though grain–
> wild wheat and barley– grows untended, and
> wine-grapes, in clusters, ripen in heaven's rain. (p. 148)

In this land, there is even disdain for the gods. The Kyklopes thunders:

> . . . telling me, mind the gods! We Kyklopes
> care not a whistle for your thundering Zeus
> or all the gods in bliss; we have more force by far. (p. 153)

If we listen carefully, are there echoes here of the life of prehistoric times. Could it be that this island of the giants somehow rests on an instinct of what life was once like for all creatures? Could we have in our bones a primordial longing to return to a simple way of life, where power is king and we can do anything we have the force to do?

Can't We Just Skip Some Of The Unpleasant Stops?

There is one further question that nags for an answer concerning this visit to the Kyklopes. When the ships first landed on this island, Odysseus' men sensed the danger and pleaded with him to leave. But he refused. Why? He later explained, "I wished to see the caveman, what he had to offer." Was this simple curiosity on his part? Perhaps. Was it just a mistake, bad judgment? Perhaps.

Yet perhaps it would be our mistake to assume that this journey ever contains simple mistakes and idle curiosity. On a symbolic quest for meaning, it is quite possible that each of us must confront this giant and, like Odysseus, "see what it has to offer." It is quite possible that before we can move any further on this journey we must look squarely in the face of our desire to rule the world by sheer power and force, that we must face this urge to be free from all constraints of community, of others – free even of concern with the immortal gods. Perhaps we have to look this primordial urge in the eye, face it, and come to terms with it – even if the cost is high — before any further progress is possible. This could well be another of the interior lands we must

enter, make conscious, and cross on any true journey home. Perhaps the only other choice is to be taken over by this urge at moments throughout our lives – without even being aware the rest of the time that it exists in us.

Thus Odysseus, perhaps by necessity, stays to see the Kyklopes in his cave. But it is not pleasant. The giant (as I have frequently heard it reported of giants) started doing exactly what he wanted. And in this case, he decided he wanted to have Odysseus and his men for supper. They were to be the main course. The giant begins eating the men, one by one, simply because he wishes it.

Through great cunning and bravery, however, Odysseus manages to blind the single eye of the giant. However, they are still trapped in the cave, the single exit being covered by a boulder much too heavy for them to move. Their only chance is to somehow get the giant to use his force to move the stone for them – no easy task after they have blinded him.

At this impasse, Odysseus engineers a wily escape by tying his men underneath the rams that sleep in the cave at night. The next morning, when the giant removes the stone to allow the rams to go to pasture, he inspects their backs and sides with his hands — but does not discover Odysseus and his men clinging for dear life underneath. So as the rams leave the cave the surviving men escape, one by one, clutching the bellies of the giant rams. Thus Odysseus encounters the giant of pure self-interest, of unrestrained power, of complete freedom from all obligations to god and man – meets him face to face – and after the loss of several men manages to escape through cunning and courage.

It is interesting to note that they did not escape from this land of pure force by the use of pure force, but in a very unassertive way. Does this suggest that pure force can never be fully overcome by pure force? As we consider the symbolic meaning of this encounter, could we not say that each of us must meet this giant face to face, within if not without, if we would be free from it's dominance in our lives. Must not each of us manage to subdue it through cunning and bravery — not by killing it — but by learning to use its force to help us along our way. As for its blinding, perhaps it is not stretching too far to say that the eye of the giant, the organ that guides the actions of our urge to pure power, must be put out so that it cannot operate by its own will. Its independent eye must be put out, or brought under the sway of our

larger consciousness, so that its force can be used, perhaps even by trickery, to serve the interests of our higher needs and values.

A Hero's True Identity

Another significant event on this island of the giants has to do with identity. When Kyklopes asks Odysseus his name, he replies:

> My name is Nohbdy: mother, father, and friends,
> everyone calls me Nohbdy." (p. 156)[C]

Why, from the perspective of our symbolic journey, would a great hero say his name is "Nobody"? At a later point, when the giant is blinded, his call for help from his fellow giants is ignored because he shouts that "Nobody" has blinded him. Thus assuming the mantel of "Nobody" serves as a trick that provides protection for our hero. But to say you are "Nobody," even as a trick, requires a separation from total identification with being the hero. But even more important, when Odysseus first says he is "Nobody," there is no suggestion that he foresees using it as a trick. On the symbolic level, what else could be going on here? Joseph Campbell sees this as "self-divestiture at the passage to the yonder world: because he did not assert his secular character, his personal name and fame, Odysseus passed the cosmic threshold guardian, to enter the sphere of transpersonal forces, over which ego has no control."[6]

I understand this to mean that Odysseus had to give up his identity, his sense of who he was and what he thought he was about, in order to enter the mythical realm, the realm in which he would encounter essences and meaning. At this stop on the journey, if we hold too fast to our old image of ourselves, we stand no chance of continuing past the giant of pure self-interest. If we are too attached to our self-important roles, we will never be able to gain control of the giant within that wants to live by pure power. In fact, a strong attachment to our self-image at this point feeds the giant. If we would escape this place, we must loosen our attachment to our worldly identity and confront the giant with only our courage and our cunning.

Bill Bridges captures this necessary movement with the thought that when we come to this place "we must stop slaying dragons and start slaying the dragonslayer."[7] This implies that at some point we must stop being the hero and slaying problems out

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[C] Fitzgerald translates the proper name as Nohbdy, but its meaning as a word seems to be "nobody."

there. We must stop overcoming barriers to our ambitions. We must stop identifying ourselves as "Odysseus (or whoever we are) the hero." At some point we must turn back on ourselves and come to terms with the need to be a hero, with the "giant" of will to power within. We must finally release the desire for complete omnipotence, or we will remain forever in the land of the Kyklopes, forever seeking to control the world with our personal power – a power that is never sufficient to the task.

If this thought is correct, then Odysseus backslides immediately from his new knowledge after he has escaped from the island, for as the ship sails from the harbor he yells back to the wounded giant:

> Puny, am I, in a Caveman's hands?
> How do you like the beating that we gave you? (p. 159)

Whereupon the giant takes a hilltop and hurls it at the ship, and just barely misses. As the hilltop sinks beside the ship, it creates a wave that almost sinks them. But Odysseus' pride is now unleashed, and although his crew protests:

> Godsake, Captain!
> Why bait the beast again? Let him alone!
> (You) give him our bearing with your trumpeting,
> he'll get the range and lob a boulder.
> Aye,
> he'll smash our timbers and our heads together! (p. 159)

But when our pride has been unleashed, it is not easily restrained, especially after our first encounter with the need to completely give it up, to become "Nobody." And so Odysseus' pride has its say. He shouts:

> Kyklopes,
> if ever a mortal man inquire
> how you were put to shame and blinded, tell him
> Odysseus, raider of cities, took your eye:
> Laërtês' son, whose home's on Ithaka! (p. 160)

When Odysseus is telling his story many years later, he recognizes the enormity of this mistake, for he says of his boast:

> I would not heed them in my glorying spirit,
> but let my anger flare and yelled . . . (p. 160)

And the price for this "glorying spirit" was high indeed, for when he discovered who had blinded him, Kyklopes asked his father Poseidon to:

> Grant that Odysseus, raider of cities, never
> see his home: . . .Should destiny
> intend that he shall see his roof again
> among his family in his father land,
> far be that day, and dark the years between.
> Let him lose all companions, and return
> under strange sail to bitter days at home. (p. 161)

And so it came to pass. Thus when Odysseus had escaped the immediate danger of his first encounter with the will to power, his pride returned with a vengeance, and at one level this "glorying spirit" set in motion the trials and tribulations of the ensuing years. Sometimes the price is high indeed for our raging pride.

From this encounter we can quickly see that it is not so easy to step away from being the hero. If we are to come to terms with this giant within us, this will to power, this primordial urge to omnipotence, then it will be a long, slow struggle – with many defeats and many regressions. But the encounter must begin, and it is not uncommon to see the frequent re-emergence of our "glorying spirit" as the battle is waged.

The True Enemy Within – Unconsciousness

Having finally escaped this encounter with the giant, Odysseus and his men land on Aiolia, the island of the King of the winds. In this idyllic kingdom the travelers catch a glimpse of what a perfect life might be, but as we will see they are not ready for it yet, not by a long shot. After a month on the island, telling the story of the Trojan War to the King, Odysseus is given many provisions and many gifts for the journey home, as well as "a bull's hide sewn from neck to tail into a mighty bag, bottling storm winds." A bag packed full of all the ill winds that could come his way, tied up so tight that they can't possibly get out. Isn't this another fantasy that each of us has had at some point in our lives? And perhaps it is no accident that this occurs in our story immediately after the first conscious encounter with the will to power. As Joseph Campbell sees it:

> One can recognize in this and the following adventure symbolic representations of a common psychological experience: first, elation (Jung's term is 'inflation',) then depression: the manic-depressive sequence common to sophomores and saints. Having achieved this first step–let us call it a threshold-crossing toward some sort of illumination– the company felt itself to be already at the goal; yet the enterprise had hardly begun.[27]

This clearly suggests that having all the ill winds that might blow our way tied up and put away in a sack doesn't happen easily in the quest for meaning; and if it does happen, it won't necessarily last. In the example of our story, after sailing for nine days and nights on the favorable west wind, the ship comes within sight of Ithaka, the true homeland. For a moment the ship is so near that they can see men building fires along the shore. What a feeling that must have been! But the homecoming was not to be so simple for these voyagers. As they head for shore, Odysseus reports that:

> . . . being weary to the bone, I fell
> into deep slumber; I had worked the sheet
> nine days alone, and given it to no one,
> wishing to spill no wind on the homeward run. (p. 166)

So our hero falls asleep within sight of his home shore! He falls asleep! Perhaps this is to be taken as mere human frailty in a tired man. And yet, would not a man of Odysseus' strength of will, a man who stays up for nine days without sleep, stay up a few hours more if he could see the fires being lit on the shore of the homeland he hasn't seen for ten years? Surely there is more going on here than sleepiness. If we begin to look for the possible inner meaning, what could it be? The answer might lie in what happens when he "falls asleep."

> But while I slept, the crew began to parley:
> silver and gold, they guessed, were in that bag . . . (p. 166)

While Odysseus sleeps, his crew begins to speculate on what might be in the mysterious leather bag (the bag that contains all the ill winds that could blow their way), and they work themselves into a state of high envy:

> 'It never fails. He's welcome everywhere:
> hail to the captain when he goes ashore!
> He brought along so many presents, plunder

> out of Troy, that's it. How about ourselves–
> his shipmates all the way? Nigh home we are
> with empty hands. And who has gifts from Aiolos?
> He has. I say we ought to crack that bag,
> there's gold and silver, plenty, in that bag!' (p. 166)

And, as is often the case with such emotions,

> Temptation had its way with my companions,
> and they untied the bag. (p. 166)

But envy seldom brings what the enviers bargain for, and such was the result of the crew's actions here. They open the bag and the ill wind, unleashed from inside, blows the ship out to sea, and none of the companions ever see that shore again. As for Odysseus, it will be almost ten more years before he returns. Perhaps with a premonition of the trials and tribulations that lie ahead, he reports his thoughts as he awakened, despairing:

> 'Should I go overside for a quick finish
> or clench my teeth and stay among the living?' (p. 166)

Thus with this unfortunate turn of events, the mighty Odysseus considers simply giving up and drowning himself. If all the elements in this story have a meaning, how could we understand the envying shipmates? If we assume for a moment, as Jung assumes to be true of dreams, that the different characters of the story represent different parts of the main character, then the sailors bring to life the various hopes, fears, and desires that Odysseus feels inside but of which he is unaware. Viewed in this light, the companions stand for the envy and greed that Odysseus has within himself – the part of himself that wants everything. Don't most of us have a touch of this "wanting everything" inside? Just getting home isn't enough. We want a treasure too. And if we have a treasure, we want the princess (or prince) also. And if we have that – we want. We Want! We want everything. If we have succeeded at business, we want political power too. If we have power, we want to have written a book. If we have . . . but the list is endless. Each of us could easily make our own long list.

So perhaps the companions stand for the unlimited desires we all have within us. But unfortunately (or fortunately?) we can't reach our true home without giving up these

envying, limitless desires. This does not seem to mean, at least in *The Odyssey*, that we have to give up our rightful place and possessions – just the unconscious, envying, wanting everything desires.

And what of the thoughts of suicide? Certainly at times on this quest we will feel it is just too hard, that we just can't go on, that it's just not worth the effort. Perhaps this is especially true when our unconscious desires undermine goals that seem almost within our grasp. At such moments, everything seems hopeless: how can we ever reach home if we undermine ourselves within sight of the shore? Why not just put an end to this pointless struggle? But if we listen to the lesson of Odysseus' story, there is hope in perseverance.

Thus our story, seen as every person's inner journey, finds Odysseus again far from home. Having succeeded in his first encounter with his inner will to power, he then has an idyllic vision of life as it could be. Next there is a rush of elation at sighting the home shore, and then a collapse generated by the lack of control of his unconscious envying and his desire to have everything.

In the story, after this first round of adventures the company finds itself back at Aiolos. But the startled King does not receive them. In fact, he sends them away. Perhaps it had to be so. If this is indeed an inner journey, the King of Aiolos can be seen as a symbol of a ruling consciousness that has brought all elements of his kingdom into harmony with every other part. In this perfect isle, each element has its rightful place, and all the elements have a conscious relationship to all the other elements – a relationship of mutual respect and value. When the King first aids Odysseus, it is in the hope that he is also ready to live in this way. But when Odysseus "goes to sleep" and his men open the bag of ill winds, it is clear that he is not ready to be the conscious king of his own life. Thus upon his return to Aiolos, the King sends him back into the world to learn the further lessons he needs to learn. What else can the King do, for Odysseus is clearly not ready to return home.

The Dark Night of the Soul

Having encountered this tremendous setback because of envy and greed, and being refused aid by the King of the winds on his second visit, what lies in store for our hero – and for ourselves? If we again turn to Joseph Campbell for guidance, we find that the next step is even deeper into the pit, for our next stop on this journey is

"Deflation, humiliation, the Dark Night of the Soul." [8] This is true because once we begin to see the control that our unconscious motives (such as envy and greed) have over us, there are only two courses open to us; (1) we can simply go back into unconsciousness, and allow our lives to be governed by our unconscious fears and desires and fantasies; or, (2) we can begin in earnest to face our unconscious motives and begin the process of coming to terms with them. On the hero's journey, there is only the latter course. And this is the path Odysseus must take.

But, coming to terms with our deepest fears and desires is not an easy task. It is, rather, a very painful one. Our image of who we are comes crashing down, and we feel humiliation at the motives we have not previously seen in ourselves. As T.S. Eliot captures it in the *Four Quartets*:

> The shame
> Of motives late revealed, and the awareness
> Of things ill done and done to others' harm
> Which once you took for exercise of virtue.
> Then fools' approval stings, and honour stains.[9]

In this "Dark Night of the Soul," Odysseus finds himself in the land of Laistrygon. Here, without much fanfare, the "loathsome" inhabitants grab the first member of the scouting party who comes their way and make a meal of him on the spot. Next, they attack in countless numbers, throwing great boulders onto the ships, until all ships are lost but one. Odysseus is barely able to escape with one of the twelve ships with which he began.

Thus if we choose to make the effort to come to terms with our unconscious motives, the lesson of Odysseus would seem to be that at some point the only path through is to sink down into the "Dark Night of the Soul" and let our envying, greedy parts be eaten up by the primordial forces of that darkness, and hope that we can escape with our lives – and maybe one ship.

Premonitions of the Feminine

After their narrow escape, our voyagers sail until they reach another isle:

> To lie down in that place two days and nights,
> worn out and sick at heart, tasting our grief. (p. 169)

The island on which they have landed is Aiaia, the home of the enchantress Kirkê. Odysseus sends out a group of men to scout the island, and they eventually find their way to the home of the enchantress. There:

> On thrones she seated them, and lounging chairs,
> while she prepared a meal of cheese and barley
> and amber honey mixed with Pramnian wine. (p. 172)

But things were not as they seemed in this hall of the enchantress (are they ever?), for, along with the food, she was feeding them a magic potion:

> Scarce had they drunk when she flew after them
> with her long stick and shut them in a pigsty–
> bodies, voices, heads, and bristles, all
> swinish now, though minds were still unchanged.
> So, squealing, in they went. (p. 172)

So the enchantress turns the crew into pigs. What possible meaning could this event have in our symbolic journey? Turning again to Jung's psychology for guidance, we discover the idea that each person has within themselves a set of feelings, a way of looking at and experiencing the world that is similar to the point of view a person of the opposite sex would have. In Jung's words, this is the anima in a man, and the animus in a woman.

In this view, most men in the early part of their lives primarily live out the masculine traits that are hormonally dominant in them, and which are encouraged by the society in which they live. Odysseus at the beginning of his journey is a supreme example of such a male – living his life as a great warrior and general. But perhaps before he can return home, Odysseus must come to terms with the feminine principle of life, both within himself and in the world outside. As Bill Bridges writes, from a Jungian perspective:

It is significant that in this case, (and others as well) Odysseus' help and insights came from women. In *The Iliad*, of course, everything had been male, but in *The Odyssey* it is to the wisdom of the opposite sex that he must turn to find his way. It is no accident, of course, that Odysseus' whole journey home is toward his feminine counterpart, Penélopê. In symbolic terms he is coming home to his feminine side.

Or as pointed out by Helen Luke, again from a Jungian point of view: "His ten years of masculine achievement in the Trojan war had degenerated into an aggressive inflation. He could not let go of his identification with the hero. Therefore during the next ten years, most of his experiences involved confrontations with various aspects of the feminine unconscious, personified by secondary goddesses who cast their varying spells on him and his men." [10]

To say this in another way, if a man is ever to find his way home to a full and complete experience of life, he must first come to understand and to include in his life the feelings and traits that are usually associated with the feminine principle – compassion, caring for others, unselfish giving, tenderness, nurturing, gentleness, and others that we each could name. (The same point is equally true for a woman's journey, except her challenge is coming to terms with the animus, the masculine principle. Helen Luke presents a beautiful description of this process in *The Way of Woman: Ancient and Modern.)*[D]

Jung also believed that the feminine principle, when properly integrated, can lead a man to a deep spiritual experience, and in that light it is very interesting to note that many of the traits associated with the feminine principle are traits that have characterized men who became great spiritual teachers in the past – such as Christ and Buddha.

But back to our story. Kirkê has turned the advance party into swine. On the symbolic level, what could this signify? If we understand Odysseus' men as representing his shallow, unconscious male urges, then we could say that if a man approaches the feminine through these urges only, he will simply make a pig of himself and be lost forever. He will not incorporate the feminine principle within himself, but will simply try to satisfy his unconscious urges by using females out in the world to satisfy his appetites. Could we not recognize in this pattern the countless men that get caught in chasing one sexual experience after another, or in eating to the point of gluttony, until they become metaphorical pigs? Such men will often find women out in the world who will use their nurturing, caretaking side to satisfy these appetites. But one day a man in this position will wake up and find himself a slave to

[D] And Robert Moore's lecture series on the four male archetypes, "King, Warrior, Magician, and Lover," is a very good description of the masculine principle for women as well as for men.

these desires, caught in the role of "pig" in life, and perhaps even find himself imprisoned by the caretakers through his need for them.

To understand how this might happen, we must recognize that just as man is not one-sided, neither is woman. And the feminine traits of nurturing and caretaking have their negative side, their shadow side, in the desire for control and in the creation of dependency in the other. The woman who is unconscious of her masculine side, but is under its control can become very powerful, and will often attempt to control all the men around her. Such a woman then becomes Kirkê, turning the men about her into dependent pigs.

As this drama plays out in the story, one of Odysseus' men had feared a trap at Kirkê's hall, and had hidden outside. When the other men do not come out, he rushes to the ship with the tale of what has transpired. Odysseus orders the sailor to take him back to Kirkê's hall immediately, but the man pleads:

> Not back there, O my lord! Oh, leave me here!
> You, even you, cannot return, I know it,
> I know you cannot bring away our shipmates;
> better make sail with these men, quickly too,
> and save ourselves from horror while we may! (p. 173)

This is a very treacherous place for a man, this place of conscious confrontation with the feminine. But a man of courage cannot just leave his men stranded. And a man on an internal journey cannot leave part of himself enslaved to base desires. So Odysseus sets out immediately to find his men.

A Guide Appears

Having made the decision, without hesitation, to rescue the men, help arrives from an unexpected place. This is often the case at times of great peril on the journey, especially after one has passed through a "Dark Night of the Soul." And this is doubly true for anyone who will take the time to watch and listen at such moments. In Odysseus' case, the help comes from "the trickster Hermês, guide of souls to the underworld." [11] Why does Hermês appear at this moment? Symbolically speaking, who or what is he? How should we understand Hermês and the other Greek gods who play such a prominent role in Homer and much of Greek literature?

There are several possible answers to this last question, and each answer is like a bridge over a great chasm that disappears into a fog bank. We can see the beginning of the chasm very clearly, and the beginning of the bridge, but it is very hard to discern just where it leads, or what supports it on the further side. But since the answer strikes to the very heart of our quest, a brief attempt must be made to consider the possibilities.

Voice of Personal Inner Wisdom,

One way to understand Hermes and the other Olympians would be as voices from within an individual's personal unconscious. In this view, people have within themselves more knowledge than is available to the conscious mind at any one moment. Further, if we can only stop the chatter of our thinking, worrying mind for a moment, that knowledge which we possess but are not always aware of will bubble up into our consciousness as hints, guidance, and suggestions. It might come as a great flash, an Aha! insight, or it might come as a still, small voice that we can barely hear. But in either case, it is wisdom we have assimilated through time and experience, but at a deeper level of ourselves than we are usually in touch with. Let's call this the Voice of Personal Inner Wisdom, for it comes from one's personal history and knowledge, but from a level that is not always available to the conscious mind. Following this point of view, dreams would arise from the same place, as would many of the things that we just know without knowing how we know them. Words such as intuition and insight would seem to fit this kind of knowing, and most of us have encountered this source of knowledge at least a few times in our lives. (This is perhaps the view that would be most comfortable to a majority of modern scientists.)

Voice of Collective Inner Wisdom

Another way the Greek gods and goddesses could be understood would be as embodiments of a collective wisdom. In this view, there exists a body of knowledge to which all individuals have access if they can but find the door and learn to open it; or perhaps more accurately, if they can learn to get out of its way so that it can open to them, for in this view it is usually a person's preconceived notions and opinions that keep them from hearing this voice. Thus anyone who can learn to be quiet and listen, and perhaps to ask the right questions, will gradually find this knowledge opened to them. Since this voice also comes from within, there seems to be no clear way to distinguish it from the Voice of Personal Inner Wisdom, except that information or

knowledge might arise in this case which an individual has no way of having acquired in their personal history.

This view is closely related to Jung's view of the collective unconscious, and if we follow this model, Hermês and the other Olympians would be viewed as the voices of the archetypes – pure forms of the basic ways of being which humans feel as forces leading, guiding, pulling, toward the fulfillment of themselves. But since there are many different archetypes, each person will constantly feel the pull of many different ones, and will then have to make choices and trade-offs between them. In this view, the archetypes are timeless, and since we humans must live out our lives in time and space, we can never <u>be</u> any one pure form. But we must, to be fulfilled, bring as many of these forces into harmony in our individual lives as we can – and gradually learn to use the wisdom and energy which each provides.[E]

Following the logic of this point of view a step further, a dramatic consequence arises. If there is a Collective Inner Wisdom, then it could provide us with guidance for the unfolding of our individual lives. There would be a wisdom inside each of us that is greater than us, a wisdom larger than just our individual consciousnesses to which we could turn for guidance as we strive to fulfill our lives. However, if such a pantheon of archetypes does exist, that doesn't mean it will be a simple business to gain their guidance. For one thing, the different archetypes could be whispering differing instructions. And they do just that for the Greeks. But if an individual can learn to listen at moments of relative freedom from fear and fantasy, can begin to learn which archetype is speaking, and can begin to understand the necessity for balancing the differing calls of the different archetypes, then there is true guidance available. It might not be easy, as we will see in the case of Odysseus, but there is guidance here beyond an individual's whim, or ambition, or indulgence. And if such guidance is available, the door to the room of meaning moves from being slightly ajar to a position that allows at least a little light to show through from the room beyond.

How do we know if this is true, if there is guidance available from the collective wisdom? We can't know in any scientific or rational way. Perhaps only through faith in the possibility can one discover if it does exist. As St. Augustine said, "Faith is to

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[E] If the Voice of Collective Wisdom does exist, where would such knowledge be stored? Perhaps in our genes, or in the "morphogenetic field" of the world around us (see *A New Science of Life*, by Rupert Sheldrake). But wherever it is stored, in this view the knowledge is available to all who will learn to listen.

believe what you do not yet see; the reward for this faith is to see what you believe."[12] Or we could take an example from modern physics, in which we learn that if we start an experiment assuming that electrons are primarily matter, they demonstrate to us that they are in fact matter. But if we start an experiment assuming that they are primarily energy, they quickly accommodate to our assumptions and demonstrate that they are in fact energy. Thus in this case, at least, we discover that the reality we see is molded and shaped by the assumptions we bring to the looking. It is the assumption of the onlooker that determines the outcome. Or as William James said in a completely different but relevant context, "Believing may make it so." So perhaps we can only discover the possible guidance of the Collective Inner Wisdom in our lives by stepping boldly onto the bridge and walking into the fog bank. Perhaps some will open themselves to this possibility because of a deep feeling of resonance with it, a feeling that can't rationally be explained, but which so affects that person that they step calmly forward. Perhaps others, in desperation, having no other course left open that seems alive to them, step with resignation onto this bridge.

Since this is the view that Jung developed, and since Jung and those who followed his thought are serving as our primary guides on this journey, let's assume for a moment that such wisdom might exist. If you choose to join me on this path, and to step for a moment onto the bridge of the Collective Inner Wisdom, then a whole world of possible guidance for your life opens out for you. It might be a great struggle to get in touch with this guidance. You might not like what we hear. Sometimes you might not want to listen. You might stray from its path. But the path is always there to which you can return for guidance when you are lost in the wilderness of despair and illusion.[F]

If you do choose to venture on this path, perhaps only temporarily, you must acknowledge that there is no way that you will ever be able to prove to another that such guidance does exist. Each person will have to make his or her own judgment about this possibility. On the other hand, it is perhaps equally important to keep in mind that no one will ever be able to prove that such guidance does not exist. It can

[F] For those who are helping others on this journey, another Jungian analyst, Marie Louis von Franz, makes the point that it is a great comfort to know that you do not have to give another person you are helping the answer, but only help each person get in touch with this Collective Inner Wisdom for themselves.

always and ever only be a matter of each person's belief. But one caution must also be spoken. This is a very treacherous terrain precisely because it is impossible to prove what the source of any inner guidance you encounter might be. Psychology has clearly shown that the voices some hear are the split off fantasies and fears of that individual's personal unconscious. Thus just because we think we have had an insight, just because we think we have heard the "whisper of the gods," doesn't necessarily mean that what we think we heard was true. We must weigh it carefully, using all of our knowledge and resources, and then make the best choice we are capable of making as to whether it is true and right. To follow this path we must keep in mind the paradox that to follow fantasies and delusions is terribly dangerous, but to fail to follow true insight or guidance would be to miss a chance for meaning.[G]

[G] It is also worth noting that if figures from the past had ignored such insights, much of religion, science, and literature as we know it would not exist.

Encounter with the Feminine – Within and Without

Back on the road to Kirkê's hall, Odysseus is met by Hermês, the God of transitions, of passage between one state and another, of movement from one way of being to another. Following Jung's approach, this would clearly indicate that our hero is about to undergo a major life-change, a major life transition, and is to be given guidance for this change by the archetype of transitions. At their meeting, Hermês provides an herb to protect our hero from Kirkê's spell:

> . . . this great herb of holy force
> will keep your mind and senses clear . . . (p. 174)

Hermês tells Odysseus that he may now safely drink Kirkê's "unholy wine" if, when she comes toward him with her long stick, he acts in just the right way. When Kirkê advances with her stick, he is to meet force with force. In short order, Odysseus arrives at the hall and is given the potion by Kirkê. But when she advances with her long stick, Odysseus follows his instructions to the letter.

> Without a word, I drew my sharpened sword
> and in one bound held it against her throat.
> She cried out, then slid under to take my knees . . . (p. 175)

Kirkê is immediately frightened by this man who is not subject to her magic potion, and she takes his knees (a sign of supplication and pleading in Homeric times.)

> Are you not sluggish with my wine? Ah, wonder!
> Never a mortal man that drank this cup
> but when it passed his lips he had succumbed.
> Hale must your heart be and your tempered will. (p. 175)

She then recognizes him as Odysseus, whose coming Hermês had foretold to her, and she pleads:

> Put up your weapon in the sheath. We two
> shall mingle and make love upon our bed.
> So mutual trust may come of play and love. (p. 175)

But again, following Hermês' instructions, Odysseus says:

> Kirkê, am I a boy,
> that you should make me soft and doting now?
> Here in this house you turned my men to swine;
> now it is I myself you hold, enticing
> into your chamber, to your dangerous bed,
> to take my manhood when you have me stripped.
> I mount no bed of love with you upon it.
> Or swear me first a great oath, if I do,
> you'll work no more enchantment to my harm. (p. 175)

And Kirkê:

> Swore at once, outright, as I demanded,
> and after she had sworn, and bound herself,
> I entered Kirkê's flawless bed of love. (p. 176)

What a marvelous image of a man's encounter with the feminine. Viewing Kirkê as an external figure rather than an inner figure for a moment, first the men, representing the unconscious urges which wander about looking for fulfillment of their desires and needs, come upon the "beguiling" feminine singing in her courtyard. She seems harmless and inviting, and offers them food and drink. They accept, but since they are unconscious and unaware, they are immediately turned into swine by the controlling, aggressive feminine who was hiding underneath that beguiling exterior. Why is this the result? Because one aspect of woman is her aggressive, controlling side – an aspect of her negative animus, Jung might say. Just as each man has a positive and a negative feminine within, each woman has a positive and a negative masculine within. And when a woman with a strong negative masculine encounters an unconscious or weak man, she will take charge and enslave him. (There go "the men" into swinedom).

When Odysseus arrives, if he rushes in headlong, unaware, he will also be turned into a swine by the magic motion and long stick of a powerful woman. But he is not so unconscious, having listened to the inner voice that warned about and offered protection against the perils ahead (the perils our weaknesses lead us into), and he draws his sword when Kirkê approaches with her long stick. (You don't have to be Sigmund Freud to understand some of the symbolism here.)

Or, to put it another way, he asserts his own masculine force, the sword, against the aggressive and controlling feminine symbolized by Kirkê's long stick. Otherwise he would be brought under her control, and be enslaved.

When confronted with his masculine strength, the aggressive feminine gives way – and then tries to seduce him. But again, following a deep insight, the guidance of Hermês, he responds:

> Am I a boy,
> that you should make me soft and doting now?
> Here in this house you turned my men to swine;
> now it is I myself you hold, enticing
> into your chamber, to your dangerous bed,
> to take my manhood when you have me stripped. (p. 175)

A boy, having overcome the assertions of an aggressive, controlling woman, would have quickly thought he had won, and would have been easily seduced. But seductiveness is not necessarily a sign of capitulation in a controlling woman. You can often catch more flies with honey than with vinegar, and at times a seductive woman is more interested in gaining control through seductiveness than in the immediate fruits of the seduction. Thus a boy, thinking he has won by force, will quickly find himself seduced, and then gradually unmanned by the feminine. Unmanned? Perhaps this means becoming dependent, or being manipulated, or even hen-pecked. Don't we all know an otherwise strong man who at times seems not to be his own man at all, but is somehow controlled by the "nicest" woman. Don't we all know women who are totally "nice", always doing things for other people, always taking care of others, but who are very controlling underneath all that niceness? A woman who is unconscious of her masculine side will often find a veiled way to be aggressive and controlling, just as a man who is unconscious of his feminine side will often find a veiled way to be soft and weak.[A] Thus when Odysseus meets Kirkê, he must not be seduced on her terms. She must first pledge not to undermine his manhood, she must pledge to "work no more enchantment to his harm." (p. 175)

To attempt to capture this immensely important encounter with Kirkê in a way that has relevance to us all, let us envision a man moving through the world, his

[A] When an unconscious woman and an unconscious man meet– stand back. Unless of course one of the two is you. Then you best work furiously to become conscious, or the relationship will submerge and drown any chance for wholeness in both you and your partner.

unconscious desires and fantasies looking about, trying to find someone out there in the world to gratify them. When he comes across a promising woman (in this case Kirkê) who might fulfill his fantasies, he immediately sees her in an ideal way. As one of Odysseus' men captures it:

> Dear friends, no need for stealth: here's a young weaver
> singing a pretty song to set the air
> a-tingle on these lawns and paven courts.
> Goddess she is, or lady. Shall we greet her? (p. 172)

Thus he projects his fantasies onto a woman out there in the world that he knows nothing about. In such a situation, these fantasies have little to do with the real nature of the woman. In any new relationship, not knowing the person provides the perfect opportunity to imagine that they can fulfill all one's expectations. They have not yet disappointed (though in such a situation this will almost certainly come with time). Because our imaginary man is looking for evidence to reinforce his view of the new woman he has encountered, he may ignore or reject facts that disclose who she really is. The more desperate he is to hold on to his fantasy, the longer he may ignore dangerous signals – and thus end up in a relationship for all the wrong reasons. This phase of believing a potential partner to be "all that you need to want" could be called stage one, the Encounter with Our Own Fantasies.

If the new woman is, like Kirkê, motivated by a need for control [B], she might play along for a time with these fantasies:

> On thrones she seated them, and lounging chairs,
> while she prepared a meal of cheese and barley
> and amber honey mixed with Pramnian wine . . . (p. 172)

She plays along until she has time to spring her trap and gain control. If the man is completely lost in his unconscious world, he will be caught in her snare indefinitely. If, however, the man has a strong masculine side, and can overcome the initial urge to see Kirkê as the fulfillment of his fantasies (if the man is more like Odysseus), then he can approach the woman a second time. He will then meet her aggressive, controlling side with his own strength. He will draw his sword and demand respect. Let's call this the Encounter of Strength.

[B] The result would be quite different if the women were herself innocent, but in our story, it is the controlling Kirkê we encounter.

If in this second meeting the man is sufficiently strong in his masculine nature, then the woman might turn to another aspect of her nature and attempt seduction. She might act submissive, and offer the favors of her bedchamber as a means to gain the upper hand. But if the man has enough consciousness, can listen to his inner wisdom, and can resist this seductive feminine with maturity, then he will not be seduced, and will successfully pass through this Encounter with Seduction.

If all of these tests are passed, then and only then is a man ready for a relationship of mutual respect and equality. Then and only then can a man meet a woman consciously, and on a level of equality. Only then can the treasure chest, which is the potential of all true relationship, be opened, and "mutual trust . . . come of play and love." (p. 175) In the end, the only meeting with the feminine within or without that can result in a whole man is this meeting of equality and respect. Let us call this ideal the Encounter of True Equality. [C]

Of course, all relationships do not follow this path. Depending on the nature of the two people involved, the steps might occur in a different order. And if either the man or the woman is sufficiently mature, some of these stages might be skipped. But judging by the evidence of our story, these different levels of interaction have been part of romantic relationship in Western culture for a long time. And one model for moving successfully through them is embedded in this ancient story.

An Image of Wholeness

To expand upon this model, let us imagine that each person has within themselves four distinct sides, or ways of approaching the world. We might call them the Positive Masculine, the Negative Masculine, the Positive Feminine, and the Negative Feminine. These four sides would exist in both men and women, and the four poles would be defined in very similar, although not precisely the same way for each. The similarities between men and women would grow out of the fact that each has all sides within them. As for the differences between men and women, these would arise from the fact that in most men's lives the masculine aspects are developed first, and in most women's lives the feminine aspects are developed first. Does this happen primarily because of cultural conditioning, or does it happen because of the different hormones

[C] There is of course a similar and comparable movement in a woman's journey to wholeness in relation to the masculine. Helen Luke has captured this beautifully in the previously mentioned *The Way of Woman: Ancient and Modern*.

that course through the veins of men and women. Are the differences preordained by different genetic codes imprinted from birth, or do they arise from the way young boys and young girls are treated by the culture? There is no definitive answer to this question.

Whichever the cause, however, the path for most human beings is to first learn to live out of the gender into which they are born. Each person's self-identity is formed as either male or female, and this is one of the primary aspects of our images of ourselves. Because this early identity development is in one direction or the other, life patterns of men and women are usually quite different. But as a man reaches mid-life, his opportunity for further growth usually involves developing the feminine aspects of his nature (in Jung's terminology, coming to terms with his anima). For Odysseus, this means his attempt to return home to his feminine ideal – his Penélopê. But for Odysseus, this return is possible only after he has learned many lessons from the women he encounters along the way.

For a woman at mid-life – and beyond – perhaps *The Odyssey* provides clues for the unfolding of the masculine side of her nature. Perhaps, if we each contain all of the aspects of wholeness within, all the stories of heroes and heroines contain a lesson that each of us might need at some point in our lives. The trick then is to find the proper story to fit each moment. Perhaps, if we each contain all sides of human nature within, each great story has its lesson for a crucial moment in each person's life. Then perhaps the Odyssey has as many lessons for women as for men, each time they come to a challenge in their lives that was faced by Odysseus. (I know that I have often been deeply affected by the stories told by Helen Luke in The Way of Woman: Ancient and Modern. Whether these stories speak to my anima, or all humans simply have many of the same issues to struggle through, I couldn't say. But my experience is that both men and women have valuable lessons to learn from the stories of the adventures, trials, and tribulations of both men and women.)

The following is a brief look at the four sides in men, and the similarities and differences with the four sides in women. These descriptions do not exhaust the list of traits for each aspect, but only suggest how each might play out in our lives.

The 4 Aspects of Men's Nature

Positive Masculine In Men: Ability to take charge, to assert when appropriate; to fight when necessary. Ability to set goals and stick to them. Ability to be clear-headed and cool in the face of pressure, to use reason and judgment when appropriate, no matter what the outer difficulties.

Negative Masculine In Men: Excessive assertiveness or aggressiveness. Using force when inappropriate or unnecessary. Can lead to rape, brutality. Often grows out of trying to fulfill one's urges through sheer force. Too great a need for control. Assertion without any judgment of appropriateness, without recognizing that force isn't suitable to achieve many ends. Pursuing external goals at too great a cost to other values. Overly competitive. Overly rational and logical at the expense of emotions. Overly righteous. Keeping everyone at too great an emotional distance. In a sense trying to fulfill one's needs by overdoing the "traditional masculine" image.

Positive Feminine In Men: Ability to feel and express compassion, gentleness, and kindness. To be nurturing and loving. Ability to be a care-giver, to minister to others. Ability to feel and express tenderness and warmth. In touch with the earth, with nature, with the flow of life.

Negative Feminine In Men: Overly submissive and weak-willed. Too tenderhearted, moody, soft. Inability to set goals, or inability to stick to goals that have been set. Tendency to shirk responsibility, to avoid life's challenges. A man in this mode can sometimes switch into the negative masculine without warning and become violent and destructive. Could perhaps be called the Unconscious Feminine in a man.

The 4 Aspects of Women's Nature

Positive Feminine In Women: Ability to feel and express compassion, gentleness, and kindness. To be nurturing and loving. Ability to be a caregiver, to minister to others. Ability to feel and express tenderness and warmth. In touch with the earth, with nature, with the flow of life.

Negative Feminine In Women: Overly submissive, weak-willed. Too tender-hearted, flighty, fragile. Inability to set goals, or inability to stick to goals that have been set. Tendency to see others with all the power, themselves with none. Often grows out of trying to fulfill one's urges through the "traditional feminine" role, but inappropriately.

The feminine out of balance. A woman in this mode can often appear seductive and weak, but is often unconsciously using this appearance to try to get what she wants.

Positive Masculine In Women: Ability to take charge, to assert when appropriate, to fight when necessary. Ability to set goals and stick to them. Ability to be clear-headed and cool in the face of pressure, to use reason and judgment when appropriate, no matter what the outer difficulties.

Negative Masculine In Women: Excessive assertiveness or aggressiveness. Using force when inappropriate or unnecessary. Believes that she must always fight, or people will take advantage of her. Believes it's a dog-eat-dog world that leaves no room for tenderness, compassion. Keeps everyone at too great a distance. Great difficulty in expressing positive emotions. Overly competitive. Overly righteous. Too great a need for control. If in touch with her feminine side, will often simply use it to try to gain control. Could perhaps be called the Unconscious Masculine in a woman.

There are great similarities between the descriptions of the four aspects in men, and the same four aspects in women, but there are also subtle differences. The positive traits are very similar in men and women, and any differences in how they manifest arise mostly out of whether a person learns the masculine or feminine traits first. The negative traits are also similar, but perhaps there is a greater difference in how they express themselves. As has been said, the path for most human beings is to first learn to live out of the gender into which they are born, and then gradually to bring to consciousness and incorporate into life the traits associated with the other. Somehow in this process the negative aspects seem to take on a greater coloring of difference than do the positive.

In the countless relationships that play out daily all over the world, an encounter can begin with any side of a man meeting any side of a woman, and depending on which parts engage the pattern can develop in many different ways. And two people can be locked for years in a suffocating embrace because their negative sides have entwined. But only when all sides of the man have come to the proper balance with all sides of the woman is a full relationship possible. And of course every person's starting point is different in the mix of the four elements, so every person's path is unique.

Is a man's encounter with the feminine out there in the world, or is it an inner meeting within the subconscious realm? The answer seems to be that it is usually

both. When a man begins to try, often around mid-life, to come to terms with the feelings that have been locked away, pushed aside so he can go out and make his mark in the world (feelings that are often associated with the feminine; gentleness, tenderness, caring for others) then often there is a woman in the world toward whom he becomes extremely attracted. This attraction can be at a very primitive and immature level, as in Nabokov's Lolita, in which a middle-aged man is obsessed at a sexual level by a twelve-year-old girl. When a man is completely unconscious and immature, then the feminine will almost always appear as a woman out there who he wants sexually. He will often become totally enslaved to the pursuit of women out in the world.

On the other end of the spectrum, there is the image of Dante's Beatrice, a central feminine figure in Western culture, who was a real person, but who became for Dante in the Divine Comedy an inner figure who was his guide through Paradise, and finally his guide to a magnificent vision of the nature of the universe and his place within it. And there are many, many examples in literature, as in life, of all the stages in between. I think it would be safe to say that whenever a man begins to deal with the feminine within, he almost always will find himself in love with, fascinated by, obsessed with, or intrigued by a woman "out there" in the world. This could be his mother (not a good sign) or his wife (but often he thinks he knows her too well). And if we use literature as a guide, there is no one right way to deal with this encounter with the feminine out in the world. The Bible, for instance, is full of encounters of this kind, which have very different results: David and Bathsheba (adultery and murder), Samson and Delilah (the man's downfall), Moses at the well with his wife to be, Zipporah (a true relationship).

What can be safely said is that unless a man resists being controlled by the aggressive feminine, and being seduced by the seductive feminine, he will be enswined or unmanned. Further, if he gives himself over too completely to the feminine principle within he will lose his manhood and be lost in the feminine side of his nature. He will then be moody, overly sentimental, possess no strength of will. In the end, only by becoming conscious and whole within will he be able to come to a full relationship with the feminine within himself and outside in the world. Although it often seems that another person can add to our life what we think we need to be whole, this turns out finally not to be the case. It is the other way round. Only by becoming whole within can a man meet a woman (or a woman meet a man) in a relationship of wholeness,

for as we become more whole inside, we are more and more capable of meeting a partner in a relationship of wholeness and equality out in the world. (And as with Odysseus, if we become more whole ourselves, often the place we can best find a whole relationship is at home, with a mate whose virtues tend to "miraculously" expand as we become more whole ourselves.)

It is also interesting to note that the drug given by Hermês is a drug with holy force. Is it stretching the point, or does this imply that the only way to successfully encounter the feminine principle is to somehow maintain a connection to the broader order of things, to always have in the background of one's dealing with the feminine an awareness of the broader meaning one is searching for. Does it suggest that if a man completely loses sight of the final goal he will be enswined or unmanned in this encounter? The drug Kirkê used was an unholy drug, perhaps to make him forget the ultimate quest, and rendering him susceptible to being enswined.

Another point worth noting in this meeting with Kirkê is her statement that "mutual trust may come of play and love." (p. 175) Perhaps learning to play is part of opening to the feminine side of one's being, especially for a man like Odysseus who has been intensely achieving for ten years. Perhaps this is a major part of what the feminine side has to offer. And certainly learning to truly love – not just to have sex – but to truly love, is one of the primary lessons a man must learn in order to be whole.

To return to our story, after the bed of "mutual trust through play and love," Kirkê prepares a sumptuous feast for Odysseus. But he is morose. Kirkê asks why, and he replies that he can't eat and drink as long as his companions are still in the pigsty. Responding with understanding to his feelings about his comrades, Kirkê:

> . . . stroked them, each in turn, with some new chrism;
> and then, behold! their bristles fell away,
> the coarse pelt grown upon them by her drug
> melted away, and they were men again,
> younger, more handsome, taller than before. (p. 177)

In his excellent book *In Midlife*, Murray Stein makes a striking point about this event: "It seems to me worthy of more note than scholars appear to have given it that the companions' brief encounter with pig-existence had a renewing, vitalizing effect on them: they are taller now, younger, 'handsomer by far', when they come out of their enchanted state than they were going into it." [13] As this suggests, perhaps if we can

come to a right relationship to the feminine principle within and without, the various aspects of ourselves will return to the world with "renewed energy and vigor."

This also implies that, just as with the stop on Kyklopês isle, we cannot skip this stop on our journey if we wish to reach the land of wholeness. As Murray Stein captures this idea:

> It seems necessary to go *through* an encounter with the anima at midlife if the individuation journey is to continue and if the midlife transition is to move from liminality into the next stage of integrating the personality around a new core. To shy away, to repress, to run from the island and declare it hostile and unsafe territory is to abort the process. [14]

Further, we must have the help of the feminine on the next part of our journey. Thus Kirkê must swear the "great oath," and by this process Odysseus will have "broken through the magical power of the anima" and "managed to get her to reduce herself to human magnitude and to commit herself to the human dimension."[15] She will now be his ally in trials and tribulations that are to come.

After the banquet, Kirkê invites Odysseus and his men to:

> Remain with me, and share my meat and wine;
> restore behind your ribs those gallant hearts
> that served you in the old days, when you sailed
> from stony Ithaka. (p. 179)

They accept her invitation to stay, and during the next year they are replenished and restored. Such is the gift that a right relationship to the feminine can bring to a man at this stage of his life.

3

The Descent to Hell

As we are about to see, a year of rest and restoration is only the beginning of the reward that a right relationship with the feminine principle can bring. As Jung suggested in his work, the anima is often the gateway to the spiritual realm. Thus after his year of renewal, Odysseus asks Circe for her help in continuing his journey home. She replies:

> Odysseus, master mariner and soldier,
> you shall not stay here longer against your will;
> but home you may not go
> unless you take a strange way round and come
> to the cold homes of Death and pale Perséphonê. (p. 180)

Hmmm. An ominous turn of events. Just when we are rested and renewed, and ready for a quick, easy journey home, we are told we must visit the land of the dead. Not exactly what we wanted to hear. Odysseus reflects:

> At this I felt a weight like stone within me,
> and, moaning, pressed my length against the bed,
> with no desire to see the daylight more. (p. 180)

I think we can safely say that Odysseus did not look forward to this new trial. Nor do any of us. So why do we have to go? *Do* we have to go? Murray Stein perhaps captures this best: "But the pivotal experience of the psychological change that unfolds at midlife, and the element that most unmistakably declares its uniqueness and brings it to its deepest meaning, is the lucid realization of death as life's personal, fated conclusion. The chilling awareness of this fact grips a person's consciousness at midlife as it has not gripped it before, and the sense of an absolute limit to personal extension in time spreads into every corner of consciousness and affects everything it touches.[16]

So do we have to go?

The answer is both yes and no. No, because we can—as many do—avoid coming to terms with the fact that this existence as we know it will come to an end. In fact, that it may come to an end *at any instant*. Many people do not face this truth, but take exactly the opposite path, and spend an increasing amount of their life's time and energy trying to avoid coming to terms with this reality. Do we not see those all around us who are trying to escape from this awareness by using drugs, pursuing one sexual experience after another, driving themselves to exhaustion with their ambitions, or sliding into oblivion in front of a TV—actions that often stem from an attempt to avoid coming to terms with the reality of death? And aren't we all aware of those who lose themselves in magical beliefs and magical thinking, or fall prey to misguided teachers and teachings, in an attempt to avoid this reality?

Is this not also the reason human beings through the ages have sought the Fountain of Youth in all its varying forms? But the fruits of this quest for a magical fountain have not been promising in the past, and do not appear so today. Rather, if we are to come through this passage of the realization of our personal death "alive"—with hope, purpose, and meaning still alive in us—we must first come to accept this truth and then find our meaning in the territory beyond the full acceptance of this knowledge. [A]

Thus the answer to the question is *no*, we do not have to go. But it is hard to envision how life works in a positive way beyond midlife if we don't. As William James so succinctly captured it, no matter how well things might seem to be proceeding, it is never long before "the skull will grin in at the banquet." [17] So the answer to the question is also *yes*, we must make the journey to the land of death if we wish to come to terms with life; if we, like Odysseus, wish to find the path to a life that is whole and complete. In fact, that other old Greek who gave rise to much of Western values and philosophy—none other than Socrates himself—asserts in the *Phaedo* that the goal of life is to come to terms with the reality of death.

But if we have learned our lessons up to this point, we will have aid on our journey to the land of the dead. Joseph Campbell puts it this way: although Circe—the anima, the feminine principle—"in her terrible aspect is the cannibal ogress of the Underworld," at the same time she is "in her benign aspect the guide and guardian to that world."[6] In other words, if a man can come to a right relationship with his

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[A] In Volume 8 of his *Collected Works*, pp. 404-415, Jung presents a very wise discussion of this issue.

unconscious, and especially a right relationship with the feminine principle within, then he will have a guide on his journey to the confrontation with death, and to the meaning to be found beyond the stark reality of that fact. (A wonderful example of this possibility occurs in the work that marks the beginning of the Renaissance. In the *Divine Comedy*, Beatrice serves as Dante's benefactor on his journey through Hell, and as his guide through Paradise. Finally she leads him to his great vision of the highest possibilities that life can bring.)

Back in our story, Odysseus' guide tells our hero that the reason he must journey to the land of Death is to:

> . . . hear prophecy from the rapt shade
> of blind Teirêsias of Thebes, forever
> charged with reason even among the dead; (p. 180)

She gives him instructions on how to get to Death's kingdom, and precise instructions on what to do when he arrives so that he may hear the prophecy of Teirêsias. Of Teirêsias she tells him,

> ". . . be it he
> who gives you course and distance for your sailing
> homeward across the cold fish-breeding sea." (p. 181)

Thus Odysseus, with Circe's help, sets sail for the land of death in order to find his way "home." As the ship departs, he tells his companions where they are headed, and

> They felt so stricken, upon hearing this,
> they sat down wailing loud, and tore their hair. (p. 182)

(When we—if we—journey to the halls of death, there are certainly parts of us that will be terrified and will not want to go—that will be tightly clutching the doorframe as our more courageous part drags us on through the door.)

Upon reaching the dreaded land, Odysseus follows his instructions perfectly, and the shades begin to gather. As they arrive, he grows "sick with fear," (p. 186) but soon he recognizes the shade of Teirêsias. How should we understand this figure of the blind wise man? Again Murray Stein offers an excellent view from the Jungian model:

> Teirêsias symbolizes wisdom. Blinded by a Great Goddess, Hera, for taking the side of Zeus in an argument about sexual pleasure, Teirêsias

> was given 'second sight,' the ability to see beyond surfaces to what is invisible and unconscious for others. His knowledge is knowledge of the unconscious. . . . This figure, then, represents knowledge of unconscious patterns and facts; his vision is directed toward the invisible, toward psyche.[18]

To say this in another way, Teirêsias represents the inner wisdom that we all have inside us, the wise old man inside each of us whom we often do not hear, but who is there, waiting to give us guidance if we will but listen.[B] In this role, Teirêsias can be understood much as the gods were understood—as the voice either of Personal Inner Wisdom or of Collective Inner Wisdom—but at a more human level. Having been human himself, he can completely understand the human perspective. Having passed beyond the threshold of death, he has no remaining illusions. And having been given second sight by Zeus himself, he can see all there is to see in the unconscious realm. And in the realm of psyche, of soul or spirit.

However, to hear this voice of wisdom we must first, as Odysseus did, come to terms with the feminine principle—for we need her help to reach this place. And we must also sail into and face the reality of death. These two hurdles crossed, what would it mean to come face to face with our deepest inner wisdom? What would it mean in a practical way? Perhaps it would mean giving up the attempt to make life and ourselves as we would have them be, and being willing to see others and ourselves as we truly are. Perhaps it would mean giving up the effort to make life serve our perceived interests, in order to be better able to see the whole of reality. Perhaps it would mean ceasing to blame others for our problems, or recognizing and accepting our weaknesses, or taking full responsibility for our lives and our actions. Perhaps it would mean accepting life without illusions.

Not an easy task, this. But surely not impossible. At least not impossible to travel a "far piece" in this direction. Don't we all know at least one person who has already traveled a long way down this road? Don't we all have an aunt or a grandfather or a neighbor who seems to see life clearly, without any illusions? A wise old one who gives clear, honest advice, but with great compassion? A person who has no reason or need

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[B] In his more autobiographical works, Jung talked a good deal about his inner wisdom figures and the value of dialogue with them.

to say anything but the truth to us, yet who tempers that truth with kindness and understanding?

If we don't know such a person, there are many, many images in literature and even in movies to help us form an image of this wisdom figure for ourselves. Characters such as Uncle Remus, or Merlin, or Mary Poppins, or the fairy godmother in "Cinderella." In the movies we have the characters of Yoda in *Star Wars*, or the janitor in *The Karate Kid*, or the Good Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*. These characters may not have reached the level of wisdom given to Teirêsias, but they all point the way toward such wisdom.

After the first step of recognizing that such wisdom exists *out there* in the world, the next step is to begin to search for it within oneself. For there is the distinct possibility that these images simply capture a truth that exists within us all. It is possible that these images are simply portraits of those among us who have gradually let go of their own personal agendas, until the wise old man or wise old woman is all that is left in them. They no longer have any illusions, worldly desires, need to achieve, or desire to control life's events. They have lived life down to its core, and have become the personification of wisdom itself.

And if it is true that we each have this figure in us, a figure to whom we can listen on life's journey if we will (and whom we can become if we so choose), then how do we learn to listen, and how do we gradually become this person if we choose to do so? If we follow the model presented to us by Homer, we must step into life's lessons, become conscious of our unconscious motives, and gradually let go of the desires, fears, and urges that keep us locked in our strivings and blinded to our inner wisdom. Symbolically speaking, it is necessary for Teirêsias to be blind to the attractions and fears of the outer world so that he will be able to see within.

Back in our adventure, after facing down the pressing host of shades of the dead, Odysseus finally meets Teirêsias face to face, and the sage prophesies,

> 'Great captain,
> a fair wind and the honey lights of home
> are all you seek. But anguish lies ahead . . .' (p. 188)

However,

> ‘One narrow strait may take you through his blows:
> denial of yourself, restraint of shipmates.’ (p. 188)

Specifically, he says that when Odysseus and his men land on the island where the god of the Sun keeps his cattle, they must not eat those cattle. If they do,

> ‘. . . I see destruction
> for ship and crew. Though you survive alone,
> bereft of all companions, lost for years,
> under strange sail shall you come home, to find
> your own house filled with trouble: insolent men
> eating your livestock as they court your lady.’ (p. 188)

Thus Teirêsias tells Odysseus that there are two dramatically different routes by which he may return home. One route, through denial of himself and restraint of his companions, will take him home within a fairly short time, and his companions will accompany him. However, if he fails in this, he can still return home by the longer route, but it will take him many years and further travels. He will be “lost for years”—that is, still on the night sea journey, the soul’s journey to learn its lessons. On this longer route he will return home alone, on a strange ship, without any of his companions. And if he arrives home by this long route, he will find his home filled with trouble.

If we again try to understand this warning and the clear choice that is presented to Odysseus as part of an inner journey, what could it mean? The short route home requires denial of himself and restraint of his shipmates. Might not, must not, this mean that if we wish to return home and fulfill our inborn potential for wholeness, we must listen to our inner wisdom when it warns us to deny our desires, and even at times refrain from grasping at things we think we need? Even hunger, as Odysseus and his men will find on the island of the Sun, must sometimes be overcome. This does not seem to mean giving up all needs and desires, but it suggests that we must learn when it is right and appropriate to fulfill them, and especially when it is not. And when our inner wisdom tells us it is not the right time, we must deny ourselves. If the companions are symbolic of the unconscious drives within each of us, we must even learn to restrain our *unconscious* drives when our inner wisdom lets us know it is not the right time to fulfill them.

Why is this not an appropriate time for Odysseus and his crew? Perhaps one must know when an action is in the realm of the spirit, and must learn to deny and restrain one's worldly desires when "in the presence of the gods." Perhaps one must not use things in the spiritual realm, the cattle of the gods, to fulfill one's worldly desires. Perhaps things of the spirit must be honored as having a higher value in themselves, and not used to meet one's worldly desires.

In our story, Teirêsias continues with one of the most puzzling instructions a wisdom figure has ever given in all of literature. He prophesies that if Odysseus does follow the long path home, he will succeed in killing his enemies and restoring order to his kingdom. But when that has been accomplished, he must then

> '. . . go overland on foot, and take an oar,
> until one day you come where men have lived
> with meat unsalted, never known the sea,
> nor seen seagoing ships . . .' (pp.188-189)

When he has found that place, Odysseus must

> 'Halt, and implant your smooth oar in the turf
> and make fair sacrifice to Lord Poseidon:
> a ram, a bull, a great buck boar; turn back,
> and carry out pure hekatombs [C] at home
> to all wide heaven's lords, the undying gods,
> to each in order.' (p. 189).

Concluding, Teirêsias declares that if Odysseus will follow these instructions, the remainder of his life will take a course that is as full and rich as any we are ever likely to hear of:

> 'Then a seaborne death
> soft as this hand of mist will come upon you
> when you are wearied out with rich old age,
> your country folk in blessed peace around you.' (p. 189)

To summarize this message from the land of the dead, a message that requires great courage to hear: First, there are a long road and a short road home. To take the short road, Odysseus must deny himself and restrain his shipmates. If he is not ready for

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[C] Hekatombs are offerings to the gods.

this, then there is also a long road, with many difficulties, but on this path he can still reach home. If he does take this longer route, however, he will find much trouble at home, but he will finally be able to overcome it. But if he follows this longer route, after he succeeds in overcoming his enemies he must make one last journey, a journey overland to plant his oar where none has seen an oar before.

A journey to *plant his oar*. Seems a quaint and irrelevant thought at first. But as we examine the story, we begin to realize that since Odysseus is unable to take the short route home, the *only* message he hears in Hades that will have any effect on his life (other than encouragement) is this last instruction. If it is of such great importance, what does it mean? But as in any good suspense story, perhaps this discussion should be saved for a more propitious moment. (If you just can't wait, turn to the back of the book.)

After hearing the wisdom of Teirêsias, Odysseus talks with many of the other figures in Hades, and hears recounted many of the stories of Greek gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines. (In this way, Homer molds into his story many of the values of Greek culture, and his understanding of these legends becomes the reference point for most Greek writers through many generations to come.) As these stories unfold, one particular account has a special importance for Odysseus. Agamemnon, the leader of all the Greek armies at Troy, recounts the disastrous events of his own homecoming. After the victory at Troy, Agamemnon made his way home without mishap, and was immediately given a great banquet by his wife. But things were not as they seemed, for before the banquet was done, his wife and her lover had killed Agamemnon and all his men. The great king was caught in a trap and butchered by his wife. (In an inner sense, clearly Agamemnon was not ready to return home. But let's stick with Odysseus.)

In recounting these events, the shade of Agamemnon issues a chilling warning:

> 'Let it be a warning
> even to you. Indulge a woman never,
> and never tell her all you know. Some things
> a man may tell, some he should cover up.' (p. 199)

Thus from the lessons of his experience, Agamemnon advises Odysseus:

> 'One thing I will advise, on second thought;

stow it away and ponder it.
Land your ship
in secret on your island; give no warning.
The day of faithful wives is gone forever.' (p. 199-200)

Not a very cheering thought for our hero as he leaves Hades for his own journey home. How will this advice affect his determination to proceed, and how will—how should—it affect his approach to his own wife, whom he is striving so mightily to rejoin? How would it affect you? (If, for instance, an older and more experienced person advised you never to trust your wife or husband in a situation in which he or she had an opportunity to be unfaithful, what would you do? Would you take that wisdom to heart, although such an attitude might gradually undermine your trust in your mate and ruin your relationship? Or would you ignore the advice, and risk being made a fool by an unfaithful spouse?) Not an easy question, but one that will be valuable to hold in our minds as future events unfold in our story.

After hearing many tales from the dead, suddenly Odysseus has a strong sense that it is time to leave, and he follows his intuition, quickly returning to his ship and sailing away from the halls of Death. Soon they have returned to Circe's isle, and there they fulfill the last desperate request made by one of their shipmates, one who died of a fall and arrived in Hades immediately before them. His body remained unburied, and he pleaded to be given a proper burial. So upon their return to the isle, they find his body and bury him with honor. Is there significance here?

Perhaps this first act of burying the dead after visiting the halls of Death is meant to demonstrate the proper attitude of life toward death. Perhaps Odysseus has learned, or learned in a deeper way, that it is the duty of the living to show respect for the dead, and that it is important to honor with proper ritual the passing of those who precede us into death.

After the burial, Circe greets them and calls:

'Hearts of oak, did you go down
alive into the homes of Death? One visit
finishes all men but yourselves, twice mortal!' (p. 210)

If Odysseus' journey is a primary model for every man's and every woman's journey in Western culture, do we not hear, even in this jesting tone, a clear reference to the

reason for the visit to the home of Death? We must visit Hades so that we can die to the old self, for we must die to the old self before a new self can be born. Or as it was said in another place and time, to enter the Kingdom, "Ye must be born again."[19]

4

The Siren Songs of Life

After the return from Hades and the burial ceremony, Circe provides a banquet for the weary travelers. Late into the night, when all the crew is fast asleep, she prepares Odysseus for the next part of the journey. Her counsel begins,

> Listen with care
> to this, now, and a god will arm your mind. (p. 210)

If we view this advice in the light of our previous discussion, the feminine principle with which our hero has become familiar (and a bit more at ease) will now give him invaluable guidance for the rest of his journey home. For each man on his journey, perhaps the reward for reaching a conscious relationship, a relationship of equality, with the feminine principle within is that he will then gain the inner wisdom necessary for the next part of the way. (Similarly, a woman who has reached a conscious relationship, a relationship of equality, with the masculine principle will gain the inner wisdom needed for the next part of her way.) Further, for those who have reached this level of consciousness, the inner wisdom will be present on the rest of their journey—"a god will arm [their] mind"—and will be with them when they meet the trials and tribulations that are to follow.

And there are trials and tribulations aplenty. But during their last night together, Circe, this figure of feminine power and wisdom with whom Odysseus has established a relationship of equality and respect, gives him guidance for the adventures to come. Then, as ". . . Dawn mount[s] her golden throne," (p. 213) Circe leaves him at the shore, and Odysseus sets sail to face the trials that she has carefully described. And the first is this:

> Square in your ship's path are Seirênês, crying
> beauty to bewitch men coasting by;
> woe to the innocent who hears that sound!
> . . . the Seirênês will sing his mind away (p. 210)

The Sirens: Beautiful voices calling out to all men who sail by, promising a good time, as well as knowledge of the past and of the future; irresistible voices singing an irresistible song. Yet all who venture toward them lose possession of themselves (their minds are sung away, their consciousness of who they are and what they are about is lost), and they perish on the rocks hidden beneath the waves. In the inner journey, what could this image mean?

Since Odysseus has just come to terms with the feminine principle in the form of Circe, and has gained the boon of her guidance and wisdom, it is not hard to understand the Sirens as the first test of this new knowledge, undergone as he begins the return from the mythical world to the world of human reality. From this perspective, the voyage to Hell is the literal and figurative turning point of his night sea journey, the furthermost point he has to reach before he can return with *all* the knowledge he needs for its completion. On the return path, he will often face challenges similar to the ones he faced on the way in—which suggests that soon after a lesson has been learned, it is repeated in a slightly different form, perhaps to determine whether it has been learned deeply enough, and whether he can respond from this new knowledge in the daily living of his life. Thus our hero's first challenge after Hades is the lure of the Sirens' irresistible call, the lure of the seductive feminine. These voices urge a man to follow his unconscious fantasies. But the fantasies are unreal, and lurking beneath are the rocks on which he will inevitably crash if he follows these illusions.

What form might the Sirens take in our lives today? Perhaps the fantasy that easy sexual encounters are free of cost, or that one can casually play with drugs and escape unharmed. Perhaps the illusion that there is a shortcut to happiness and knowledge. Perhaps the illusion that there is a quick fix for one's problems, or the problems of others, or of the world. Perhaps the ability to persuade oneself that the easy solutions will work, and that everything will turn out well without the necessary hard work and restraint. Perhaps the belief that if we can just acquire enough things—a nice house, a fine car, a high salary—happiness will inevitably follow.

Don't we all know people who pursue one get-rich scheme after another, only to crash time and time again on the rocks? Or who follow one fad diet after another, rather than making the long, daily effort it takes to lose weight successfully and healthily? Or who, against all advice, put their faith in one charlatan after another, only to be left

dangling time and again to the consternation of friends and family? As Circe warns: "Woe to the innocent who hears that sound!" (p. 210) If we are not aware of our fantasies and illusions, we will succumb to each siren song we hear, and we will inevitably crash. Even Odysseus, who through his journey has gained a great deal of inner maturity and even wisdom, must be lashed to the mast if he wishes to listen without succumbing to these irresistible illusions. Thus Circe instructs him:

> But if you wish to listen,
> let the men tie you in the lugger, hand
> and foot, back to the mast, lashed to the mast,
> so you may hear those harpies' thrilling voices;
> shout as you will, begging to be untied,
> your crew must only twist more line around you
> and keep their stroke up, till the singers fade. (p. 211)

So even though Odysseus is now strong enough and has the inner maturity to hear the song and recover from it, even he must be tied to the mast while he hears it, or he will be unable to resist. And his crew *must not hear*. He is therefore instructed to fill their ears with wax before the passage. The men of the crew are even directed that when Odysseus, hearing the voices, begs to be untied—as he inevitably will—they are to tie him even tighter.

To try and capture this passage in another way, the Sirens, being female, are the outward expression of an "anima" fantasy within each man. They are *not* symbols of the positive feminine wisdom, but epitomize the negative feminine within. The Sirens are images of possibilities that we think we see out there in the world but that are really fantasies within us. For instance, they are the fantasy that there is a female in the world who offers the bliss of relationship without effort; the illusion that we can have what we want without giving of ourselves. They are the feeling that we can have a meaningful relationship without effort, sacrifice, and commitment; that all our needs will be met without the necessity of making hard choices, or of coming to terms with a real *human* woman with all her faults and needs. They are the hope that we can have our needs for sex and entertainment fulfilled, that we can be treated as important and special, wined and dined, told stories, and even given knowledge of the past and future by the feminine—but a feminine that is not a real human being who gets sick, gets angry, and has a mind and needs of her own.

There could be many other examples. For instance, the Sirens might stand for the fantasy that there is a shortcut to bliss, a shortcut to spiritual fulfillment without hard work, sacrifice, and faith. These and many others are the fantasies within that seem to be calling from the shore. (Of course, the call of the Sirens is not limited to men only. Any woman who is living out of her negative masculine side will be equally enticed by the call of her fantasies, by the siren songs within her soul.)

If we understand the Sirens in this way, there are countless examples of this fantasy and its dangers permeating our culture—in literature, in fairy tales, and even in movies. Take a story by Bernard Malamud, "The Natural," which became a successful motion picture. In the story, a young baseball player has an almost magical athletic ability, and a girlfriend whom he loves and who loves him. But when he first begins to travel with a baseball team, a mysterious female on the train seduces him. He believes for the moment that he can have a cost-free affair. But this is an illusion. Suddenly the woman on the train becomes all too real, and she pulls a gun and fires at point-blank range, injuring him permanently. In the unfolding story, the hero then begins a years-long quest to free himself from his fantasies about women, and to recover his natural abilities and a real relationship. Shades of Odysseus.

We can also see this image at play in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Here the hero pursues an image of the woman of his dreams into a life that doesn't work, a fantasy that is never made conscious and thus finally leads to his death. Or, jumping back many centuries, there is the story of Merlin, the wise magician and advisor to King Arthur who came to understand much of reality, but never consciously came to terms with the feminine principle within or without. Thus, at the end of his life, many versions of the legend picture him being lured to an icy tomb by the negative feminine in the form of an enchantress.

The examples of this image in literature, as well as in real life, are endless. This is also the realm of the *femme fatale*, the woman who seems to be one thing but in reality is something quite different. For her own reasons, unbeknownst to the gullible man, she uses his fantasies to gain her own ends, luring him to his downfall, to the betrayal of his goals and values—unless he can manage to become conscious during the encounter. How many mysteries and spy novels portray variations on this theme? It would be difficult to count the number. Perhaps this illusion is also at the heart of the quest of Don Juan, who thinks the next and then the next relationship will fulfill his

fantasies. But when each new relationship becomes too real, he flees from the reality of the woman before him to the next fantasy.

In real life, how many men turn to prostitutes for fulfillment, or to highly illicit sexual encounters, out of some version of this fantasy? And yet these pursuits seldom end in a way that is anything like the fantasy with which they began. Such encounters are much more likely to end in a total collapse of the person's self-respect, or with public humiliation (as has happened with many politicians and television evangelists). Or it might end with an ever-increasing addiction to perversion, a numbing fear of disease, or simply a completely closed heart.

To try to say this one last time, perhaps the Sirens are those illusions that call out to each of us to forget our journey and sense of what is real, and to follow each passing image that promises an easy path to satisfaction and fulfillment. But in this direction *always* lie the rocks. In the end, perhaps a person can be good at a few things only by giving up the fantasy of being good at everything. Perhaps only after a person gives up the fantasy of writing the world's greatest novel can that person write a good novel. Perhaps only after a person gives up the fantasy of solving all the world's problems, or being the greatest leader the world has ever seen, can that person be a truly effective leader. Perhaps only after a person gives up trying to make everyone like him or her can that person form a few deep friendships. Perhaps only after giving up our fantasies of omnipotence will we be able to let go and just be who and what we are. Could this be the meaning of the thought that we must be willing to lose everything before we can find anything in our lives? Perhaps only when we have completely given up our fantasies about life will we be able to fully use the talents and abilities we do possess.

Why are the Sirens feminine? Perhaps they are ultimately symbolic of the negative feminine in both men and women, symbolic of that part in each of us that longs for easy answers, for success without effort, for an escape from the need for the sword of discrimination in our lives. (Helen Luke discusses this at length in her book *The Way of Woman*) Perhaps the Sirens are the negative feminine in both men and women, the part that attempts to seduce the healthy male principle in each of us—the principle of purpose, of determination, of discrimination. Or perhaps the Sirens are simply the negative other, and appear as feminine in our story because our hero is male.

Why will the unconscious feminine first try to seduce? Perhaps because one of the most basic natural urges, often demonstrated by young children, is simply to get what one wants however one can. If a child lives out this urge from the unconscious masculine principle, it simply takes what it wants by force—from other children, from anyone subject to its power. If it lives out this urge from the unconscious feminine principle, it tries to get what it wants by seduction—seduction in its negative aspect. But it is very important to recognize that both masculine force and feminine seductiveness can be positive when they are used in a more conscious way, in a way that moves the whole person forward responsibly. Thus part of the process of growing up and becoming whole is that of gradually learning when and how force and seductiveness can be used in a healthy way.

But back to our story. Odysseus, lashed to the mast, hears the song of the Sirens and demands to be untied. But he is held fast by the ropes of restraint—outwardly and inwardly. He has prepared himself to meet the siren song, and has firmly fixed within himself his resolution not to be seduced. He has, symbolically speaking, tied himself to the mast by his consciousness and resolution.

The question does arise: Why does he have to listen? Why didn't he just fill his own ears with wax as he did the ears of his men? Perhaps the passage suggests that the guiding consciousness cannot go through life avoiding all seductive images. Perhaps this would not lead to wholeness, but to a life closed off from all adventure, all possibilities. Perhaps, in fact, a person must occasionally be lured to adventure by the seductive feminine. If a person is too protected, too controlled, perhaps the seductive feminine is the only chance to be pulled into the necessary adventures of life. And life must have its adventures, if we are to learn our lessons. But such a path is also dangerous, for if we are lured to adventure by the seductive feminine, and do not become conscious soon enough, we will be destroyed on the rocks.

Perhaps in the end, if we are to *live* life rather than sit forever in a prison of rules, we must inevitably hear the siren songs, for rigid rules grow out of the rulemaker's fear of his or her own demons and desires. In the end, we cannot avoid hearing, except at too great a cost. In fact, it is often those who attempt never to hear the Sirens that fall the hardest. For instance, might not ministers who spend a great deal of time condemning sex be doing so because they have strong unconscious desires to live out these fantasies themselves? In such a case, if they do not make their fantasies

conscious, and keep condemning everyone "out there," they often become the ones who in a moment of weakness fall into a scandalous affair with a member of the flock, or create a scandal when their secret affairs become public—as has been true of numerous well-known evangelists through the years. Is it really hard to see that those who are doing the most condemning of others are often fighting their own secret demons and desires? But rather than looking within and coming to terms with their fantasies, they try to blot them out by condemning those fantasies in everyone else.

Along the pathway of our journey, however, the only healthy choice is to learn to recognize these fantasies for what they are, and to prepare our will and restraint to resist them when necessary. Otherwise, we are much more likely to pursue them at just the wrong time and end up on the rocks of the Sirens. (For those of us who are especially attached to our fantasies, such as myself, it is important to say again that the goal is not to make our unconscious fantasies conscious so that we can *live them out*, but to make them conscious so that we can make a clear decision as to what it is appropriate to live out in our lives.)

Thus, as is true of so many lessons on this journey, we can fall off the bridge on either side. To hear the song unprepared is to perish. To close it out of one's life completely is not to live (and to increasingly risk a complete collapse into its embrace.) So our hero listens—perhaps must listen. But he is firmly tied to the mast. It is important to note, however, that even with all his experience he would succumb while he is listening if he had not built up the inner restraint, if he were not tied to the mast by his consciousness of what is real and what illusion. This implies that we must always stay alert to the need for conscious restraint. We cannot just assume it will happen, cannot just leave it to habit—even a good habit. But our hero is prepared for this challenge, he is held firmly by the ropes, while the crew, ears stopped by the more mature Odysseus, hear nothing as the ship sails safely by. And after the ship has passed the Sirens and the voices have faded, he is strong enough and wise enough to resist the temptation to return.

5

Impossible Choices Along the Way

Free of the Sirens at last (hopefully for the rest of his life), Odysseus sails on toward the next great challenge along the way. This trial involves a choice (two choices, really) that he must make. As Circe describes it:

> One of two courses you may take,
> and you yourself must weigh them. I shall not
> plan the whole action for you now, but only
> tell you of both. (p. 211)

To meet this new challenge, he must either sail his ship past the clashing rocks—which no ship save one has ever passed—or he must pass through the narrow waters between the headlands of Scylla and Kharybdis. If he chooses the second course, he must also decide whether to sail through on the side of Scylla, or whether to risk the passage on the side of Kharybdis. The latter is a whirlpool that three times a day spews up a mighty torrent, then sucks it down again in a whirling maelstrom. It is so terrible that:

> . . . if you come upon her then
> the god who makes earth tremble could not save you. (p. 212)

On the other side is Scylla, a devouring female monster with

> . . . six heads like nightmares of ferocity,
> with triple serried rows of fangs and deep
> gullets of black death.
> . . . And no ship's company can claim
> to have passed her without loss and grief; she takes,
> from every ship, one man for every gullet. (p. 212)

Thus Odysseus has two choices to make. First, he must decide whether to sail between the clashing rocks or whether to sail between Scylla and Kharybdis. And if he chooses the latter, he must then decide whether to sail closest to the whirlpool, or closest to the monster that will inevitably devour at least six of his men. This is why,

as Bill Bridges points out, Scylla and Kharybdis have "come to stand in the Western imagination for the impossible choices of life."[4]

After describing Odysseus' options, Circe strongly recommends that he choose to sail between Scylla and Kharybdis, rather than by the clashing rocks. And she further recommends that he keep his ship toward Scylla even though it will cost him at least six men. But Odysseus, not one to make such sacrifices without a struggle, asks how he can fight Scylla. Circe replies:

> 'Must you have battle in your heart forever?
> The bloody toil of combat? Old contender,
> will you not yield to the immortal gods?
> That nightmare cannot die, being eternal
> evil itself—horror, and pain, and chaos;
> there is no fighting her, no power can fight her,
> all that avails is flight.' (pp. 212-213)

What issues arise here in the inner journey, at this place that has "come to stand in the Western imagination for the impossible choices of life"? Why does Circe tell Odysseus that the choice is to be his, when in the past she has been so explicit about what he must do? And why, after saying it is his choice, does she immediately advise him on which course to take?

One possible answer to the first question is that we have come to a stage in life's journey that can only be traversed by a conscious decision, by a conscious sacrifice of some of the journeyer's unconscious fantasies and longings. At this stage, the wayfarer must make a conscious decision—and take responsibility for having made it. (No excuse like "The Devil made me do it" here. Nor even "I was just following the advice of my inner voice." At this passage, there are no excuses.) Those at this crossroads can be advised about what choice to make, but they cannot pass this point on the journey home without a conscious decision to sacrifice some of their images about who they are and what their lives will be like. Journeyers here must sacrifice some of their "men," some of their unconscious fantasies and hopes—for only by this sacrifice will they be able to keep alive the real possibilities of their lives. And if they linger too long in this place, trying to resist, Scylla will strike again and devour six more men, six more of their talents and possibilities. No, the only path through at this

stage of the journey is to yield to fate, to give up what must be given up, and to pass on with as many of life's possibilities intact as can *realistically* be maintained.

Perhaps this is why, after saying Odysseus has a choice, Circe acts as if she knows that he will go by way of Scylla, even with the losses. For to continue on the journey home, perhaps we must each face Scylla, accept our losses, and only then be free to sail on. Any other decision would be to refuse to face reality. In this case, Circe knows that our hero will choose the path that requires courage and sacrifice, the path that will allow him to continue his journey home. (She knows this because, after all, he is the hero of our story.)

The Great Mother: Good and Bad

And Odysseus does choose to face Scylla. In this mythic realm, who is this Scylla, this six-headed she-monster that is so "huge and monstrous" that "God or man, no one could look on her in joy"—a monster so fierce that "no ship's company can claim to have passed her without loss and grief?"(p. 212)

In the culture of India there is a figure that Scylla brings to mind, but a figure that is much more fully developed, with many more dimensions. That figure is Kali, who in her dark aspect is a "blood-drinking goddess of death, whose hunger can be appeased only through the slaying of innumerable living creatures." [20] Perhaps examining this figure will give us an approach to understanding the current passage of our hero's journey.

In *The Great Mother*, Erich Neumann expands on Jung's work, following the feminine image in many cultures through its multiple roles of life-giver, nurturer, protector, destroyer, and finally "the primordial force of self-mastery and redemption."[21] In the role of destroyer, he writes, "the Terrible Mother has been given its most grandiose form as Kali, 'dark, all-devouring time, the bone wreathed Lady of the place of skulls.'" [22] [A] In her many depictions in India, the "dark" Kali is presented as unbelievably gruesome, with garlands of human heads about her neck, drinking blood from skulls, wearing bracelets made of fingers, and so on. But this gruesomeness is not just to shock or entertain. There is an underlying meaning in the image.

[A] Neumann quotes here the thought of Heinrich Zimmer in *The Indian World Mother,* Zimmer's work was also a major influence on Joseph Campbell.

To attempt to get at this meaning and see what relevance it might have to our journey, let us "regress" for a moment. Inside each of us there is an image of a positive "Great Mother," the underlying force or principle that brings forth and nourishes all of life. Part of this is captured in Western culture in the image of Mother Earth, from which life arises and by which it is sustained.

But there is another side. What is born of the flesh must surely die. Thus in this train of thought the dark aspect of Kali is the full-blown image of the Great Mother as destroyer. For Mother Nature as much consumes life as nourishes it; in fact, the nourishing *is* the consuming. What is nourishment to one living thing is death to another. In the end, each living thing can only live by eating other living things. Or, as Joseph Campbell often said, "Life feeds on life." "For in a profound way life and birth are always bound up with death and destruction." [23] That is why the Great Mother is also terrible. In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* Annie Dillard captures this truth very poetically in speaking of the pact that brought forth life:

> The terms are clear: if you want to live, you have to die; you cannot have mountains and creeks without space, and space is a beauty married to a blind man. The blind man is Freedom, or Time, and he does not go anywhere without his great dog Death. [24]

Thus if we are to come to terms with all of life, we must come to terms with this consuming, destroying aspect of the Great Mother. We will lose some of our "men." We will lose friends and loved ones. We will finally lose this body that we inhabit. And to face the whole truth we must realize that this is as much the work of the Great Mother as is our birth and our nourishment. These two aspects are continuous, mutual, simultaneous.

Back in our Greek world, does not this image shed light on our she-monster, our "nightmare [that] cannot die, being eternal evil itself—horror, and pain, and chaos"? Odysseus has just journeyed to Hell and faced the fact of death, and has successfully resisted the seductive, unreal fantasies of the Sirens. Now he must face the reality that "horror, pain, and chaos" are a constant and inevitable part of life itself. And any meaning he is to find must include this reality, must somehow acknowledge and incorporate this fact within itself. Further, "there is no fighting her." No power can fight this truth. There is only the willingness to acknowledge the horror and pain and chaos, accept the losses that this brings, and sail on—continuing the quest on the

other side. Without forgetting. If one attempts to stay and fight, the losses will only be greater. Thus if we are to follow Odysseus' trail, we must also learn when to fight and when to bear our losses and move on. (As so many profound truths do, this one crops up again and again throughout human culture—in the most serious and respected places, as well as in popular works. Just one example: In the song "The Gambler," Kenny Rogers sings, "You've got to know when to hold'em, know when to fold'em. You've got to know when to walk away and know when to run." Isn't this the same message Circe gave Odysseus about his encounter with Scylla?)

Thus perhaps to face Scylla is to look into the face of this devouring aspect of the Great Mother, that aspect on which "no one could look . . . in joy." Is this not just the time—when he has come to terms with much of the feminine side of himself, has begun to make conscious much of the feminine aspect of life—when Odysseus' next step would be to face one of the most difficult of all truths, the devouring aspect of Mother Nature? And would not the proper response to this challenge be to pass as swiftly as possible to the other side without denying its reality, and without fighting?

(It is also crucial to hold in one's mind the paradox, at this moment of facing her terrible aspect, that there is always present the opposite side of the Great Mother. In India, this same figure—once the negative side has been faced—"in her positive and non-terrible aspect is a spiritual figure, [a figure of] freedom and independence." [25] According to Neumann, "she is also the force of the center, which . . . presses toward consciousness and knowledge, transformation and illumination." [26] It is crucial to hold this in mind, because at times the only way through to greater understanding is to hold both sides of a paradox in mind simultaneously.)

As Ramakrishna, an Indian spiritual teacher of the 19th century, captured this thought:

> Is Kali, my Divine Mother, of black complexion? She appears black because she is viewed from a distance; but when intimately known she is no longer so. . . . Bondage and liberation are both of her making. By her Maya worldly people become entangled in "women and gold," and again, through her grace they attain their liberation. . . . She is full of bliss. [27]

Separation From "the Mothers"

There is a second level at which we can consider this image. Starting with the Great Mother, if we maintain our attention we might (with Germany's most influential writer of the modern era) move from the outer to the inner level. In Goethe's *Faust* we read:

> *Mephistopheles:* Not glad do I reveal a loftier mystery—
> Enthroned sublime in solitude are goddesses;
> Around them is no place, a time still less;
> To speak of them embarrasses.
> They are the *Mothers!*
> *Faust:* (terrified) Mothers!

A bit later:

> *Mephistopheles:* Goddesses, to men unknown,
> whom we are loathe to name or own.
> Deep must you dig to reach their dwelling ever;[28]

Just what is this all about? When a person has begun to come to terms with the feminine principle in all its aspects, both within and without, that person is then ready for the next great challenge: to establish a mature, adult relationship with "the Mothers" and with his or her own personal image of and relationship to "mother." But why was Faust terrified? Why are we "loath to name or own" the Mothers? Why must we dig so deep to reach their dwelling? Let's again turn to Jung (who was greatly influenced by Goethe) for guidance.

As he developed his own view of life's journey, Jung came more and more to believe that the life energy of many people is trapped in a desire to return to the "protective custody of the mother." [29] Unconsciously we long to be shielded and protected, fed and nurtured by the life-giving mother. But this unconscious urge prevents us from stepping fully into life, from living out of our personal, individual lives. This unconscious urge keeps us from becoming fully autonomous, conscious human beings—which is our natural birthright.

But to gain this birthright is a very difficult undertaking, and requires each person to turn inside and face the unconscious urges that make up the bars of the prison in which his or her life energy is snared. In describing the journeyer's need to face this terrible passage, Jung insists:

> Whoever vanquishes this monster has gained a new or eternal youth. For this purpose one must, in spite of all dangers, descend into the belly of the monster (journey to hell) and spend some time there (imprisonment by night in the sea). . . The battle with the night serpent signifies, therefore, the conquering of the mother. . . [30]

To try to understand this thought, we might begin with the idea that when we are very young, the image of the Great Mother becomes naturally merged with the image of our own mother or of whoever is our primary caregiver.[B] We tend to see (perhaps for our survival we need to see) this person as the *positive* Great Mother. That is true because in the early months of life we are completely dependent for survival on "mother." She provides for our needs—whatever it is that is provided. In a sense, she *is* the whole world. And at this time of total vulnerability, whatever we get we tend to define as good, for it keeps us alive. It is all we know. Simultaneously, we tend to see our personal mother as a reflection of the Great Mother; thus we tend to see her as good, as nourishing, as life-giving.

In this earliest time of life, the young child has no choice. He or she must look to the all-powerful "mother"—for sustenance, for protection, for all of life's needs. The good mother takes care of all problems, makes everything all right. A supportive mother helps a child believe that the world is his or her oyster, that everything is possible, that all life's fantasies can be fulfilled. But the price of this support is to have no individual freedom, no autonomy. The young child has no control over his or her own life. The "mother" has the power and the control.

In some ways, the passage at this point is even more difficult for a young man than for a young woman. As Murray Stein points out in his lecture series "Masculine Development," young women can at least identify with the power role of the mother, whereas the young man cannot and thus is a further step removed from any sense of personal power and autonomy. The young man must somehow find a way to become his own man, to develop his own identity, to find his essence apart from the messages embedded deep within by "mother." He must somehow wrest control of his life from the power and control of the feminine—the feminine that devours his freedom and independence through possessiveness, through unrealistic expectations, through

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[B] In this discussion I will use "mother" to indicate the initial, primary care-giver of the young child. Jung would say that we each have within us the archetype of "mother," and whoever fills that role in our early life would be identified with that archetype for us.

smothering support. (In another great myth of Western culture, when Parsifal of Arthurian legend turned the corner in the road to leave home for his own great quest—against the wishes of his mother—his mother fell dead.)

Thus the ultimate danger of the supportive mother is that the young man will never break free, but will be forever possessed by her expectations, by a need to fulfill her wishes, by a longing to return to the protected place she represents. There is also the danger of believing that he can do anything, which a supportive mother often engenders. But to stay too long in this state is to be lost in an unreal land, and thus to be unable to make the effort necessary to create something real in life.

In this context, the necessity to establish autonomy from the "mother" could be seen as the single greatest challenge of a young man's youth. Certainly many cultures, as documented by Joseph Campbell and Mircea Eliade, have established major rituals to separate a young man from his mother. In fact, the ritual that initiated a young man into the male world was usually the single most important event in his youth. As author Valerie Andrews captures it:

> When we give ourselves over to the Mother we have no individuality, no consciousness. . . . A young man must learn to seize his own kind of happiness. If not, he will remain part of a conspiracy between mother and son where each helps the other to betray life. The unconscious mother sees nothing wrong with this: she ruthlessly pursues her need for union. It is no wonder that in tribal rites, the young man's energy must be literally *stolen* by the men.[31]

Thus one way to view this place of the impossible choices in life is to realize that a choice seems impossible only when it requires us to give up something we are not ready to give up. And what we are often required to give up at such moments is the longing to return to the protective embrace of the mother, or the fantasies about who we are and who we will become that have come from unreal expectations embedded in us by an overly supportive mother.

Does the *Odyssey* really fit into this perspective? In Jung's view it certainly does, for he believed that any true hero myth "symbolizes the struggle of the person who has descended to the primordial depths and succeeded in overcoming attachment to the 'Mother.'" [32] And at least one comment in the *Odyssey* supports such a point of view. When Odysseus encounters his own mother among the shades of Hades, he asks her

how she died. Her reply is full of meaning for our discussion. She describes how difficult it was for everyone after he departed. As for herself:

> "So I, too, pined away, so doom befell me,
> not that the keen-eyed huntress with her shafts
> had marked me down and shot to kill me; not
> that illness overtook me—no true illness
> wasting the body to undo the spirit;
> only my loneliness for you, Odysseus,
> for your kind heart and counsel, gentle Odysseus,
> took my own life away." (p. 191)

Only her loneliness for Odysseus brought about her death. Just as in the case of Parsifal, when Odysseus left home—symbolically—for his own life journey, his mother died. (This is a perfect example of a symbolic versus a literal interpretation of a story. In symbolic terms, for a young man to leave home his mother need not literally die. She must simply die within him as the center of his world, his longing. The importance of her approval and her disapproval must die as the focus of his life energies.)

At his meeting with the shade of his mother, the force of this deep longing is brought back to Odysseus. Even in Hades, her words reach out to pull him back into her embrace. He reflects:

> "I bit my lip,
> rising perplexed, with longing to embrace her,
> and tried three times, putting my arms around her,
> but she went sifting through my hands, impalpable
> as shadows are, and wavering like a dream.
> Now this embittered all the pain I bore,
> and I cried in the darkness:
> 'O my mother,
> will you not stay, be still, here in my arms,
> may we not, in this place of Death, as well,
> hold one another, touch with love, and taste
> salt tears' relief, the twinge of welling tears?'" (p. 191)

But Odysseus has truly left home many years before, and the mother of his youth is gone forever. And this moment passes—for him. Yet how far a person has progressed in this struggle for autonomy varies greatly. Since so many have not yet left home,

many stories in literature and in fairy tales deal with a young man's effort to establish his manhood, to establish his independent identity in the world. This is a state that all young men must go through, and that so many seem to be struggling with today. For this journey, such great mythical characters as the aforementioned Parsifal, as well as Huck Finn, *War and Peace*, *Of Human Bondage*, *The Red and the Black*, *Great Expectations*, and many, many more would serve as guides. And Robert Bly captures this struggle beautifully in his telling of the fairy tale "Iron John."

However, when we first encounter Odysseus, he has already made this passage and achieved his manhood, his initiation into an adult male life. Thus he is not long delayed by these feelings when they do arise. On the contrary, Odysseus is a man who in midlife is seeking to integrate back into his life the parts that were left out as he established his autonomy, his manhood. His main task is to bring back into his life the feminine side, and to come to grips with the negative aspect of the Great Mother.

(Then why does he encounter his mother in the story at all? Perhaps, as was true of the Sirens, this is a refresher course. Perhaps he is again being tested to see if he remembers an earlier lesson. And hopefully, at each such encounter we, along with Odysseus, learn the truth of the lesson at a deeper level, until at the end we have incorporated it into our very being.)

A very different problem arises for the young child who has been raised in an environment of too little support. Since not all primary caregivers are supportive, many young adults are striving to win the respect and support which they needed as children but did not receive. For a person in this situation, perhaps Scylla has an even more direct meaning. As small infants, such children might have been treated badly, neglected—even abused. But it is extremely difficult for a young child in this situation to come to grips with the horror of the knowledge that his or her primary caregivers were indifferent, or even cruel. Thus, as Alice Miller has so clearly described in her work (*Prisoner of Childhood*, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware*, and others), such a child represses the knowledge of what happened to him or her. It is too painful to comprehend, so the child's unconscious hides it from his or her conscious memory. For such a one, perhaps to face Scylla is to face the ultimate horror of one's unconscious life—the evil that was done to a helpless child. This certainly fits the words "That nightmare cannot die, being eternal evil itself." (See how easy and

productive it is, once you get the hang of it, to look at these images in many different ways, each with its own possible reward for consciousness?)

In the case of abused or neglected children/adults, there are often fantasies of how they will achieve their autonomy, how they will achieve power and control over their lives. But these fantasies are frequently grandiose and unreal. Such people may envision becoming great leaders, with everyone doing as they say. Yet they are not moving on a leadership track in their lives. Perhaps they imagine becoming great spiritual figures, yet are not living spiritual lives. Perhaps they envision becoming rock stars and having adoring masses all around. Perhaps in extreme cases, like that of Hitler, they envision ruling the world, and being able to do whatever they wish to anyone and everyone. And perhaps a few eventually turn into the perpetrators of the terrible crimes we read about in the newspapers. Or some become the parents who abuse and neglect their own children.

If a person in this category is a young man, as he grows older he will constantly be seeking to gain his autonomy. But out of old patterns he will often associate with the negative feminine, the feminine which continues to undermine his confidence, subvert his healthy pride, and deny his sense of independent existence. In such a case, only by facing Scylla consciously, only by consciously facing the horror of his past, will he have a chance to live a healthy and whole life.

Insofar as this speculation applies to any of us on life's journey, when we come to the place of Scylla the only way through is to consciously give up part of ourselves—some of our "men" — to consciously choose to take our losses. As Soren Kierkegard put it, we must give up some of our possibilities to be able to move on and actualize whatever our true potential might be. Not our grandiose fantasies about our possibilities—our limited but *real* possibilities.

There is, of course, a great tendency to fight the necessity of such a choice, or to delay, hoping that the sacrifice won't have to be made at all. But in this place of Scylla, there is nothing to do but give up fighting and have faith that if we move through the impossible choices as best we can, if we make the best choice we can make and then move on—perhaps with a touch of divine resignation—then we will come through with the part of ourselves intact that can be truly fulfilled in the real world.

The Dark Side Within

There is yet another stop on this painful pathway to the heart of the meaning of Scylla. As we have been discussing, "mother" fulfills all of the young child's needs, so the young child in turn develops an idealized view of "mother" as an all-powerful, perfect being. But since real mothers aren't always perfect (even the good ones), what does the child do with those memories and experiences in which the mother caused pain or harm? The pain might not have been intentional, but anytime a small child is hungry, or cold, or wet—anytime it doesn't get what it wants or needs—it feels pain. (For instance, how is a very young child to understand the pain and suffering of a lifesaving operation if he or she is too young to understand the explanation? What does the child do with the emotions raised by the question "Why are you doing this to me?") Psychologist Melanie Klein argues that in such a situation the child creates an image of two figures, the "good mother" and the "bad mother." And in most cases the real mother is viewed as the "good mother," and the bad experiences are not consciously associated with her. As Valerie Andrews describes the immensity of this dilemma when it does break into consciousness:

> In my earliest memory, my mother is bending over me in the half light of the bedroom, her face round as a moon. She takes me from the crib and cradles me in her arms, then begins to hum a gentle lullaby. I am surrounded by her sounds, her body and her breath, secure in the belief that our contact will be continually renewed. A few nights later, I cry out for her and am met only by the darkness. I yell louder. When she finally appears, her smile is distorted, her face no longer round and smooth. The hands which used to open and receive me are now tightly clenched. In an instant, my mother turns into the enemy. From then on I do not know which face to expect: the one that destroys and annihilates or the one that nourishes and provides for me. This is the memory we all have—the moment we realize there is no guarantee of safety in the body of the mother or the body of the world. [33]

Thus just as we must face the negative side of Mother Nature if we are to be whole, we must also finally come to the point at which we can see and accept the negative side of our own image of "mother." Why is this so? Would it not be better to maintain our positive images, to let sleeping dogs lie, to simply defend our positive images to ourselves and to others so that we can hold onto our love and respect for our parents?

The reason this approach doesn't work very well is that psychologists have clearly shown that although we might not be conscious of the negative aspects of our image of "mother" or "father," they are inside us and are affecting us in many negative ways. From this can arise unreal expectations, lack of energy and motivation, consuming ambition, lack of an ability to form meaningful relationships, and numerous other problems. And often coming face to face with these images—which certainly would fulfill the words "That nightmare cannot die, being eternal evil itself—horror, and pain, and chaos"—is the only way through to a more whole and meaningful life. A wonderful example of the necessity of this passage is presented in the movie *Star Wars*. At a crucial moment in the battle with the evil Darth Vader, the young hero discovers that Darth Vader is in fact his *father*. And he must come to terms with this knowledge before he can move on. (Dealing with the relationship to the "father," in archetypal form, usually happens later in life, and often involves initiation into the outer world. Both men and women have a similar but related movement in relation to the "archetypal father," but since this is not dealt with in our story here, neither will we. For further reading, see *The Wounded Woman* by Linda Leonard.)

It is no wonder, then, that this stop on our voyage past Scylla is so difficult. This is very tough stuff to digest. But perhaps in the end it is the most meaningful as well. Perhaps, in fact, the ultimate reason why this pathway into the land of "the Mothers" must be trod on a journey to wholeness lies here. For here is the place where we finally come to terms with the negative traits of the "mother" that have come to reside in our own character, have become a part of us.

In the end, perhaps only by seeing the dark side of "mother" and "father" can we come to fully see the dark side of ourselves. Then we begin to see the habits which we took for virtue in ourselves, but which for some "mysterious" reason seems to irritate our friends. Here we find the beliefs we hold dear that are in total contradiction to other deeply felt beliefs. And here we find the goals and ambitions that we thought so important, but that bring us no joy or fulfillment when we reach them. The list could go on.

At this point most of us are tempted to raise our arms in surrender—to cry "Enough!" It all seems too overwhelming. As we see our faults more clearly, it seems impossible. Yet if we persevere, there is hope. For just the simple act of recognizing these traits in ourselves makes them subtly begin to change. In fact, simply to notice them, and to

keep noticing, is often the most powerful agent of change. If we really see and acknowledge who we are, if we really "know ourselves" consciously, then the various parts will begin to realign themselves into a more harmonious whole.

Sometimes it is probably necessary to make a conscious effort to change a specific trait that is not compatible with other parts of ourselves. But it is usually not necessary to work too hard at changing some trait directly. In fact, sometimes a negative trait will be reinforced by this kind of attention. Or you may find that an effort to crush one trait will cause another that is even worse to pop up. Often the best course is to simply notice—clear-eyed, honestly, humbly—who you really are, and then simply form an image of the most whole self you can muster. Just hold those two images side by side, with compassion for yourself and your failings. And you will change.

There might even be a bonus to be won in this passage. When you first see one of your previously unconscious faults, the difficulty of changing it can seem overwhelming. And to erase such a trait completely seems impossible—and probably is. But to change that trait completely is never required. For there is a very thin line between a negative trait and a positive one. In other words, with only a slight shift—a slight adjustment—a negative trait can become a positive one. In fact, most negative traits seem to be positive traits taken to excess, having gotten out of balance with another, balancing characteristic. Thus to change effectively is not to crush or completely eliminate a part of ourselves, but to adjust it gradually back into balance with the other parts. Therefore, our weaknesses aren't necessarily "bad," but often contain the seeds of our greatest strengths.

Thus perhaps to face Scylla is to look into the face of the negative side of "mother" and "father," the dark side of the mother and father embedded in ourselves. This is truly a vision on which "no one could look . . . in joy." But paradoxically (as these things go), only after coming to terms with the negative mother and father within are we able to have a full, whole, loving relationship with our real parents. For until this passage, that relationship is often full of unacknowledged hurt and pain; of dutiful love and respect, rather than truly felt love and respect; of futile attempts to win the support and acknowledgement we lacked as a child, of anger at "mother" or "father" for those things that we unconsciously dislike in them but that are developing in ourselves. (Isn't this often why traits in our parents disturb us so?) But after this

passage is won, we are free to completely forgive our mother and father for being human, and to embrace them in their full humanity.

We are also free, for the first time, to pursue the fulfillment of our own unique destiny. As Jung saw it, if an individual is to live fully "he must fight and sacrifice his longing for the past in order to rise to his own heights." [34] Could this also be a clue to the meaning of Jesus' saying: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." [35] Could it be that only after we have let in the hate for our mother and father can we truly live the life of love that Christ advocated? Could it also be that until we heal the wound in our relationship with the Mother, we can never heal the wounds of Mother Earth—that our unconscious anger and resentment toward the Mother is part of why we have treated Mother Earth so destructively? [36]

Perhaps this is too far afield for Scylla. But that's the nature and purpose of myth. The argument is not that many, or most, would be called to the question of dealing with the Great Mother, or with their images of their own parents, by hearing or reading the encounter with Scylla. The point is that some are, and to open to the images leads to whatever issues one is ready to grapple with on life's journey. I would simply suggest that through the centuries some have been called to just such an understanding by this image in the *Odyssey*, and that this opportunity is presented to each of us by the story.

The Tricks of Memory

Back to ancient Greece. Odysseus is almost, but not quite, ready for the challenge of Scylla. As he approaches the fateful moment, he makes his choices and sets his men rowing with all their might beneath the lair of the she-monster. Having set the course and exhorted his men to their greatest effort, he has done all that he can do except to *wait*, to pause while destiny plays her hand. But for this he is not quite ready. Circe has told him emphatically that when he faces Scylla he should not try to fight. But, as he relates his encounter:

> Kirkê's
> bidding against arms had slipped my mind,
> so I tied on my cuirass and took up
> two heavy spears, then made my way along

to the foredeck . . . (p. 217)

Her instructions had *slipped his mind!* After all the instructions that he had followed so carefully, this one just *slipped his mind*.

But isn't that just the way we all are, in the face of advice and warnings we don't want to hear? If something goes too much against how we wish it to be, it slips our mind. This is clearly the case with Odysseus, for when Circe tells him not to fight, "Odysseus demurred, announcing that he was Odysseus and would never turn away from combat." [37] Circe replies:

"Must you have battle in your heart forever?
The bloody toil of combat? Old contender,
will you not yield to the immortal gods?" (pp. 212-213)

But when the moment comes, Odysseus has not completely given up the hero's role, has not fully accepted that all challenges will not yield to his will or to his mighty sword. He is so identified with being Odysseus the Hero that he cannot wait, cannot yield even when yielding is the path of wisdom. So when the moment arrives, the instruction slips his mind, and as Bill Bridges expresses it so well, he is "the little man standing on the deck of a fragile vessel, playing the hero when the time for heroism had passed!" [38] And we stand with him, in each of those moments when our own voice of wisdom is ignored, and its warnings just "slip our minds."

One other interesting point arises here. As they approach Scylla, Odysseus sends his men rowing through with all their might, but he does not tell them about the danger

"I told them nothing, as they could do nothing.
They would have dropped their oars again, in panic,
to roll for cover under the decking." (p. 217)

To meet this challenge, he simply tells them that they must follow his orders. Does this suggest that at times our conscious self must assert its right to make decisions about how we will act, overruling our unconscious fears and terrors? That at times we must simply exclude our unconscious fears from the field of action, and that if we let them in at the wrong time, they will paralyze us, causing greater losses than would otherwise be suffered? Perhaps in such moments, we must also follow Circe's advice:

". . . put all your backs into it, row on;
invoke Blind Force, that bore this scourge of men,

to keep her from a second strike against you." (p. 213)

Perhaps there are moments in our lives when we must use our will, our resolve, our endurance to press on in the face of terrible times—of anguish, of dread, of mortal fear. On the other hand, when they are about to face the Sirens, Odysseus takes a different approach, telling his men about Circe's warnings:

". . . so let me tell her forecast: then we die
with our eyes open, if we are going to die,
or know what death we baffle if we can." (p. 214)

Why does he act so differently in these two situations? In the case of the Sirens, the men not only have to let Odysseus put wax in their ears, but also have to tie him to the masthead and be ready to bind him tighter if he begs to be released. Thus perhaps when our "men" must cooperate, when they must be prepared to carry out the instructions of the ruling consciousness even against its own momentary lapses, then they must be let in on the game. Perhaps this is to say that at times we must learn to trust our unconscious instincts to help us past a danger, and at other times we must simply ignore or overrule them with our will. And we must gradually learn to tell which situation is which (no one said this journey was easy).

The Agony of Conscious Loss

Thus, with the men ignorant of the mortal danger they are in from Scylla, and Odysseus still struggling to give up the inappropriate hero's role, the ship approaches the narrows of Scylla and Kharybdis:

. . . in travail, sobbing, gaining on the current,
we rowed into the strait—Skylla to port
and on our starboard beam Kharybdis, dire
gorge of the salt sea tide. (p. 217)

As the whirlpool Kharybdis:

. . . swallowed the sea water down
we saw the funnel of the maelstrom, heard
the rock bellowing all around, and dark
sand raged on the bottom far below.
My men all blanched against the gloom, our eyes
were fixed upon that yawning mouth in fear

of being devoured.
Then Skylla made her strike,
whisking six of my best men from the ship.
I happened to glance aft at ship and oarsmen
and caught sight of their arms and legs, dangling
high overhead. Voices came down to me
in anguish, calling my name for the last time. (pp. 217-218)

What a painful, heart-wrenching moment for Odysseus! What a painful moment for us all.

At this passage, even though Odysseus has brandished his sword and spears, he has not delayed and has sent his ship through this terrible spot as fast as it will go. Thus the ship makes it through, after the toll of six men has been paid. But this loss is especially great, for Odysseus relates that:

". . . deathly pity ran me through
at that sight—far the worst I ever suffered,
questing the passes of the strange sea." (p. 218)

Why the worst pity after so many previous losses? Unlike other battles, in which chance played a greater role, in this encounter our hero consciously chose to sacrifice six men. He knew six would die when he chose to sail by way of Scylla. Thus, in this case, he must take full responsibility for the losses, a much more painful situation than if the cause of the tragedy were simply fate or chance. (Just think of the different feelings two generals might have: one who decides to send a squad on a mission that means certain death for the men, and another who sends out a squad on a routine mission during which they are surprised by an attack and killed—an attack that the general could not possibly have foreseen.)

Thus, with grave losses, Odysseus makes his way through the trial of the impossible choices of life. Has he, have we, gained the prize to be won? Whether or no, the pace of the journey is furious now, and there is little time for mourning losses or even consolidating our gains. We are now at sea in a turbulent world, and must press on.

6

Intimations of Answers

To Compromise or Not to Compromise

Shortly the ship is "coasting the noble island" of the Sun (p. 218), the island where Helios, god of the Sun, keeps his cattle and sheep. As they approach the island, Odysseus warns his men:

> "Shipmates, grieving and weary though you are,
> listen: I had forewarning from Teirêsias
> and Kirkê, too; both told me I must shun
> this island of the Sun, the world's delight.
> Nothing but fatal trouble shall we find here.
> Pull away, then, and put the land astern." (p. 218)

Specifically, the warning is that Odysseus and his men must not kill any of the cattle or sheep on the island. But it is not so easy to control our unconscious urges, especially when they are exhausted and afraid. Then our needs and fears well up, and they respond as did the men:

> "Are you flesh and blood, Odysseus, to endure
> more than a man can? Do you never tire?
> God, look at you, iron is what you're made of.
> Here we all are, half dead with weariness,
> falling asleep over the oars, and you
> say 'No landing'—no firm island earth
> where we could make a quiet supper. No:
> pull out to sea, you say, with night upon us—
> just as before, but wandering now, and lost.
> Sudden storms can rise at night and swamp
> ships without a trace." (p. 219)

Our fears and needs can be very persuasive, especially when we are weak and tired and have just passed through a great ordeal. And often the first step away from what

we know we should do is a small step, a small compromise. The leader of the men continues:

> "Where is your shelter
> if some stiff gale blows up from south or west—
> the winds that break up shipping . . .
> . . . I say
> do as the hour demands and go ashore
> before black night comes down.
> We'll make our supper
> alongside, and at dawn put out to sea." (p. 219)

Sometimes we are not strong enough to overcome the rationalizations and entreaties of our fears and needs, even if we know better. Therefore Odysseus, the ruling consciousness, begins to give in:

> "Now when the rest said 'Aye' to this, I saw
> the power of destiny devising ill.
> Sharply I answered, without hesitation:
> 'Eurylokhos, they are with you to a man.
> I am alone, outmatched.'" (p. 219)

Losing the battle with his fears and needs, Odysseus hopes that through a compromise he can still avoid the grave ills that he knows wrong action will bring. He therefore bargains:

> "Let this whole company
> swear me a great oath: Any herd of cattle
> or flock of sheep here found shall go unharmed;
> no one shall slaughter out of wantonness
> ram or heifer; all shall be content
> with what the goddess Kirkê put aboard." (p. 219)

Thus Odysseus tries to have it both ways. He will let himself be persuaded to disobey the warning and land on the island, hoping that the oath his men swear will make it all right. But the "men," his short-term desires, will swear to anything having to do with the future if it will bring them what they want at the moment—just as Esau gave away his birthright for a bowl of porridge. So the men ". . . fell at once to swearing as I ordered," (p. 219) and the ship moors at the island.

But as we might have expected, this one small compromise does not turn out to be as simple as the men hoped. Once they reach the island, a storm arises. And it continues, day after day, until a month has passed. Day by day they cannot set sail, for the winds of the storm keep them trapped in their cove.

But isn't it always so? Once we begin the process of compromise on the wrong issue, on an issue about which we clearly know at a mature level what is right, then events arise that force us deeper and deeper into the path of the wrong choice. This pattern might arise if we start stealing a little money from the firm's petty cash, or begin to tell small lies to a loved one rather than facing a difficult truth, or agree to sell illegal drugs to our friends for their personal use *just this once*.

There is, of course, a time for compromise—sometimes even of values. This might arise when we have a clear conflict of values with another person we respect. Perhaps in such a case we try to find a way to blend our values with theirs in order to reach a common understanding. Or sometimes we might even have a clash of differing but important values within ourselves—which actually happens quite often in many people's lives. Then wisdom lies in seeking a compromise between these values on a conscious level.

If this is not possible, wisdom would then require as conscious and clear a choice as possible between the conflicting values within. A dramatic example of this is captured in the movie "Sergeant York," (based on a true story) where a young man who doesn't believe in war has to choose whether to fight to defend home, community, and country against powerful forces that would destroy things he holds dear. Perhaps most of us do not have such dramatic choices to make, but if we look carefully within, we will almost certainly find conflicting values that are not compatible with each other.

So there are many occasions for legitimate compromise. But this is not the case when we begin to compromise because it is convenient, easier, safer. At such moments, we are bending to the lesser angels of our nature, and then we will inevitably be drawn deeper and deeper into the quagmire.

It is just so with our sailors. Once they have overruled the conscious values held by Odysseus, the ship is stranded for a month. As long as the supplies hold out, the men stand by their pledge to avoid the cattle of the Sun. But when the supplies are gone,

and they become hungry—ah, then the swearing of pledges is quickly forgotten by the part of us that wants immediate gratification.

So, as the storm continues, Odysseus:

> . . . withdrew to the interior
> to pray the gods in solitude, for hope
> that one might show me some way of salvation.
> Slipping away, I struck across the island
> to a sheltered spot, out of the driving gale. (pp. 220-221)

Seems reasonable, doesn't it? But it clearly isn't the right approach. For, as he prays, the gods "for answer, only closed my eyes under slow drops of sleep." (p. 221)

Don't Go Back To Sleep

Sleep again! What is going on now? Could it be that sleep at times stands for the loss of consciousness, the failure of our ruling consciousness to stay fixed on the goal; that sleep is a metaphor for giving oneself over to one's unconscious urges?

Or, in a slightly different but compatible direction, it could be related to the thought of that remarkable nineteenth-century American, Henry David Thoreau in *Walden*:

> We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep. I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor. It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts.[39]

This is a soaring affirmation that if we can awaken ourselves (become conscious of how our minds determine our experience of life?) and keep ourselves awake (consistently choose to live toward the highest possibilities for our lives?), we will literally create the quality of our days. Thoreau here gives us a brief glimmer of the possibilities for our lives, if we can but learn to awaken ourselves and to stay awake. And this imagery seems to be a universal impulse, a universal possibility for everyone

who will choose to tread this difficult but well-worn path. To give but one other example, the eleventh-century Persian poet Rumi instructs:

> The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell. Don't go back to sleep.
> You must ask for what you really want. Don't go back to sleep.
> People are going back and forth across the doorsill where the two worlds touch.
> The door is round and open. Don't go back to sleep! 40 **** (footnote font)

But Odysseus is not quite ready to be fully awake; thus he falls "asleep." And sure enough, as soon as this happens, back at the camp one of the men begins to rationalize:

> "All deaths are hateful to us, mortal wretches,
> but famine is the most pitiful, the worst
> end that a man can come to." (p. 221)

"Let's take these cattle," he urges, "And we'll make up for it by offering some of them as a sacrifice. Then we'll eat our fill. And if the sacrifice doesn't work, why then, it's better to drown at sea 'than waste to skin and bones on a lonely island!'" (p. 221)

Sounds reasonable again, doesn't it? Does it sound familiar? I certainly have heard that voice within myself more times than I can count. "Let's do what we want right now. We'll make up for it somehow. We won't really have to pay the price. And if we do, then that's better that facing the current problem." All the while thinking, "I'll be able to wiggle out of this somehow when the time comes."

But if you know what is required of you, in the end rationalization and appeasement will not work. Even if you think you can go back to sleep, can make it all right after you have gone against your higher values, there comes a moment when the debt must be paid—at least on the path presented to us by Homer. In this case, after the cattle have been slain and cooked, Odysseus awakes and rushes back, only to discover that it is too late to intervene:

> . . . when I reached the sea cave and the ship,
> I faced each man, and had it out; but where
> could any remedy be found? There was none. (p. 222-223)

The deed has been done. The men feast for six days, and then the weather miraculously clears. But there are no more reprieves for the "men." Soon after they sail away from the island, a great storm breaks upon them, and a bolt of lightning strikes the ship:

> . . . and all the men were flung into the sea.
> They came up 'round the wreck, bobbing a while
> like petrels on the waves.
> No more seafaring
> homeward for these, no sweet day of return;
> the god had turned his face from them. (p. 223)

From the point of view of the inner journey, what does this episode have to say to each of us? Odysseus is explicitly warned that if his men kill any of the cattle on the island of the Sun, they will all die, and he himself will have to wander far from home for many, many more years:

> ". . . if you raid the beeves, I see destruction
> for ship and crew. Though you survive alone,
> bereft of all companions, lost for years,
> under strange sail shall you come home, to find
> your own house filled with trouble . . ." (p. 188)

After this warning, how can it possibly happen that the cattle are killed? First, it happens because Odysseus "goes to sleep" and allows his immediate, short-term unconscious urges to override a clear, longer-term knowledge of his proper path. How often we each make this choice:

> "Just one more piece of chocolate can't hurt."
> "I'll have just one more drink so that I'll not get bored until the party is over."
> "I'll take this job for a while, even though it doesn't lead toward my real goals. It pays more money, and I'll be able to save for a step in the right direction."
> "I know that I'm not supposed to use this privileged information to buy stock, but no one will know, and it'll really help me get ahead."
> "I know one of the people in this deal has a corrupt reputation, but they're not asking me to do anything illegal."

"I know that the engine is bad on this car, but if I don't sell it, I won't have enough money to pay my bills."
"These folks might not really need this product, but if I don't sell it to them, someone else will."

We all make these choices wrongly at times in our lives. All lives are filled with such moments. Why, then, do we sometimes seem to have to pay the price, and sometimes not? From our vantage point, from where we stand, none of us can see how much weight rests on the other side of the scales of fate. Thus we cannot know just how any particular action will affect the balance. Why do the scales finally tip against the "men" here? It could be that it is just the last straw, the one small piece that finally tips the scales and seals their doom. But another possibility arises. They have not been engaged with just any old long-term goal here. Perhaps the reason this failure is so much worse than others is that this is a failure in relation to the spiritual dimension.

In many cultures the Sun is seen as the highest spiritual power, and in ancient Greece the Sun was one of the most important gods of the Greek pantheon. In most religions, the region of light is the region of spiritual insight, of seeing into the truth of things. Thus, here, the island of the Sun must stand for the region of the spiritual, the region of spiritual understanding and obligation. In this place, the duty is in relation to the gods, and to breach this prohibition is to breach a clearly understood duty in the spiritual realm. Thus perhaps the lesson is that at some point, after the time of innocence is past, one must recognize one's duties in the spiritual world—must show respect for the gods—or the traveler will be required to spend much more of life's allotted time learning the proper respect. In Odysseus' case, he consciously accepts this fact, and he does not participate in the killing of the cattle. But he has not yet learned to control his unconscious urges, so he falls asleep and his "men" do the killing. He is not yet fully ready for this challenge. Thus the warning of Teirêsias comes true, and he is required to spend many more years learning the needed lessons.

Because Odysseus has not participated in the slaughter of the cattle himself, he is spared to face the next lesson. But the men are not as fortunate. If we look at the "men" in a different way for a moment, and see them as other individuals out in the world rather than as parts of the unconscious, what would be the lesson? Perhaps that

Odysseus at this point on the journey must separate himself from his identification with the group. As Joseph Campbell put it, up to this point "Odysseus had not yet released himself from identification with his group, group ideals, group judgments." [41] Thus, when the group fails in relation to the spiritual duty which Odysseus clearly sees, he is finally able to break free of the group values, and to move on alone. At this point he realizes that he must not follow others, but must begin to honor the spiritual realm as he sees it, no matter what other people around him are doing.

It is also important to note that the fact that the men are suffering, that they are literally afraid they will starve to death, does not relieve them of their obligation to the spiritual dimension. Odysseus sees this, and makes them swear, but they still do not individually recognize and accept the importance of this obligation. Because of that, they perish.

"The Only Hope, Or Else Despair"[42]

Odysseus is now alone. His ship has sunk. He is in the middle of a storm, floating on a few remnants of the destroyed ship in a very large sea. Yet the trials are still not done, for as he floats on the mast and keel that he has lashed together:

> . . . now the west wind
> dropped, and a southeast gale came on– one more
> twist of the knife– taking me north again,
> straight for Kharybdis. (p. 224)

Just as we might have guessed if we had thought about it – for it's hard to skip any of the challenges of life – his log has floated to the edge of the great whirlpool. As the waters begin to pull him down, with one final effort he grabs a branch of the solidarity (solitary?) fig tree that leaned from the shore out over the terrible maelstrom. And:

> . . . I clung grimly, thinking my mast and keel
> would come back to the surface when she spouted.
> And ah! how long, with what desire, I waited!
> till, at the twilight hour, when one who hears
> and judges pleas in the marketplace all day
> between contentious men, goes home to supper,
> the long poles at last reared from the sea. (p. 224)

When the whirlpool had disgorged itself and sent the mast and keel back to the surface:

> . . . I let go with hands and feet, plunging
> straight into the foam beside the timbers,
> pulled astride, and rowed hard with my hands
> to pass by Skylla. Never could I have passed her
> had not the Father of gods and men, this time,
> kept me from her eyes. Once through the strait,
> nine days I drifted in the open sea
> before I made shore, buoyed up by the gods,

upon Ogy'gia Isle. (p. 224)

The test of Kharybdis. For what does this violent whirlpool stand on our inner journey? In the action, after grabbing the branch of the tree hanging over the whirlpool, he hangs there for what must have seemed like an eternity, clinging desperately to his one branch of hope, watching the swirling waters that would engulf him if he faltered for an instant. Perhaps at this moment he is facing the ultimate test of despair, of depression, of hopelessness. Why should he hang on? All his men are lost, his ship is destroyed, and he knows that because his men killed the cattle, if he is ever able to return home it will only be after many, many more years of struggle. Then why should he hang on? Why not just let go and lose himself in the whirlpool, in death? There would be enormous immediate pain to hang suspended from that limb for hours. It would hurt horribly! Why should he hang on? Why endure this horrible, immediate pain? Why not just let go? The suffering would end quickly.

Move then two millennium later, another great writer ponders the same question. Through Hamlet, Shakespeare wonders why we don't just put an end to it all when things get rough. Why don't we just escape our troubles by permanent sleep, by death.

> To die: to sleep;
> No more; and, by a sleep to say we end
> The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
> That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
> Devoutly to be wish'd.[43]

But, perhaps it is not quite so simple. For how do we know just what we might face if we attempt to escape our troubles through death?

> To die, to sleep:
> To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
> For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
> When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
> Must give us pause. . . .[44]

Hamlet, who by this time has worked himself into quite a state, enumerates the trials and tribulations of this human life, this "mortal coil," and captures the negative side of this question perfectly:

> For who would bear the ships and scorns of time,
> The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
> The pangs of dispriz'd love, the law's delay,
> The insolence of office, and the spurns
> That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
> When he himself might his quietus make
> With a bare Bodkin? Who would fardels bear,
> To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
> But that the dread of something after death,
> The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
> No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
> And makes us rather bear those ills we have,
> Than fly to others that we know not of?[45]

Thus his conclusion: We don't kill ourselves because we're afraid of what might happen to us after death. We just don't know what troubles might befall us if we try to escape the problems of life through intentional death. Certainly this is the answer that many individuals, and many cultures have given to this question.

But there is a more positive answer. Shakespeare suggests it in other works, such as *The Tempest* and *King Lear*, and I believe Odysseus lives it through. What is that answer?

In moments of despair, we are almost by definition out of touch with what the purpose of life might be. But there is no reason to believe that at such moments we are in touch with the truth of life. On the contrary, when we are not in a state of despair we can usually see that in such states our perceptions are distorted. In such moments, everything might look hopeless. But how do we <u>know</u> there is not a purpose – even to our suffering. And if there happened to be a purpose, wouldn't it be a shame to miss it because we didn't hang on through our despair, our suffering!

One avenue to this thought was suggested by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, who argued that the miracle is that we are here, that there <u>is</u> life rather than no life. We might not know how we got here, or why, but <u>we are here</u>. We are alive. Yet it would in many ways be easier to imagine a universe in which there was no life. How then can we <u>assume</u> there is no meaning, no purpose to our existence. We might not know what the meaning and purpose is. We might feel miserable. The path ahead might seem hopeless. But since we are here, isn't the presumption in

favor of living through this life simply because it does exist. In our moment of despair we might not know our purpose, our meaning. We might not be in touch with it at all. But that does not mean it does not exist. It only means that at that moment it is beyond our understanding. At such moments, then, perhaps not knowing opens to the possibilities of our lives, and with Shakespeare's King Lear, to "take upon us the mystery of things, as if we were God's spies."[46]

Thus until and unless we have a clear, transcendent experience that life is meaningless, isn't the only valid assumption that since we exist, since we find ourselves on this earth, in these bodies, that we should keep walking on until we find our purpose and meaning – find out why we are here rather than "not here." There might be some fundamental meaning around the corner, or even after death, that we are serving now.

Can we be sure there is a purpose, a meaning? No, not in moments of despair. Can we be sure there is not? No.

What we do know is that throughout history there have been those who have reported a direct experience of the meaning of life. Every culture has examples of such "wise ones," and the famous ones have given rise to religions and myths. The not-so-famous have affected those around them.

What are our possibilities if we have not had such an experience ourselves? We can hang on. And we can follow the examples of those who have reported such experiences. But until and unless we have such an experience ourselves, we cannot know for sure. But since we are rather than are-not, it seems the better part of wisdom to hang in there on the path of this life because there might be. And the presumption is in favor of this position because we do exist.

When we do find ourselves in such a state of despair, Odysseus hanging from the branch of the fig tree over the raging whirlpool is a very good model. Perhaps during such moments there is nothing to do but hang on, to endure until the raging whirlpool subsides. And to try to wait without acting in ways that will cause more pain later on. In our hero's case he does not let go. He hangs on.

After he has endured what must have seemed like an eternity, the water begins to return, and the keel and mast burst up from the depths. At this moment the image used to describe the scene is the time of day "when one who hears and judges pleas

in the marketplace all day between contentious men, goes home to supper." It surely is no accident that the metaphor used is one of judging. As he hangs there, his will being weighed in the balance, he is engaged in a crucial test; the choice between hopelessness and despair on the one side, and, on the other, the determination, hope, and faith to see life through; to live life through to its end – whatever that might be. To be true to the life he finds himself in as fully as is in his power. Thus the image this story would give us is that we must endure the test of hopelessness and despair, and we must hang on through the worst losses and impossible situations, if we are to find the path through to our destination.

Thus Odysseus endures the test of despair, and the waters finally return his makeshift raft. As Bill Bridges relates it: "Letting go at last of his painful hold, Odysseus drops athwart the keel and paddles with his hands out to sea. This king and hero, who began with a fleet of ships, leaves the scene like a child on a log." [47]

Bridges also relates: "Metaphorically, he is stripped of the various supports on which he had earlier relied, a loss that is grievous but also one that leaves him able to know in a totally new sense who he really is."[48]

By enduring this passage of despair, we might lose all of the external props and supports of our life, but at the same time we are no longer burdened or confined by them. We have come to ground zero, to a new, honest, and true starting point for our new selves. And, "In suffering this attrition, Odysseus learns a kind of courage that is different from the cunning and the aggressiveness of the battlefield." [49]

Thus, after so many trials and so many losses, Odysseus sits astride his log, drifting alone upon the open sea. There he sits for nine days. His next destination, if there is to be one, is in the hands of fate.

Although the story doesn't mention it, these nine days without any interruptions need not have been unproductive for our hero. If they had come to a young man who was full of spirit, a young man longing for adventure, this time would have seemed like torture. But for a traveller who has been through so many adventures already, it could well have been a most productive time. With every ounce of physical and emotional energy drained, what is now essential, as Bill Bridges suggests, is the sorting through of all the experiences and the gradual consolidation of all the lessons that have been learned. (In a modern time, imagine no phone calls, no mail, no

duties, no chores, no acquaintances to talk with, no television or radio, no one else's problems to lose oneself in, no external duties or challenges to meet.)

During such a time, there is much that can be done. One can consolidate and strengthen patience in the absence of any meaningful action to take. One can reflect on all that has been learned, and on what is real and what illusion. One can take out the internal fantasies and aspirations one by one, sorting them through to recognize the wheat from the chaff. One can learn the humility appropriate to the powerless of such a position. One can practice affirming, moment by moment, the choice of life in the face of despair. One can reflect on the meaning of life with the raw material of all that has gone before.

A Visit To Paradise – (And Yet . . .)

After his nine days at sea on his log, after all the lessons have had time to sink into the deepest reaches of his being, Odysseus lands on Calypso's Isle. Ah, Kalypso! In a sense, every man's dream:

> a nymph, immortal and most beautiful . . . (p. 1)
> Divine Kalypso . . .
> . . . singing high and low
> in her sweet voice, before her loom a-weaving . . . (p. 83)

So our hero lands on the island of a beautiful enchantress. Her cottage is truly an idyllic place:

> Upon her hearthstone a great fire blazing
> scented the farthest shores with cedar smoke
> and smoke of thyme . . .
> . . . and four springs, bubbling up near one another
> shallow and clear, took channels here and there
> through beds of violets and tender parsley. (p. 83)

And the rest of the island was equally ideal, for:

> A deep wood grew outside, with summer leaves
> of alder and black poplar, pungent cypress.
> Ornate birds here rested their stretched wings-
> horned owls, falcons, cormorants- long-tongued
> beachcombing birds, and followers of the sea. (p. 83)

In fact, the spot was so ideal that it is said that:

> Even a god who found this place
> would gaze, and feel his heart beat with delight. (p. 83)

This is the land to which Odysseus, after so many trials, tribulations, hardships, and struggles, has finally come to rest. Is this his reward for all the suffering, for his endurance and courage during his incredible journey?

When he arrives, he is made welcome and nurtured by Kalypso. No struggles with the feminine now. She takes him in and loves him. In fact, her greatest wish is to love him and be loved by him. She commits her time and powers to fulfilling his every need, his every wish and whim.

And in this idyllic land, Odysseus remains for seven years. But is this paradise for him? Is this the end of his journey? Does living in the midst of one of life's basic fantasies bring happiness and fulfillment to our hero?

Well, at first it is pleasant enough. He desperately needed time to rest, to regain his strength, to heal his inner wounds. But as time wears on, the attraction fades. Gradually he becomes restless. But the one thing that is completely unavailable to him is any means of leaving the island. Therefore, as his strength returns, his paradise becomes a prison. When seven long years have passed, the gods send Hermes to rescue him. Hermes, the god of transitions, looks around for our hero:

> But he saw nothing of the great Odysseus,
> who sat apart, as a thousand times before,
> and racked his own heart groaning, with eyes wet
> scanning the bare horizon of the sea. (p. 83)

No, this paradise had not brought fulfillment to Odysseus. Perhaps it had seemed to at first, but after a while, somehow it had become empty. Thus:

> . . . he lay with her each night, for she compelled him.
> But when day came he sat on the rocky shore
> and broke his own heart groaning . . . (p. 85)

Why is this his reaction to "paradise"? It is not as if Kalypso were not devoted to him:

> I fed him, loved him, sang that he should not die
> nor grow old, ever, in all the days to come. (p. 85)

Not only are all his needs met, all his natural urges fulfilled, but if he will but stay with her and love her, then he, the mortal Odysseus, will become immortal.

> The enchantress in her beauty
> fed and caressed me, promised me I should be
> immortal, youthful, all the days to come . . . (p. 118)

Immortality even! Eternal youth. Odysseus had found the Fountain of Youth. And yet, he would not drink. Instead, he sat:

> . . . in his stone seat to seaward– tear on tear
> brimming his eyes. The sweet days of his life time
> were running out in anguish over his exile . . . (p. 85)

The days of his mortal life were running out. Yet it did not have to be so. He was choosing to remain mortal, rather than accepting immortality. He was choosing to grow old and die, rather than living with a beautiful enchantress forever in "paradise." How could this be? Why would he make this choice? Kalypso cannot understand at all. When she finally, at Hermes' insistence, agrees to help him leave, she declares:

> If you could see it all, before you go–
> all the adversity you face at sea–
> you would stay here, and guard this house, and be
> immortal . . . (p. 87)

But given the chance to leave, Odysseus does not hesitate, even if it means further hardship:

> "If any god has marked me out again
> for shipwreck, my tough heart can undergo it.
> What hardship have I not long since endured
> at sea, in battle! Let the trial come." (p. 87)

But, again, why is this so? Why does he choose home rather than her promise of immortality? One fundamental reason he gives for his choice is his longing to be reunited with his wife. But Kalypso says what Odysseus must have thought a thousand times:

> ". . . though you wanted her forever,
> that bride for whom you pine each day.
> Can I be less desirable than she is?
> Less interesting? Less beautiful? Can mortals
> compare with goddesses in grace and form?" (p. 87)

To this Odysseus replies:

> "My quiet Penélopê– how well I know–
> would seem a shade before your majesty,

death and old age being unknown to you,
while she must die. Yet, it is true, each day
I long for home, long for the sight of home." (p. 87)

And so our hero, when given a choice, prefers home and his aging wife over eternal youth and the most beautiful of goddesses. Why? The answer is not made clear in the story, but the choice must have struck deep resonances with many men, and puzzled many more as the tale was told for hundreds of years in the ancient world. And for men through all ages as it has been retold throughout western culture. If we look at the choice on the inner level, perhaps we can catch a glimpse of the reason.

Most of us have many fantasies about how we would like our life to be:

"If only I had all my material needs met and didn't have to work."
"If only I had a beautiful woman who loved me and thought only of my needs."
"If only I didn't have to worry about getting sick."
"If only I could afford to travel and see the world."
"If only I could go on living forever."
"If only . . ."

We all have these fantasies in our lives, the endless "if onlies." And this is not necessarily bad. We need images to shoot for. If we actively engage these images, we either bring them into reality, or adjust them when they clash too dramatically with reality. Some we gradually let go. This is a healthy process. But too often, rather than engaging these fantasies directly we hide them, guard them, nurse them – and try to find ways to live out bits and pieces of them around the edges of our lives. This is often not so healthy a process. For, as the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard described so brilliantly, we are then in "the despair of infinitude," which is "due to the lack of finitude"[50]. We have all our possibilities alive in our imagination, but we have no reality. We have nothing real in our lives.

To say this again, in order to make anything real in our lives, we have to engage it, grapple with it, change it, let it change us. As we engage in this process, what we end up with is never exactly what we had imagined, is not our original fantasy. But it is <u>real</u>. We have molded it and shaped it, as well as ourselves, by bringing it into the world of our lived life – our daily world.

But while we were bringing one thing into reality, into our lived life, we had to pass by many other possibilities, for a person can only deal with a limited number of options at a time. If we try to hang on to all our possibilities in our imagination, then we can't spend any time making anything real in our lives. Thus we are lost in the Kierkegaard's "despair of infinitude."

And perhaps this is just the place in which Odysseus finds himself. He "has everything," but not in a real world that he helped to create. He is still in the land of the imagination, with infinite possibilities, and no human realities. And for his part, he has come to discover that the meaning of life involves living out his human possibilities, rather than remaining in the world of his imagination.

For Those Who Have Not Yet Left Home

It's important to recognize at this point that each person is at a different stage of life's journey. For those of us who have not yet left home, this does not mean that we should stay locked in our everyday lives while life passes us by. Odysseus did start his journey. He left his home. But after the adventures of his youth, he does not then settle for a world of fantasy. He keeps making the effort to learn his lessons so he can return to his human world a whole man. He maintains his commitment to live out his human life to its fullest.

If this is a model for our lives, when do we leave our everyday lives in pursuit of possibilities, of adventure, and when do we stay home and work on creating our reality in our daily world? Especially if we have already reached mid-life. Not an easy question, this.

Odysseus left home early. We all know or have heard of those who in mid-life toss everything they have aside, and go for broke in an attempt to live out another image of who they wish to be. Often this ends in disaster. The middle-aged man who leaves his wife for a woman he hardly knows, and is in turn left by her. Perhaps much poorer. The man who puts all his money in an investment he knows nothing about, and then loses everything. Those who seek the Fountain of Youth, which some believe can be found in today's world in cosmetic operations, or $29.95 facial cream, or magic elixirs.

Occasionally, but rarely, someone throws off their old life in mid-life or later and goes for the gold ring – and grasps it tightly. Don Quixote might be an example in literature, or Gauguin in real life. In these cases, the dramatic changes probably work because their new images had been brought close to reality through much hard work already, and because each endured the trials and difficulties of the new life in the right way. They hung on to their new image through the difficult times, rather than escaping again into another fantasy.

Returning to our hero, he seems to be one of those few who, starting in his youth, obtains many of his fantasies. (That's why he's the hero.) When such a one appears, we all admire them, follow their fortunes, envy them. We use them as the model for our own life journeys. For this reason, it's very important to focus on the fact that this hero does not choose the fountain of youth. He does not choose to stay in "paradise." What is the message we are being given here?

Perhaps it is this: It is fine, probably necessary, to pursue ambitious goals. It is human to have fantasies, and even to live them out for a time. But ultimately, the meaning of life lies elsewhere. It somehow lies in living out this human life fully, rather than forever seeking the fantasies of youth. It lies in the gradual process of releasing our fantasies, and committing ourselves to the daily reality of our lives, of living out fully who and what we are, versus trying to be something we are not. It doesn't mean accepting less than is our portion, our potential, but it does mean gradually learning to distinguish between what is fantasy and what is our true potential. Then, through long years of work, forging our true potentials into realities. It means realizing that a real relationship to a real human being, blemishes and all, is ultimately more rewarding than our fantasies about more perfect relationships.

It might also be important to point out the danger of fantasizing our real partner, so that we are not building a true reality in that relationship. But clearly Odysseus is not fantasizing Penélopê, for he says that she "would seem a shade before your majesty" (p. 87), and he goes on to talk about how she will inevitably grow old and die.

Thus the lesson of this part of the story seems to be that ultimately our need for relationship and relatedness can only come through a relationship to a real human being, to another real person in the world, and not to our fantasies and daydreams. This might sound simple, but as Jung and others have made abundantly clear in their work, most of us spend a lot of time trying to turn our partners into our fantasies. We

are forever trying to force our fantasies onto them rather than seeing them as they truly are. However, only by gradually seeing them truly, and coming to love and accept them just that way can we ever find a relationship that is meaningful.

It is also important to note that in Odysseus' case, it takes many years of hard work to come to a clear realization of what is important to him. Even after he knows it completely, it still takes much time and much effort to return home and live out the real relationship. But at this point on Kalypso's isle, Odysseus has learned his lesson. He is ready to leave.

One other thought about this part of the journey. The promise of immortality that Kalypso offers is quite different from the immortality described and discussed by most religious teachers. The immortality offered here is more like a description of the legendary Fountain of Youth, the image that we can go on living this particular life and forever fulfilling all of our desires here on this earth. This possibility might seem very alluring to a man in middle age, but this immortality Odysseus does not choose. Why not? Homer doesn't tell us clearly, but to echo our earlier discussion, one answer might go like this:

It's hard to know for sure, without doubts, what we are doing here on this earth, and what the purpose of our life might be. But one thing is clear. We are here. In the face of this fact, the only authentic and meaningful thing that we can do is to live out this life fully and completely – the tragedies as well as the triumphs, the decrepitude of age as well as the vigor of youth. To live out each of these passages with our whole being.

Perhaps, if numerous spiritual teachers are right, there will come a time when we will see beyond the veil of this life. Perhaps we will not. But until and unless this occurs, the only meaningful action is to gradually give up our fantasies, while making the hard and difficult fight to fulfill our full human reality. This means choosing a full life on this earth, and accepting the death that is the inevitable fulfillment of that bodily existence. Without a spiritual revelation, to do other than live this life out fully would be to deny the one thing we know, the one fact that is unassailable – that we exist. To end this life prematurely, or fail to make the effort to live it fully would be to deny the one truth given to us – the truth of our existence in this body on this earth.

This in no way means that life is simple, or that our choices are simple. For a start, it means that we must grapple with what it means to live this life out fully? And this is no easy question. Does it mean working hard, or having fun? Does it mean trying to accomplish worldly goals, or following spiritual pathways in search of a spiritual vision? Does it mean serving others, or finding an expression for our unique creativity? Does it at times mean risking our life for a cause we believe in; or for family, or country, or for a spiritual belief? Or even for ambition?

One thing the story of Odysseus suggests is that meaning is not found in fantasies of the Fountain of Youth, or in seeking the "perfect" mate, or in trying to escape death. The story of Odysseus suggests that meaning is found in living life fully at every stage as it comes; in learning our lessons, and gradually becoming more aware of who we really are and what is really important to us; in coming to see ourselves and our world more clearly; and in committing to the long, hard effort of building a real relationship with a real human partner. It lies in building a relationship with a partner who is not a god or goddess, but with a person whose beauty is partly contained in their weaknesses, needs, fears, and struggles, and in their own relationship to old age and death.[A]

[A] What about living this life in order to reach the Kingdom of Heaven, or Nirvana, or the One? What about trying to live love, or serving others? Jung quote on life and death?

9

The Wisdom of Humility[51]

On with our story. Finally, and very reluctantly, Kalypso accepts the message of Hermês – that she must let Odysseus go. With this acceptance of her fate, she acts with nobility and helps him build a raft for his journey. Showing her true caring for him, she even loads it with provisions. Here, as with Kirkê, once Odysseus has formed a real relationship with a powerful feminine figure, this powerful feminine gives him guidance for the next part of his journey. Kalypso provides the crucial directions for navigating the passage to the next island. Having gained this crucial piece of knowledge, he sets sail, and after seventeen days at sea comes within sight of the land of the Phaiákians.

However, just as he approaches land, Poseidon realizes what is happening – that Odysseus is "just offshore of that island that frees him from the bondage of his exile." (p. 89) Poseidon knows that the other gods (Or is it fate? – You can choose) have intervened, and that Odysseus will make land. But he is not about to let his grudge die. Even though Odysseus is clearly destined to reach the shore, Poseidon declares: "Still I can give him a rough ride in, and will." (p, 89) Thus a furious storm breaks out, and:

> . . . Odysseus' knees grew slack, his heart
> sickened, and he said within himself:
> "Rag of man that I am, is this the end of me?". . .
> ". . . How lucky those Danaans were who perished
> on Troy's wide seaboard, serving the Atreidai!
> Would God I, too, had died there . . .
> . . . I should have had a soldier's burial
> and praise from the Akhaians, not this choking
> waiting for me at sea, unmarked and lonely." (pp. 89-90)

It seems that our hero has forgotten his brave words, spoken only three weeks before:

> "What hardship have I not long since endured

at sea, in battle! Let the trial come.” (p. 87)

But this is precisely why Odysseus' story captures us, for isn't this exactly the way life is – sometimes we are brave, sometimes despairing, sometimes ready for anything, sometimes ready to chuck it all. Odysseus seems to capture the ups and downs of the human condition as well as anyone in myth or literature. As the storm rages, he is thrown overboard.

> Now the big wave a long time kept him under,
> helpless to surface, held by tons of water,
> tangled, too, by the seacloak of Kalypso.
> Long, long until he came up spouting brine
> with streamlets gushing from his head and beard . . . (p. 90)

But after so many struggles, for so many years, Odysseus is not going to surrender now. He might despair for a moment, but his underlying resolve is firm. Thus he has the presence of mind,

> . . . half-drowned as he was,
> to flounder for the boat and get a handhold
> into the bilge– to crouch there, foiling death. (p. 90)

He finally manages to scramble back on the raft, and then another magical feminine intervenes. As he clings to the logs, a "sea nymph" takes pity on him, and tells him that he should leave the raft and swim for it. But Odysseus:

> . . . said to himself, his great heart laboring:
> "O damned confusion! Can this be a ruse
> to trick me from the boat for some god's pleasure?
> No I'll not swim; with my own eyes I saw
> how far the land lies that she called my shelter.
> Better to do the wise thing, as I see it." (p. 91)

So he decides to stay with the raft as long as it holds together, and <u>if</u> it breaks up, <u>then</u> he will swim for it. He concludes his deliberation, "I cannot think it through a better way." (p. 91)

A puzzling episode, this. Who was this "sea nymph," and why did he not follow her advice? Since this figure is not given a developed personality in our story, it is perhaps easiest to understand her as a flash of insight. But the problem with flashes

of insight, whether from others or from within ourself, is that they seldom appear distinctly and clearly, and they seldom remain fixed and clear. In a crisis situation, we might have several different flashes that lead in different directions. Which one do we follow? Perhaps this episode suggests that in our journeys we must consciously decide for ourselves what course to take, using all the information available to us. Perhaps it says that we cannot rest the responsibility upon others, or even on supernatural voices we might think we hear. We can and should listen to the opinions of others. We can be open to the possibility that the inspired vision of another could be a message for us. And we can listen closely to any inner voice that might arise, and gravely consider its guidance. We can and should listen to such insight, consider it, weigh its merit. Then we must take responsibility for the decision ourselves. We must capture in our conscious net the widest possible range of insight and guidance, and then let the largest "self" we can muster sort through it all and make the decision. (And as we become more conscious, we begin to realize that our life is made of a series of such decisions, and that by making these decisions we are creating who we are.)

Perhaps this passage gives us a model for mature decision – making. This is not necessarily a logical or rational process, although reason plays its part. It is a process of the whole self – as far as we can get in touch with the whole self at the moment of decision – the reason, the feelings, the emotions, the intuitions, the body[A].

And this was Odysseus' course. He did not follow the advice of the supernatural being, for she was only one voice among many. Since he had not developed a strong relationship to this particular feminine figure, he did not immediately trust her. Her insight might be right, but it was only one piece of information. He weighed it, and then made the best decision <u>he</u> could make – taking everything he knew into account. He made his own decision and stayed with the raft.

Finally the raft was torn asunder by the storm. <u>Then</u> he unhesitatingly followed the sea nymph's advice as his next best course, and began to swim for shore:

[A] There is a wealth of information demonstrating that the body in fact does contain much wisdom about how we are doing and how we can improve our health and our lives. Anyone interested might read (list).

Two nights, two days, in the solid deep-sea swell
he drifted, many times awaiting death . . . (p. 92)

until on the third morning he saw the shore. Swimming toward it, he suddenly realized that he was heading straight toward breakers that were crashing against the rocks. At this sight his "knees grew slack, his heart faint, a heaviness came over him." (p. 92) As he weighed what to do, a wave rushed over him, carrying him straight for the rocks. At the last moment:

. . . he gripped a rock-ledge with both hands in passing
and held on, groaning, as the surge went by,
to keep clear of its breaking. Then the backwash
hit him, ripping him under and far out. (p. 93)
As he was ripped away from the rock:
Odysseus left the skin of his great hands
torn on that rock-ledge as the wave submerged him.
And now at last Odysseus would have perished,
battered inhumanly, but he had the gift
of self-possession from grey-eyed Athena. (p.93)

(These tests do go on and on, don't they? Does this have any relevance to your own life's journey?)

During this ever-so-long journey, one of the fundamental lessons Odysseus has been learning is self-possession. To keep his head even in times of great danger and incredible distraction. No easy business. But Odysseus has learned it well. Torn off the rock and submerged by the wave, Odysseus keeps his head, and with his final strength fights to swim parallel to the rocks. Finally, when all strength is gone, he sees the mouth of a river offering one last chance to escape from the raging sea. As he swims into the calm waters of the river's mouth, free of the rocks at last, he prays:

"O hear me, lord of the stream:
how sorely I depend upon your mercy!
derelict as I am by the sea's anger.
Is he not sacred, even to the gods,
the wandering man who comes, as I have come,
in weariness before your knees, your waters?
Here is your servant; lord, have mercy on me." (p. 94)

What a far cry from the Odysseus we met at the beginning of our journey, the Odysseus who believed he could conquer anything, outwit anyone. He seems to have learned through his many trials the lesson of humility, and of respect for the forces beyond his control. Isn't this, in fact, one of the fundamental lessons Odysseus had to learn if he was going to find his way back "home"? Isn't it likely that he reaches this shore with these words on his lips, the shore which is the end of his ten year night-sea journey, because he could not reach this shore until he learned this lesson of humility? Until he came to know what he could control, and what he could not? After having expended every ounce of his own effort, judgement, endurance, and will toward the task of return, he is finally able to say, "Here is your servant; lord, have mercy on me." (p. 94) At that precise moment he makes shore back in the human realm. He has learned the wisdom of humility, and at that moment receives its reward.

The poet Rumi captures this same thought in a different way:

> Always add the gratitude clause to any sentence, if God wills, then go.
> Those who do not breathe the God willing phrase live in a collective blindness.
> Rubbing their eyes, they ask the dark, "Who's there?"[52]

To say this one more way, as we struggle toward our destination in life – our home – there is much that we can accomplish through effort, through ability, through will, through determination. But there is always an element in life that is outside our control. Whatever we wish to call this force beyond our control – be it fate, or Mother Nature, or God, or the collective unconscious, or many other possible names – as long as we fail to recognize its power in our lives we are living in blindness. If we try to gain all power for ourselves, we are destined for defeat, at death if not before. But if we finally come to accept the true nature of our position, then with the wisdom of humility we will give what is due to that which is outside of our power. And we will earn the reward that such recognition and respect for this realm will bring.

It is however, crucial to emphasize that Odysseus reached this point only after he had expended every ounce of his own effort. If this is a model for our lives, why should this be so? It could be that if we surrender too easily, if we give up our own responsibility and control too quickly, we are not really being humble. We are instead trying to use a surface humility to get what we want. Thus many of us have at times

prayed: "Lord, have mercy on me," meaning "Lord, give me all the things I think I want – money, power, prestige, physical pleasure" etc.

But this is a far, far cry from true humility, from the final release we feel in Odysseus when he turns his fate completely and irrevocably over to that which is greater than himself. He has done all he can do. He now knows that he cannot do it all by himself. From this full consciousness that there is something outside his power, he surrenders his fate and almost sighs with his final breath, "Here is your servant; lord, have mercy on me." (p. 94) Precisely at this point, he reaches the end of his night-sea journey. He reaches the shore of the human world. It is his second birth – and probably suggests just what being reborn suggests in all the world's religions. Our first birth brings us into the material world – the world of matter, of flesh and fleshly desires, of acquiring, and accumulating, of experiencing the material world. The second birth is birth into the spiritual realm, a conscious birth into the world of meanings, of essences, of that which is outside the ego's control. Perhaps even outside of its understanding.

So with these words, Odysseus reaches shore. His internal journey is complete. His lessons have been learned. After ten years, he is reborn into the world of men. But what a state he is in! As he is washed ashore:

> His knees buckled, his arms gave way beneath him,
> all vital force now conquered by the sea.
> Swollen from head to foot he was, and seawater
> gushed from his mouth and nostrils. There he lay,
> scarce drawing breath, unstirring, deathly spent. (p. 94)

Not an easy journey, this.

The Samurai – Doing the Next Thing Without Fear

Rousing himself, he realizes that finding shore does not end all problems. If he stays at the shore with no clothing or shelter, he might well freeze; but if he goes into the woods and falls asleep, he will be easy prey for wild animals. After considering the choices, he decides to risk the animals, and he moves inland. He finds a dense thicket of olive trees and, making a bed of leaves, collapses into a sleep which verges on death itself.

It is late the next day when he finally wakes to the playful shouting of young girls. He wonders whether they be friend or foe, human or not, but he has been through too much to worry about the next adventure. He is ready to simply do the next thing:

> He pushed aside the bushes, breaking off
> with his great hand a single branch of olive,
> whose leaves might shield him in his nakedness . . . (p. 103)

What a sight he must have been to the young girls (for girls they were, pretty young maidens). As he emerged:

> Odysseus had this look, in his rough skin
> advancing on the girls with pretty braids;
> and he was driven by hunger, too.
> Streaked with brine, and swollen, he terrified them
> so that they fled, this way and that. (p. 103)

A huge naked man, ravaged by days at sea, stepping out of the undergrowth. And not coming timidly, but he:

> . . . came out rustling, like a mountain lion,
> rain-drenched, wind-buffeted, but in his might at ease,
> with burning eyes . . . (p.103)

It's no wonder that the young girls scattered in fear. However, since danger has often lurked behind peaceful surfaces on this pathway, shouldn't Odysseus also have been afraid? Things have often been more treacherous than they seemed.

But Odysseus has just been about as close to death as one can come. And there is something bracing about such moments. It puts everything else into perspective. So for the moment, our hero is simply ready to do the next thing, to take on the next challenge, if challenge there be. He is not particularly afraid of what might happen, for he is prepared to do whatever he can do, to react spontaneously to the best of his ability to whatever arises, then to accept whatever consequences follow. He has given up the attempt to control the outcome,[53] and thus has no need for fear. Since he accepts for the moment that the outcome is outside of his control, he has no paralyzing hesitation or fear, and yet no aggressiveness or hostility. Like a great samurai warrior who has completely accepted death, he has nothing to fear, so is "in his might at ease." (p. 103) And perhaps – no, probably – just because he is neither

afraid nor aggressively hostile (aren't these finally the same thing?), one girl, the daughter of the King, does not flee, but stands her ground as he approaches:

> She faced him, waiting. And Odysseus came,
> debating inwardly what he should do:
> embrace this beauty's knees in supplication?
> or stand apart, and using honeyed speech,
> inquire the way to town, and beg some clothing? (p. 103)

As always on this journey, our hero assumes the responsibility for making the best decision he can make, using all the information he has at his disposal, simultaneously accepting that there are factors at play outside of his control. Sizing up the situation:

> In his swift reckoning, he thought it best
> to trust in words to please her– and keep away;
> he might anger the girl, touching her knees.
> So he began, and let the soft words fall. (p. 103)

The Place for Restraint of Passion

With "soft words" he tells her of her beauty, and asks who she might be, whether human or divine. Then he asks for directions to the town, and for a scrap of clothing.

She judges him quickly, and says, "Stranger, there is no quirk, or evil in you that I can see." (p. 104) So, she agrees to help. She directs her maids to come out of hiding and give him a bath. But Odysseus replies:

> "Maids," he said, "keep away a little, let me
> wash the brine from my own back, and rub on
> plenty of oil. It is long since my anointing.
> I take no bath, however, where you can see me–
> naked before young girls with pretty braids." (p. 105)

Hmm. After all the adventures he has been through with women, it is hard to imagine that Odysseus has suddenly grown shy. But this is his first encounter with women in the human world since his inner journey began. Perhaps as Odysseus leaves the inner realm and returns to the human world, we are to be shown what he has learned, who he has become through all these trials and lessons.

In this light, perhaps this passage suggests one particular lesson, the proper place for sexuality. Odysseus is full of sexual energy throughout this long tale, but here on this isle he demonstrates a clear demarcation between when it is appropriate and when it is not. He is not controlled by his sexual urges, rushing blindly into being washed by unknown maids with whom he has no emotional connection. This is not the same man who in his early exploits "divided up the women" after victory. No, this is a man who can choose when it is appropriate for him to express his sexuality, and who has the foresight not to tempt himself or others. He is a highly sexual man, but no longer controlled by his urges or easily swayed by temptation. He can now make a clear choice as to the proper time and place for sexual expression. And he doesn't let himself start down the path of self-deception. He doesn't rationalize by saying, "They mean nothing by this. It is simply a custom here." He knows what is right from his point of view, and without trying to justify accepting a bath by the young maidens – even though his sexual energy must have been tempted by the thought – he decides against placing himself in a tempting situation.

After giving himself a bath, he rubs himself with olive oil and puts on the clothing the young princess had provided. When he reappears, he is a changed man. The princess, Nausikaa by name, marvels:

> Uncouth he seemed, I thought so, too, before;
> but now he looks like one of heaven's people.
> I wish my husband could be fine as he
> and glad to stay forever on Skhería! (p. 106)

Reprise of Humility

They give him food, and then Nausikaa tells him how he might best approach the town and gain acceptance there. She instructs:

> . . . while we go through the countryside and farmland
> stay with my maids, behind the wagon, walking
> briskly enough to follow where I lead. (p. 106)

As the procession departs the beach for the town, Odysseus does exactly as he has been instructed by the princess. He follows along behind the wagon, walking with the young maidens of the court! No false pride here. This is not the same man who

began his journey so sensitive to how he was treated. This is a man who has learned to accept help when it is needed – and with humility.

Nausikaa had also instructed him to leave the procession at the edge of town, for she was concerned about what the sailors might say if they saw him in her company. She says:

> From these fellows I will have no salty talk,
> no gossip later. Plenty are insolent
> And some seadog might say, after we passed:
> "Who is this handsome stranger trailing Nausikaa?
> Where did she find him? Will he be her husband?
> Or is she being hospitable to some rover
> come off his ship from lands across the sea . . ." (p. 107)

(It seems that gossip and fear of gossip doesn't change much through the ages.)

The new Odysseus (who can't have cared a fig what the sailors might say) is very considerate of the young princess' concerns, and leaves the company at the edge of town just as he had been instructed. Waiting in a park on the outskirts of town until the princess has had time to arrive at the royal palace, he then makes his way through the streets until he finds the place himself. Still following the princess' instructions to the letter, he throws himself at the feet of the King's wife, and pleads:

> " . . . here is a man bruised by adversity, thrown
> upon your mercy and the king your husband's,
> begging indulgence of this company –
> may the gods' blessing rest on them! May life
> be kind to all!" (p. 115)

He continues, after more blessings:

> "But grant me passage to my father land.
> My home and friends lie far. My life is pain."
> He moved, then, toward the fire, and sat him down
> amid the ashes. (p. 115)

After his supplication, he <u>sat down in the ashes</u>. What image could be further from that of the proud, brash, young Odysseus! This is a man who has learned humility! Not false humility, but the appropriate – if theatrical – humility of a supplicant who is

asking for an enormous favor from strangers who owe him nothing. And this act of sitting in the ashes was not part of the advice Nausikaa had given. It was the one thing he did which was not in the princess' instructions.

It is also very important to note that he made his plea to the King's wife, as Nausikaa had instructed:

> "On Mother's feeling much depends; if she
> looks on you kindly, you shall see your friends
> under your own roof in your father's country." (p. 108)

Once again we are reminded that Odysseus' long journey has much to do with the feminine, for over and over his encounters are with women – of many different ages, characteristics, and personalities. If in this first human kingdom after his night-sea journey we are seeing a demonstration of what Odysseus has learned, then clearly he has learned to listen to, show respect for, and honor the power of the feminine.

10

Some Lessons Learned Along The Way

There is Truth, and Then There is Truth

Accepting Odysseus' plea, the Queen gives him her support, as and following her lead, so does the King. It was then declared that on the morrow there would be a day of feasting and games in honor of their new guest. However, before they retired for the evening the Queen asked how Odysseus had gotten to the castle, since she recognized that he was wearing clothes that came from their castle. He gave a brief reply, in which he answered her unspoken question about how he had gotten the clothing. When the king learned of his daughter's actions, he said she had erred in not bringing him directly to the palace. But Odysseus accepted full responsibility, saying:

> "Sir, as to that, you should not blame the princess.
> She did tell me to follow with her maids, [to the palace]
> but I would not. I felt abashed, and feared
> the sight would somehow ruffle or offend you." (p.120)

Since this was clearly not the truth, what does it suggest about the developing image of how a whole person should act? First, we can see that he was very considerate of the princess' point of view. He took the blame even though it was not his, and even though the princess' motives had been somewhat shallow. But he also did not tell the truth. What does this mean? Perhaps it suggests that there is truth, and then there is truth. There is nothing more harmful than the truth spoken at the wrong time, or for the wrong reasons. If we think about it, it becomes clear that the truth is often used to injure, or to wound. We can all think of numerous examples in our own lives (if we are willing).

- In the middle of an argument, we wound a friend by throwing back at them a secret they had told us at an intimate moment.

- During a romance we just <u>have</u> to tell the object of our affection a damaging "truth" about a rival – to protect our loved one, of course.

- We are mad at a parent, so we tell them a "truth" about themselves while we were growing up that is more painful to our parent than any lie could have been.

But facing numerous such examples in our own lives is too heavy a burden on which to dwell. Let's take ourselves out of the picture, and look at this process in others.

- The town busybody says sweetly: "I saw your husband at a restaurant yesterday. Who was that lovely lady he was with? His secretary?"

- Or the competitive, achievement driven salesman at a party loudly declares: "You only make $20,000? How unfair!."

- Or the village gossip whispers: "Did you know that . . . " (fill in the blanks – ad infinitum).

As one begins to think of the complexities involved in "truth," it becomes evident that truth is not always "good." Sometimes it is the motive for its use, or misuse, that is crucial.

Is this also the case with untruth? To consider this question is to become a philosopher, and to join the ranks of great philosophies stretching back at least to Plato and Aristotle, for this question has been debated for centuries by some of the greatest of minds. For example, philosopher Emmanuel Kant discussed whether it would be moral to tell a murderer where his intended victim was hiding if asked point blank by the murder. What would you do? What if by saying nothing you knew the murderer would find his or her victim, but if you lied you could throw the murderer off the track? Would you then tell a lie?

Or consider another example faced each day by thousands of physicians: Do you tell patients the truth about their illness if you believe the truth will make them less likely to get well? Or do you take a very positive position about their chances in the hope that this will increase the likelihood of their improvement? What if they know you aren't being truthful with them? Won't that make them lose confidence in you, and therefore reduce your effectiveness?

If we dwell here a moment longer, we quickly realize that this is not just a question for physicians. Each of us might well be faced with the question of whether to tell a sick parent that the doctor doesn't expect them to live a month. Do we show them the respect of honesty, or do we tell them that they can pull through, believing the

doctor might be wrong, and that by telling them they have a fighting chance we are increasing their chances of pulling through. There could be many more examples.

At the surface level, the question of truth and untruth is often met with the simple platitude that truth is always the best policy. And there is an important place for this thought. But as one's understanding becomes more complex, one begins to realize that the real danger lies in using truth or untruth for selfish motives; to get something one wants unfairly, or to take something from another unjustly. Or it lies in using truth or untruth to "help" another in the wrong way. It begins to be clear that one can mislead, and even cause harm with the truth as easily as with a lie – depending on the motive, and on the wisdom used in evaluating the circumstances. In this context, perhaps the model Odysseus presents is of a person who has become wise enough to know when to withhold the truth, and even when to fabricate, with the right motive, an untruth for the benefit of another.

The writer Idries Shah captures this complexity in a tale about the wise fool Nasrudin. Nasrudin, like the Sufi himself, does not violate the canons of his time. But he adds a new dimension to his consciousness, refusing to accept for specific, limited purposes that truth, say, is something that can be measured as can anything else. What people call the truth is relative to their situation. And he cannot find it until he realizes this. One of the Nasrudin tales, a most ingenious one, shows that until one can see through relative truth, no progress can be made:

> One day Nasrudin was sitting at court. The King was complaining that his subjects were untruthful. "Majesty," said Nasrudin, "there is truth and truth. People must practice real truth before they can use relative truth. They always try the other way around. The result is that they take liberties with their man-made truth, because they know instinctively that it is only an invention."
> The King thought that this was too complicated. "A thing must be true or false. I will <u>make</u> people tell the truth, and by this practice they will establish the habit of being truthful."
> When the city gates were opened the next morning, a gallows had been erected in front of them, presided over by the captain of the royal guard. A herald announced: "Whoever would enter the city must first answer the truth to a question which will be put to him by the captain of the guard."
> Nasrudin, who had been waiting outside, stepped forward first.

> The captain spoke: "Where are you going? Tell the truth – the alternative is death by hanging."
> "I am going," said Nasrudin, "to be hanged on those gallows."
> "I don't believe you!"
> "Very well, then. If I have told a lie, hang me!"
> "But that would make it the truth!"
> "Exactly," said Nasrudin, "your truth." [54]

The would-be Sufi must also understand that standards of good and bad depend upon individual or group criteria, not upon objective fact. Until he experiences this internally as well as accepting it intellectually, he will not be able to qualify for inner understanding.

There is, of course, a very great danger in approaching truth in this way. If truth is relative, if there is not an absolute rule about truth and falsehood such as "Always tell the truth," then each of us will be constantly tempted to use untruths to get whatever we want at the moment. But following absolute rules is equally dangerous, for then each of us is equally tempted to convince ourselves that we are telling someone the "hard truth" in order to help them, when in reality we are acting from self-centered but unconscious motives. Ultimately perhaps the Nasrudin story, and the lesson of *The Odyssey*, is that we can only be really truthful when we have come to know ourselves completely; and that once we know ourselves completely, our motives for what we say, and how and when we say it, are an inseparable part of real "truth." Until we have reached this state of complete self-knowledge, it could be argued that it is better to err on the side of telling the truth. As Nasrudin says, you must practice real truth before you use relative truth – until you are very sure about your motives in a particular situation, and until you are ready to take full responsibility for the wisdom of the use of relative truth. But here in our story, Odysseus seems to give us an example of just such a "wise" untruth.

A Word In Defense of Pride

The next day at the games, Odysseus is the guest of honor, and is content to sit back and watch as the young men compete in "boxing, wrestling, broad jump, and foot racing." And discus throwing, his specialty. Odysseus had been invited to join in the games, but had declined. (It's important to note that at this point he has still not revealed his identity to his hosts.) He is enjoying the contest until, in a burst of

excessive exuberance, one of the young competitors insults him. This youth, full of the flush of victory, turns to Odysseus and jeers at his failure to compete:

> "The reason being, as I see it, friend,
> You never learned a sport, and have no skill
> in any of the contests of fighting men.
> You must have been the skipper of some tramp
> that crawled from one port to the next,
> . . . itching for gold – not, by your looks, an athlete." (pp.129-130)

Does our hero reply humbly to this insult? Not by a long shot. He eyes the challenger coldly, and says:

> "That was uncalled for, friend, you talk like a fool.
> The gods deal out no gift, this one or any –
> birth, brains, or speech – to every man alike.
> In looks a man may be a shade, a specter,
> and yet be master of speech so crowned with beauty
> that people gaze at him with pleasure. Courteous,
> sure of himself, he can command assemblies,
> and when he comes to town, the crowds gather.
> A handsome man, contrariwise, may lack
> grace and good sense on everything he says.
> You now, for instance, with your fine physique –
> a god's, indeed– you have an empty noodle." (p.130)

Not much humility here. What a contrast to his sitting in the ashes just the night before! Perhaps the lesson is that there is a place for pride, as well as humility, <u>if</u> we can choose the appropriate time and place for each. Odysseus continues:

> "I find my heart inside my ribs aroused
> by your impertinence. I am no stranger
> to contests, as you fancy. I rated well
> when I could count on youth and my two hands.
> Now pain has cramped me, and my years of combat
> hacking through ranks in war, and the bitter sea.
> Aye. Even so I'll give your games a trial.
> You spoke heart-wounding words. You shall be answered." (p.130)

Here is clearly a proud man, a man sure of himself, aware of his masculine power. He does not feel compelled to show it or assert it. He can be humble, considerate, and gracious when it is appropriate. But the masculine force has not been destroyed in him, only brought into balance. When it is appropriate he can also assert with the best:

> He leapt out, cloaked as he was, and picked a discus,
> a rounded stone, more ponderous than those
> already used by the Phaiákian throwers,
> and, whirling, let it fly from his great hand
> with a low hum. The crowd went flat on the ground –
> all those oar-pulling, seafaring Phaiákians –
> under the rushing noise. The spinning disk
> soared out, light as a bird, beyond all others. (p. 130)

And now that his pride and passion have been kindled, he gives them full rein for the moment.

> ". . . Now come alongside that one, lads.
> The next I'll send as far, I think, or farther.
> Anyone else on edge for competition
> try me now. By heaven, you angered me.
> Racing, wrestling, boxing – I bar nothing
> with any man except Laodamas,
> for he's my host. Who quarrels with his host?" (p. 131)

And warming even further in his pride, he continues:

> "Inept at combat, am I? Not entirely.
> Give me a smooth bow; I can handle it,
> and I might well be first to hit my man
> amid a swarm of enemies, though archers
> in company around me drew together.
> . . . Of men who now eat bread upon the earth
> I hold myself the best hand with a bow –
> conceding mastery to the men of old . . . " (p. 131)

There is definitely no false modesty here! Clearly pride, in some instances at least, is a virtue in this image of a man in his fullness. But not exaggerated pride:

> ". . . in sprinting, I'm afraid, I may
> be passed by someone. Roll of the sea waves
> wearied me, and the victuals in my ship
> ran low; my legs are flabby." (p. 131)

So his boasts are claims he believes to be true, and he is willing to put them to the test. In his areas of weakness, he keeps a clear-eyed view. Thus even when filled by anger and pride, he maintains a very realistic view of himself.

At this point the good King spoke reconciling words:

> "Friend, we take your challenge in good part,
> for this man angered and affronted you
> here at our peaceful games. You'd have us note
> the prowess that is in you, and so clearly,
> no man of sense would ever cry it down!" (p. 132)

With these words of respect and offer of peace, Odysseus immediately drops his anger and returns to his role as guest. Having responded to an unjust slight, when peace is offered he easily and comfortably accepts the wise king's words:

> "Come, turn your mind, now, on a thing to tell
> among your peers when you are home again,
> dining in hall, beside your wife and children:
> I mean our prowess, as you may remember it,
> for we, too, have our skills," (p. 132)

With the tension released, our hero returns to the role of gracious guest, and watches with appreciation the talents of the Phaiákians, and praises them generously. Not a bad image for the appropriate balance between humility and pride, and certainly a change from the young Odysseus, risking his life and the life of his men by continuing to taunt the wounded Kyklopes.

Gratitude and Tears

The King suggests that all the noblemen of the country bring gifts for Odysseus, so that he will not return home empty-handed, but instead have a treasure to justify the difficulty of his long ordeal. Plans are made to have another feast the following night, at which time the gifts will be given. As Odysseus leaves the hall, Nausikaa stops Odysseus and asks to be remembered for her efforts. He responds:

"May Zeus . . . grant me daybreak again in my own country!
But there and all my days until I die
may I invoke you as I would a goddess,
princess, to whom I owe my life." (p. 139)

And you feel he means it. This is a man who has learned to feel true gratitude, and to show it when it is due. No half-heartedness or hesitation here. There is no sense of reluctance to show gratitude, no undertone of "I could have found another way if you hadn't come along," or "Your role wasn't really as important as it seemed." No. Just a complete expression of gratitude for someone who has helped.

As the feast unfolds the next evening, the minstrel begins to sing the now legendary song of the siege of Troy and the wooden horse. And still, at this point, the Phaiákians do not know that it is he, Odysseus, who is their guest. As the story is sung, he "let the bright molten tears run down his cheeks." (p. 140)

Here, and at numerous other times in the latter stages of the journey, Odysseus weeps freely. This is a vivid image of a man in touch with his feelings, open to his true emotions, willing to let the pain and suffering pour out when it is appropriate. Here is a man who is in touch with himself and his feelings, and who can express those feelings fully – even in a public place. If crying and expressing one's feelings are a part of the feminine side of one's nature, as some cultures view it, then this is a man in touch with and unashamed of his feminine side.

And Complete Self-Honesty

When the king sees him weeping, he tells the minstrel to stop the song, for he does not wish to sadden his guest. But he also, after such a long wait (demonstrating more patience than most of us could have mustered), asks firmly who Odysseus is and why he weeps. To this request from so generous a host, Odysseus can but respond, and he begins the story of his incredible journey. And he tells it fully, with no false pride and no false modesty. He tells it directly and honestly as he knows it – including his victories and his defeats – taking pride in his prowess but also owning his numerous mistakes. He seems truly to see himself clear-eyed and honestly. He is willing to own all of his past, to tell it all – both good and bad. Not a bad image for a mature person to live toward.

In Laurens van der Post's autobiography, this image of total self-honesty, is captured beautifully when he describes his impression of the last self-portrait of Rembrandt:

> To me it remains an almost unbearably moving testament, wherein the painter bequeaths the totality of himself impartially to all who have eyes to see. And the emphasis must be on the totality, because gone at last are all the special pleadings, evasions and excuses that men use to blind themselves to the whole truth of themselves, discovering in the process their portion of the estate of aboriginal darkness to which they are the natural heirs and successors . . . Yet, no matter how much greater the defects revealed, there is at last, unblurred in those blood-streaked old eyes, a look of a certainty of pardon, and an intimation that through total surrender to the truth of himself he has been emancipated from error and discovered something greater than even his art to carry him on beyond the advancing moment when painting would end.[55]

In something of this vein, Odysseus relates his long story to the captivated Phaiákians.

As his visit to Phaiákian draws to a close, what can be said about this stop along the way? After ten years in the land of visions and dreams, Odysseus' first stop in the human world seems in many ways to be a human paradise. The king and queen are wise and good, and the country seems prosperous and happy. According to Robert J. Milch, this land "can be interpreted as an inspired vision, granted Odysseus after his purification and transformation, of the highest and most perfect form of human life."[56]

Within this human paradise, Odysseus is able to interact in such a way as to demonstrate what he has learned, and to show us an image of what a whole, complete, mature man might be. It would have been far harder to demonstrate such a state in a less perfect world, for it is harder to be whole oneself when one is encountering pettiness, selfishness, and cruelty all around. So our first stop on the journey back into the human realm is a human paradise, where we can see the first clear picture of the wholeness toward which the images have been moving. Soon enough this wholeness will be tested in a less perfect place.

11

What Myth Do You Live By?

After the feasting, the gifts, and the storytelling, a Phaiákian ship and crew is made ready to carry our hero on the last leg of his journey home. As they prepare to depart, however, a very strange thing happens. (We should be used to this by now.) Boarding the ship, he:

> . . . lay down, lay still
> while oarsmen took their places at the rowlocks
> all in order. They untied their hawser,
> passing it through a drilled stone ring; then bent
> forward at the oars and caught the sea
> as one man, stroking. (p. 231)

As the Phaiákians began rowing:

> Slumber, soft and deep
> like the still sleep of death, weighed on his eyes
> as the ship hove seaward . . .
> . . . This night at last
> he slept serene, his long-tried mind at rest. (p. 232)

So again, at a crucial moment, Odysseus goes to sleep. Not the restless sleep of a person returning home after twenty years absence, but sleep "soft and deep like the still sleep of death." What is going on now? Would <u>you</u> fall soundly asleep at such a moment? The ship sails all night, and in the morning, the ship pulls into a cove on his home island:

> . . . They hoisted up Odysseus
> unruffled on his bed, under his cover,
> handing him overside still fast asleep,
> to lay him on the sand, and they unloaded
> all those gifts the princes of Phaiákia
> gave him. (p. 233)

And still, as he slept,

> They bore this treasure
> off the beach, and piled it close around
> the roots of the olive tree, that no one passing
> should steal Odysseus' gear before he woke.
> That done, they pulled away on the homeward track. (p. 233)

What a return! Wouldn't you say he's earned it? But what are we to make of this "sleep"? It would seem that this is a very different sleep from others mentioned in the story. Previously, sleep was a failure of courage, or strength of will, or insight; it was a falling back into unconsciousness. And a disaster resulted each time. But in this case he has completed his night-sea work, and this sleep is but perhaps a sign – a line of demarcation – of his crossing back into the world of everyday life.

And where has he been all this time? This is not a new question, but let's take it up again. It bears repeating, for each new attempt at an answer adds its partial (and sometimes meager) portion to the cumulative answer. As T.S. Eliot said: "I shall say it again!! Shall I say it again??"[57]

According to the line of thought developed in modern times by Jung in *Symbols of Transformation*, whose work was followed and more fully developed by Joseph Campbell and others, the land we have been exploring since Odysseus sailed from his great victory at Troy is the land of myth.[58]

Although in modern usage myth is sometimes used to mean a story that someone makes up, a story that's not really true, that is not the meaning here. Not by a long shot.

In this view, a myth is a story that explains what the world is <u>really</u> like. Not the surface world of material objects only, but the world beneath and behind the surface. A myth is a story that conveys a system of beliefs about what is good and bad, right and wrong, just and unjust. It shows those who follow the myth what values are important, what is moral and what is immoral. It gives guidance as to how anyone who will listen should live their lives. And it paints a picture of what, finally, is meaningful in life and what is not.

But, you protest, isn't that what religion does? Precisely. Religion is a myth that you believe is true, or at least worth following. Or which you choose to follow as if it were

true.[59] If you look at someone else's religion from outside, then Joseph Campbell's view, a "myth is somebody else's religion".[60]

To try to say this again, a myth is a story that attempts to explain for its listeners who they are in relation to the greater scheme of things. For the hero or heroine in the story (and for us, insofar as we identify with them), the mythic realm is the place of transformation, the place where we learn the lessons we require if we are to come to a fuller understanding of who we are and what life is about. As the story unfolds, the hero or heroine undergoes the challenges that we are each called to take on in our own lives in one form or another, and they show us ways of dealing with those situations. They live out for us their response to the challenges of life, and we can see both what seems to work and the mistakes they make. Thus when we confront similar trials and choices in our own lives, we at least have something with which to compare our situation. In the best case, we have absorbed clear guidance as to how to cross the same minefields they have crossed.

But, you again protest, Odysseus was dealing with one-eyed giants, and six-legged she-monsters, and sea nymphs, and . . . all manner of unreal things. What does that have to do with me? Ahhh! That is precisely the point Jung wants to make. These symbols stand for, are vivid, creative expressions of, the issues we each face in life – in the same way an artist might exaggerate something in a painting, might fill the canvas with fantastic images in order to make a point more dramatically. In just this way also, our dreams sometimes create fantastic, unreal images that, if we begin to think about it, have a clear message about something specific in our daily lives.

Let's look for a moment at some biblical examples. The story of Jonah being swallowed by a whale, of Noah building an ark and loading two of each of the animals in the world aboard, of Daniel standing in the fiery furnace, are all excellent examples of myths that have had tremendous impact on human culture. But it is crucial to realize that in this use of the word "myth," we are not making a statement about whether the story is literally true or not. It could have "happened," it might not have "happened." Nothing is being said about the actual occurrence of a specific event, one way or the other.

What is being said is that each of these stories, whether literally true or not, has a very important point to make about some aspect of life that we are all likely to face at one time or another. And the stories, the myths, whether literally true or not, give us

guidance as to how we might act when we meet a similar, although usually less startling, moment in our own lives. In fact, perhaps myths are so dramatic in their imagery in order to make them vivid enough to burn into our memories for all time. That way, they will always be available in our minds when we need them.

If a particular myth is not literally true, is not historical, where does it come from? Does someone simply make it up? Both Jung and Campbell would answer emphatically – no! No one can just make up a "real" myth. A myth arises over time from a source we do not, cannot, fully understand. A real myth comes from the collective wisdom of a culture, or from an inspiration deep within the unconscious, or from God. An individual might be the vehicle for putting it into words, but a real myth is not the "creation" of an individual. A myth arises and takes on a life of its own because it touches people at a level of values, of meanings, of fundamental life questions. Or to say this another way, a story about how things really are becomes a myth when it begins to take on the unpremeditated power to mold and shape the lives of people in a healthy, meaningful way.

Here we arrive at a crucial point. We have been looking at myths and the role they play in our lives. It is easy to see that some myths have healthy and beneficial effects, and that others have harmful effects on the lives of the people they touch. The question we must each face is this: as we attempt to live out our lives in a meaningful way, just how can we know the difference?

To answer this question, we must first ask just what is a healthy life? And how do we answer this question except by the values given to us by our myth? Each of us can easily look at the myths of other peoples, and conclude that they were not healthy, did not lead to meaningful actions or to meaningful lives. For instance, every few years a group somewhere in the world will go to a mountain top to await the end of the world. Often the leader has prophesied that the end is coming soon, so they go to a high place to wait. This phenomenon has occurred many, many times over thousands of years. So far, the end has not come as predicted, and we on the outside have a good laugh, or extend our pity.

An even more dramatic example is that of the mass suicide of Jim Jones and hundreds of following in Guyana in 1978. They were following a myth that said they were "protesting the conditions of an inhuman world."[61] To me their myth seems misguided, horrible, insane. Yet they thought it was true.

An example on a much more dramatic scale is that of the Nazi's in the mid-twentieth century. As a result of their myth, a war was fought that cost tens of millions of lives. Millions of people were tortured, starved, and grotesquely killed. To me, their myth was flagrantly destructive, inhuman, unimaginable. Yet millions and millions of people at the time believed in this myth. Thus it is clear that modern men and women can commit their lives to myths that to those on the outside seem totally destructive. How can this be?

From any one person's point of view it is easy to judge that some myths that other people believe in are healthy and beneficial, while others are harmful and destructive. But this judgment can only come from the point of view of the myth that the person judging holds. Where else could it arise?

And this leads us to a crucial question. How do we know whether the myth we currently believe in is healthy or destructive? How do we know whether it is leading our lives in a meaningful direction, or toward a Nazi horror, or toward banality and emptiness? How can we judge the myth in which we find ourselves living? As we attempt to live out our lives in a meaningful way, this is a question we must each face.

Each of us, whether we are conscious of it or not, lives out our lives guided by some myth – or some combination of myths. It is from this myth or set of myths that meanings and values arise. It is by these myths that our life decisions are molded and shaped.

An individual's personal mythic structure might be very similar to one of the great mythic structures that have dominated whole cultures for generations or even centuries, if that individual grew up in such a culture. (For instance, Europe in the Middle Ages, or China in the Han Dynasty, or Japan before the opening to Western influence, or Victorian England. Other smaller scale but powerful examples might be the American South before the Civil War, or the Cherokee Nation before the European settlers came, or the Amish communities of 19th and 20th century America.) If one grew up in such cultures, the odds are great that one would live out one's life believing in a personal myth that closely corresponded to the myth of the society in which one was living. (However, even in such cultures there are always those who break out and challenge the existing mythic structures. These people sometimes

leave, are sometimes crushed, and occasionally their rebellion leads to major changes in the mythic structure.)

Or on the opposite extreme our personal mythic structure might be made up of several cobbled together pieces that are totally contradictory with each other. Just think of someone who was raised by two parents who were cruel and sadistic, in a community where there were no clear cultural norms or values. Or think of a homeless child growing up on the streets of New York; or of a child forced to fend for itself with no adult support in a country ravaged by war. Or of the child of drug addicted parents. What would be their personal mythic structure?

But they would have one! In fact, the one choice not available to us is to be free of a myth. For if you tried making not having a myth your belief, that negation would then be your myth. If you would say "Life has no meaning" – then that is your myth, the belief you have chosen to live by.

To repeat, everyone has a personal mythic structure by which they live their lives. Where else could values and meanings arise. How else could life choices be made? For a myth is the story by which we understand who we are and what life is about. If you think you don't have a myth, look at how you make your decisions – at what seems important, valuable, meaningful in your life. How did you arrive at those beliefs? That is your myth. Look at how you treat other people. Look at how you spend your time (stay with that thought for a moment, if you can). However you arrive at answers to these questions, that is your myth.

Your myth might be serving you well, or it might be serving you ill. But it is your myth. You cannot not have a myth. You can only decide how you will relate to it (or them) – whether you will wrestle with it or just accept it; whether you will keep it unconscious, or whether you will work to make it more conscious. Whether you will attempt to change it, or whether you will leave what exists in place. Those are your choices.

Perhaps an example or two would be in order. Do you live your life toward the goal of making it to heaven, or toward making a good living?

Do you spend your time trying to help other people, or trying to have a good time? Does your family take precedence over work, or does getting the job done come first? If you are involved in a creative endeavor, does this push aside an awareness of

caring for the "temple of the body"? Do you sometimes say something that is untrue. For what reason?

Of course most of us try to balance numerous important values in our lives. But what criterion do we use to arrive at the correct balance? That is our myth! However you make the fundamental value judgments in your life, that is your myth.

But, you protest, "I simply know what is true." "I just know what is important in my life." But how do you "know"? However you arrived at your "knowing", that is your myth, the story by which you understand things. It is perhaps appropriate to reiterate that this use of the word myth gives no information about whether what you believe is literally true or untrue. That is precisely the point that is being belabored, perhaps excessively. Your myth might be based on absolute real truth. It might be based on symbolic truth. It might be based on partial truth. Or it might even be based on a self-serving story created by someone else – or by yourself.

And just here is the crucial question? How do you KNOW whether your myth is true? For most of us on this life journey, our myth is not really conscious to us, so how do we know whether it is true or correct? And what is more troublesome still, most of us have several different "myths to live by" within us – and they lead in conflicting directions. How do we decide which to follow at any given moment?

If this is our dilemma, there seem to be four basic ways that we can answer this question.

1. THE WAY OF REVELATION

One way to solve this dilemma is to have a personal experience so profound, like Paul on the road to Damascus, or Buddha under the Bodhi tree, or Moses at the burning bush, or Mohammed in his cave, that for you the basic questions are answered, and you believe through and through that you "know" the truth of life. For anyone who has had such an experience, there is nothing more to be said. Such a person has found their truth. That person no longer has a dilemma. No matter what anyone else might think about whether their "truth" is correct, the belief of others no longer matters to them. They no longer care how others judge their truth. Further, many of those who have had such experiences radiate a certainty and a confidence that can profoundly affect anyone who comes in contact with them. It is from just such

experiences that many of the world's influential and lasting religions have arisen. And there have probably been more of these experiences in history than we would at first assume, and among people who did not become famous. (When in an interview late in his life Jung was asked whether he believed there was a God, his response was "I don't believe. I know.")[62] For people who have had such experiences, they KNOW.

But if you have not had such an experience yourself, what do you then do? You can certainly aspire to such a vision – perhaps must so aspire if you are to have much of a chance to find such a vision for your life. But how do you proceed? This is not so easy to answer outside of a mythic structure you already accepted.

2. THE WAY OF TRADITION

A second approach to finding a myth to live by is the way followed by most people throughout the centuries – to simply follow the myth or myths they were taught in their youth. For the lucky among us, these myths will be healthy and full, and will not be too contradictory with each other. And they will lead to a full, whole, and complete life – and hopefully into whatever positive experience there is (if any) beyond this life. (The myth you follow will determine what you believe about whether there is anything beyond this life. Is there any other possible way for such a belief to be arrived at?) However, this approach is a lot easier if one grows up in a culture where almost everyone around accepts the same myth. If a particular myth has developed over the centuries, usually that means it works at least to some degree, for it has been developed and refined by the culture until it does work.

But if you have not had a direct revelation for yourself of the truth of what you were taught as a child, the path is very treacherous, for how do you KNOW that what you were taught to believe is correct.? How do you know that you even understand what you were taught? What if you weren't lucky? What if you had been raised in Nazi Germany? Or by a criminal family, or as a slave, or by psychotic parents? Or in any culture or family that was truly unhealthy? How would you know?

For here's "the rub". Many of the great tragedies of human life have arisen when a whole society has followed what was presented to them as absolute TRUTH. Or when great masses have followed an inspired, charismatic leader who seemed to have had a new revelation of truth. If you just accept the myth in which you were raised, isn't there a great danger that it was only partial, or distorted, or even corrupt? That the

people who taught you didn't really understand it themselves; or were using the rules you were being taught to get what they wanted. Or perhaps were teaching you what they wanted to believe but really didn't believe deep down inside? Or perhaps they partly believed what they taught but didn't really act that way because they were weak, or scared, or just plain selfish? If you just accept the belief system you were taught, how do you know whether it is true? Don't many of the belief systems of other cultures seem strange, or weird, or just plain crazy? But if the people who believe in these "strange" beliefs were raised in that culture and just accept what they were taught, how are they different from you if you follow the Way of Tradition? Were you simply luckier? How do you KNOW? Until you can get your perspective outside of the beliefs that surrounded you when you were young, how can you possibly judge what is really true?

But if you attempt to get outside the beliefs you were raised in, there is a great danger you will become alienated from the culture of your youth, and be unable to find anything else to believe in. On the other hand, if you don't first get outside the system of your childhood, can you ever make it yours at the deepest level? Until you have left "home", can you ever "know the place for the first time"? A true dilemma, this!

One answer to this dilemma could be the thought of William James, that "believing may make it so".[63] Perhaps by living the path of one's tradition one gives the path its meaning, creates the meaning and value of the tradition by living it. This approach has in fact seemed to work for some, especially in cultures where the beliefs are strongly supported by the culture. And when the myths are strong, healthy ones. But will this work if the myths are unhealthy, or even corrupt? And how will you know which is the case about the specific myth you were taught?

3. THE WAY OF "AS IF"

If you decide to make the attempt to discover the truth for yourself outside the myths you were raised in, how would you then proceed? One way is the way of "AS IF". Even if you don't just automatically accept what you were taught as being true, you can still by an act of faith decide to accept a particular set of beliefs as true. By this decision, you commit to act as if these beliefs are true, on the authority of someone who raised you, or taught you, or who seems to you to have had a profound

experience of truth of their own. And you hope that through acting as if this myth is true, you will come to discover its truth for yourself. For many this path seems to have worked.

But if this is your state, how do you decide which set of beliefs, which myth to commit to? If you just go unquestioningly with the myth you were taught as a child, then you are moving back into the Way of Tradition, and all the questions that brings. But if you just arbitrarily pick a myth to follow, it is very hard to develop a conviction that it is really "true." And there is the danger that you will simply adopt the "arbitrary" myth at the surface level only, while at a deeper and often unconscious level you will begin to use the arbitrary myth to pursue goals of power, or sex, or money, or other narrow self interests. If the belief system you select is not reinforced by the mystery of the teachings of your youth, or strongly supported and reinforced by the culture in which you live, it becomes very easy to use it to achieve your small-minded, selfish motives rather than following where it leads. This does not have to be true, but there is the danger that such an arbitrarily chosen myth will not have the power to mold and shape you, because if you have arbitrarily chosen it you feel you have power over it.

Unless, of course, you commit to a teacher, who will guide you and prevent this danger. But equally difficult questions arise in choosing a teacher or guide. Which teacher do you follow? How do you KNOW that the teacher isn't self-serving, or corrupt, or mainly interested in your money, or in your adulation. Or is perhaps even acting out of personal delusions of grandeur?

Yet if you don't commit to some myth or some teacher there is the equal danger of swinging back and forth between different beliefs as the mood strikes you, making none real at a deeper level. Or of switching back and forth between beliefs to rationalize your narrow self-interest, so that no belief has a deeper truth or meaning for you at all.

Perhaps the best argument for the "as if" way, the best argument for committing to some system of beliefs, even if they are only partially true, is summed up by the Christian novelist Charles Williams, "Unless you can be true to that which proves false in the end, you will not find that which is true in the end." [64] In other words, by the discipline of making the struggle to live within some system of belief, you accomplish the inner work; you overcome the obstacles within yourself that are preventing you from having a direct revelation of truth. If you choose a relatively healthy "myth to

live by", and if you do this work well, perhaps in this way you will one day have your own direct experience of truth. But there is still the question of which path to choose as your "as if" path.

4. THE WAY OF THE JOURNEY TO CONSCIOUSNESS

If neither the Way of Tradition nor the Way of "As If" seems to work for you, is there another way? The answer provided by the story of Odysseus is emphatically Yes!. (At least as understood by Jung, and Campbell, and Luke, and Bridges, and Stein, and many others.) You can undertake The Quest; the inner journey of Odysseus.

On this way you do not accept any myth as true, but go in search of truth. You go in search of your vision, your direct experience of truth, but not within a given set of beliefs. Where then do you look? Within. And what is your weapon, your tool for the work? Consciousness.

On this path, you will be beset by many adventures – and many monsters. Monsters? Yes, monsters; the inner demons of conflicting values and desires. Sexual desires that seem almost overwhelming, yet which are sinful within the value system you were taught. Moments when you recognize that actions you "took for virtue" were really motivated by a totally selfish wish. Do you acknowledge your past motives, or push the recognition away? You will be forced to make choices between a desire for power, money, and glory and a desire to help others; and you will have moments of recognition of the former masquerading as the latter. Do you let the awareness in?

In this journey you will be undertaking the long, slow process of discovering who you really are, the good and the bad, so that you can move forward in your life from a foundation of truth rather than of fantasy and illusion. You will be following the ages-old command to "know yourself."

You will be gradually learning to recognize when you must make a choice in your life between competing "goods," and making that choice consciously, rather than keeping the choice unconscious and trying to have it both ways.

You will be building the courage to see, bit by bit, your parents and other primary caregivers from your early life as they really are – as real human beings with their own good and bad parts – rather than as the larger-than-life heroes and villains they inevitably must seem to a young child. And you will be developing a real relationship,

based on truth and compassion, with those aspects within yourself that you inherited and adopted from them. And, if you are lucky, you will have the opportunity to develop a mature relationship to those real people from your early life who are still alive.

You will be taking back, little by little, the projections you have placed on your spouse, your boss, your friends, and your enemies so that you gradually come to see and deal with the significant people in your life as they really are, rather than as carriers of your internal angels and demons. (Negative projection, as understood in modern psychology, is seeing your faults in those around you. Not having been willing or able to acknowledge these ailments in yourself, you "project" them onto others because they are such a strong presence in your life.)

Or as it was captured before the advent of modern psychology by that brilliant American, Henry David Thoreau, in talking about what motivates those who are always trying to fix others: "The philanthropist too often surrounds mankind with the remembrance of his own cast-off griefs as an atmosphere, (and calls it sympathy)."[65]

He continues: "If anything ail a man, so that he does not perform his functions,"[66] then "he forthwith sets about reforming the world. If he have a pain in his bowels,"[67] then:

> Being a microcosm himself, he discovers – (and it is a true discovery, and he is the man to make it) – that the world has been eating green apples; to his eyes, in fact, the globe itself is a great green apple, which there is danger awful to think of that the children of men will nibble before it is ripe,[68]

And:

> I believe that what so saddens the reformer is not his sympathy with his fellows in distress, but, though he be the holiest son of God, is his private ail. Let this be righted, let the spring come to him, the morning rise over his couch, and he will forsake his generous companions (trying to fix others) [without apology] . . .[69]

With equal insight Thoreau captures the solution to projection, for he realizes that he must first see the things in himself that he is "projecting" onto the world, if he is ever

to stop this process: "I never dreamed of any enormity greater than I have committed. I never knew, and shall never know, a worse man than myself."[70]

If we can, with Thoreau, hold this insight, then our projections will cease. In a different age and time, is not this same thought perfectly captured by the saying of Christ:

> And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own?
> Either how canst thou say to thy brother, "Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye," when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye.[71]

Thus gradually, piece by piece, on this path you will be discovering or creating the values and beliefs that will give your life meaning and purpose, and you will be making the hard choices required to bring those beliefs and values into a conscious relationship to each other. And on this way you will be attempting to come into relationship to that which is greater than yourself (if such exists), to the source of the myths that shape human life, that shapes life itself. You will be attempting to directly experience Truth, the Tao, God – that force in which you "live, and move, and have your being."[72]

Why would you assume that such exists? The best answer is: why would you assume it does not? Until you have had a direct experience of whatever the Truth really is, the assumption that a greater reality does not exist is just as much an assumption – an act of faith – as that no greater reality exists. And in this context, Pascal's Wager if seen as a question about the mystery beyond our knowing, seems especially apt:

> . . . either God exists or He does not exist; if you wager that He exists, and He in fact does exist, you gain all; if you lose the wager because He in fact does not exist you lose nothing. In wagering on God's existence, your stake is zero, your reward, if God exists, is infinite. Reason ends in doubt and leaves unsatisfied our deepest interests. However, in religious feeling we directly experience God and find peace: "The heart has its reasons which reason does not know."[73]

It is crucial here to repeat that each of us is always embedded in and controlled by some myth or set of myths. On this pathway, the task is to come to know the "myth you live by" consciously. Does it need to be said: this is not necessarily an easy path? As a sign in a psychologist's office mentioned by John Sanford says: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free. But it might make you miserable in the process."[74]

But if you undertake this journey, there is help along the way, for to aid travelers on this pathway is precisely the purpose of the great myths of humankind. Thus you can use the great stories to give you guidance, to help you avoid mistakes, to help you understand the mistakes you have already made, and to suggest solutions to your current dilemmas. If you begin to read the great stories in this way, then you will be aided by Christ and Buddha, Odysseus and Dante, Psyche and Mary, Moses and Faust, Isis and Athena, and many, many more.

In following this path, you may concentrate exclusively on any one of the great stories, or you may learn from many of them. You may follow this path if you believe that one system was divinely inspired and created, or that all were, or that none were. The crucial factor is that you open yourself to the journey, and to whatever truth you discover there.

But how do you proceed? How do you "know" on this path when you are on the right path rather than following a fantasy or an illusion? Tough question. Just here is the most difficult point, and the place which you can cross only by an act of faith. In fact, with each of these alternatives we arrive at just such a point. It is a river that can perhaps only be crossed by an act of faith.

What is the act of faith in this fourth way? That there is a part of you, a voice within, that "knows" when you are moving in the right direction, and that if you listen carefully, with courage and patience, that this still, small voice will guide you in the way you should go. Is this voice your individual inner wisdom, or is it the collective wisdom of humankind? Or is it the voice of God? You cannot know at the start of the journey. Is it your "conscience"? Perhaps. But not the culturally conditioned "this is right and this is wrong" conscience we usually mean when we use that word. It lies behind the normal use of the word conscience.

How do you know when it is really the still, small voice you are hearing and not just another desire, or fear, or fantasy? When you really hear it, you just KNOW. You feel it in your body. Your course of action seems to be in harmony through and through, even if it is difficult. You make mistakes, just as Odysseus makes mistakes, but you gradually realize that you are off the track, so you begin to listen again. You share your journey with close friends, with counselors, with spiritual directors, with teachers, with therapists – and weigh the feedback that they give you. You don't accept what they say as truth, but as information to help you know whether you are on the right path, or that you are lost again.

You can find a teacher or a spiritual director on this journey, and follow their guidance – to a point. But on this fourth way, you must always remember that somewhere inside, you are always making the final decision as to whether you are on the right path. As Kant argued, no outside source or person or teacher can be a moral authority unless we choose them as our moral authority. And if we are doing the choosing, it is we who are making the final decision. Thus it is we who by definition are the final moral authority in our own lives.186

What is the end of this journey? Perhaps the end is when you have your own experience of Truth, of Enlightenment. The point at which you simply KNOW through and through who you are and what life is about. At that moment you join with all those who have gone before who have rested at peace with their truth. Is what you have found THE TRUTH? Who can judge but you? It is your truth, the truth of your life.

To repeat once again, the one choice you <u>do not have</u> is to avoid a myth for your life. Your mythic structure might be the one given by one of the great traditions, or it might be a grab-bag of pieces from many sources. It might be healthy or it might be destructive, but you live in relation to some mythic structure. Everyone has a myth by which they live.

The myth you follow might be one that was taught rationally through theories and doctrines, or you might have learned your myth from watching the actions of the people who raised you – or some combination of both. Many young people are taught a particular set of doctrines that are highminded, but the people around them are mostly involved with making money, having a good time, achieving fame, worrying about what the neighbors will think, being socially popular, or escaping from reality in

alcohol, drugs, or television. If the words and the deeds of those who are influencing your beliefs are in contradiction, then your myth is probably made up of many different pieces, and those pieces don't fit together very well at all. For instance, you might have been taught that helping others is the most important goal in life, but you sense that the people around you, when they do help others, are often doing it for self-centered reasons. What then would be your myth? Cynicism about helping others? The belief that it is appropriate to act like you are helping others for your own reasons? Or a commitment to living your life in service to others because you believe it is right, and that you will do it better than those who taught you? Some combination of these?

The Myth of Science

But I don't have to deal with all of that, you might say. I will only believe what can be proved to be true. I will rely upon science. Ah yes, science. But mainstream science today is a myth, a myth that begins: "Once upon a time there was a world that was made up only of matter. In this world only things that can be measured by instruments are real, and only events that can be repeated are true." But how does one KNOW this? How can science "prove" there is not some force completely unknown to it that is beyond its instruments and its measurements?

For that matter, how does an average person in the world today KNOW that there are atoms, let alone quarks, and gluons and strange attractors? Have you seen them? How do you KNOW that there are black holes, or that the universe started with a Big Band billions of years ago? To some degree we must take on faith that our most brilliant scientists know what they are talking about, and that the instruments we have never seen are demonstrating what they report. To some degree we should take this on faith. But we must also remember that the phenomenon they encounter, and their interpretation of those phenomena are two different things. In the history of science, the interpretation of the facts has changed so radically so many different times that there is no reason to believe that it will not change radically again. In fact, there is every reason to believe that it will change again. Thus to base one's meaning in life on such a fickle system is probably mistaken.[75]

Further, by looking at the conclusions about life that the greatest scientists have come to, it becomes clear that science does not "prove" anything about what the final reality

might be, or about the meaning of life. For the most famous of scientists have come to very different conclusions from each other about reality and about the meaning of life. Based on the most up-to-date facts available. For instance, Rene Decartes and Isaac Newton probably had more to do with the creation of modern science than any other two individuals. It is therefore interesting to note that Descartes' initial inspiration came through a dream, that he believed the soul survived death, and that he used his logical system to "prove" the existence of God. As for Newton, for perhaps 40 years he spent much of his time as a practicing alchemist, a practice that is today considered by many scientists quackery, and argued in essence that there was a Great Watch Maker in the Sky. Yet Charles Darwin, another of the most famous names in science of the last 100 years, came to a very different conclusion, believing that the world could be explained without reference to a force outside of the material world.

In more modern times, the greatest scientist of the 20th Century would almost universally be recognized as Albert Einstein, and he concluded on the basis of all he had learned, seen and understood throughout his life that there was a God organizing things.[76] And the creators of modern Quantum Mechanics, perhaps the most brilliant group of scientists in the 1st half of the 20th Century, names such as Schrodinger, Niels Bohr, Heisenberg, and many others, came to an essentially mystical view of the nature of reality. Yet many modern scientists, using the theories and insights of these great thinkers, have concluded that the world is made up of matter, that the soul dies with the body, and that life arose through the eons by natural selection.

The fact that some great scientists came to believe that there was a God, or that the universe is a basically mysterious and mystical place does not prove that this is true. And it gives almost no guidance as to how to live our lives, or what is ultimately meaningful for each of us. (Partly because on such questions as these there is so little agreement.) But it does demonstrate conclusively that science <u>does not prove</u> that matter is all that exists, or that the current mainstream myth of science is true.

Ultimately, science by its very nature can have little to say about many of the most important things in life. Science can not tell us about the importance of love, or the power of compassion in or lives.[77] Science cannot tell us how to deal with anger, or when it is appropriate to forgive, or how much time we should spend helping others versus pursuing our personal ambitions. And science cannot tell us what is meaningful and what is not meaningful in our lives. Unless, of course, one chooses to

adopt a particular myth of science (and there are different ones) as one's own myth. Science can then provide guidance in these questions. But only if a person starts by accepting a particular myth of science. But science was developed as an instrument to help us handle, manage, and understand the material world around us. As a tool to this end, it has been and is enormously powerful and effective. But as a myth by which we can understand reality, discuss meaning, and find guidance for our lives, it is only one of many possible myths – and perhaps not as effective as others, for it was not developed for this purpose. It can be very effective at disproving the exaggerated, misguided, and self-serving claims of charlatans – which is very valuable. But it can prove very unwieldy as a tool to help one discover one's own myth.[78]

The Myth of Television

One final thought in this digression. As has been said before, the great myths, fairy tales, and teaching stories have been one of the most important methods of conveying the values of each culture to their young. It's often much easier and more effective to teach with a story than with a lecture, as Christ and others have demonstrated. One reason this is true is that stories don't preach – they don't say you should do this, you should do that – often the kiss of death for values, especially in relation to a teenager. On the contrary, stories let a person take in the message at his or her own pace – they provide hints that each can use when they are ready. And often they provide different levels of meaning for people who are at different levels of development.

Further, the stories that are told in any particular culture don't just happen randomly. The reason certain myths, fairy tales, and teaching stories endure as opposed to others is almost certainly because they convey the values of the culture to listeners of all ages in the culture they serve. Each story, especially the fairy tales and teaching stories, do not contain a whole system of values, but each contains one bit of wisdom that has been worked out and developed by the collective wisdom of that culture. If it no longer carries the current wisdom, it soon changes or disappears. Other stories are then created or borrowed from other cultures, sometimes with an alteration that changes the point. This isn't done by committee, or even by anyone's conscious decision. It just happens.

In the twentieth century industrialized world, what has taken the place of the telling of the great stories and myths? The answer seems to be television, movies, and popular music. And just this fact is probably the source of the unease that many people feel about the pervasiveness of these cultural forms today.

Television, for instance, as a source of pure entertainment is fine – most cultures have incorporated pure entertainment as well as teaching stories into their lives. But what is being taught by television? What are the values it carries? What kind of society is it molding?

The problem is television programs are not developed through the collective wisdom of the culture. Most are developed consciously by a few individuals to capture our attention for an instant. The primary goal of most TV programs is to gain success for the creators, and to hold the largest possible audience's, attention for a few extra moments while the advertisements are being played.

This is the heart of the problem that many people perceive with television. In order to capture the attention of an audience for a brief moment, the best tools are sex, violence, sensationalism, sentimentality, escapism, and fantasy reinforcement. The quickest and easiest way to capture a large audience is to play to the most base part of human nature, to the lowest common denominator of our collective emotions and fantasies. This means that much of what the average citizen of the modern industrial world – and the average youth – spends five or more hours a day watching tends to lead in the direction of unconsciousness, fantasy, and lack of initiative. And is driven by the values of sensationalism and sensuality.

Think of the contrast between television and the great teaching stories and myths throughout the ages. In the myths and stories, horrors occurred. Great difficulty, pain and loss are certainly present. But the enduring stories had as their underlying theme the great human journey – and each offered some guidance along that pathway. Each offered hints for how to make a particular passage, sometimes by demonstrating the way in which the hero or heroine failed in their own attempt. Each enduring story held out a hand to anyone attempting the journey for themselves, and gave them courage to begin anew with each difficulty they encountered.

The same is true of the great works of literature, or of the theatre. Though written by individuals, the great works arose because an individual opened himself or herself to

the collective wisdom, attuned themselves to something larger than themselves, and captured for all to experience an underlying current of truth in the human journey. This is what all great literature is about. There was of course in every age much literature and many stories that were not of this kind. But young people heard, read, and saw much more of the great literature, and much less of the trivial. In the modern industrial world, the percentages have been dramatically reversed. What values, then are we teaching our young?

Occasionally television, movies, and popular music rise to this level also. The urge to speak to the mythic level arises continuously in the human heart and mind. Individuals today working in these fields feel that same urge, and we can observe it appearing occasionally in their works. Sometimes the underlying currents seem to take over a work and speak through it. But rarely. Why should this be? Probably because the overriding motive for these media, as mentioned earlier, run counter to the motive of capturing and conveying deeper values. People today spend so much more of their time watching and listening to works that do not carry deeper values. In most cultures of the past, however entertainment for entertainment's sake only occurred occasionally.

Contrast in your mind the current life of a teenager with an image of a culture in which the wisest old men and women off the village tell value-laden stories each day to the young; or a culture in which the spiritual leader of the community teaches the villagers through stories; and examples; or to the time of Homer, when the myth of Odysseus helped to mold and shape the lives of everyone throughout the Aegean.

It's very important to recognize, however, that this is not the fault of television executives, or advertisers, or multi-national corporations, or the government. If it is anyone's fault, it is everyone's fault. We all create and sustain our culture. If we wish to change it, if we really wish to seek meaningful change, we must follow the path of Odysseus and begin the long, difficult journey of changing ourselves. (And perhaps as we change ourselves, we will change the world, as Michael Toms would say?)[79]

This does not mean that we cannot attempt to change the culture we live in at the same time we are attempting to grow within. But we must recognize that there are no simple solutions. If we wish to change television, for example, so that it carries more values, whose values should it carry? Who gets to decide? The strength of the modern world is that no one person or group of people is given very much power to

impose their particular values on others. This is good because those who gain such power often become increasingly corrupt, and use their power to further their own special interests. To return the power to impose values to the hands of a few, whoever they are, would not seem like progress to most people today.

So how would we decide which values to incorporate into television, if that was our goal? A majority vote? But to make it a matter of a "majority" vote is not workable, for values change. How often would you vote? Who would interpret the results? What happens to the values of the minority? Further, what if there are "higher values." If higher values do exist, no one has guaranteed that the "majority" is in touch with them. On the contrary, it might well be the opposite. Maybe only a minority in any society are ever fully in touch with "higher values," and it is their role to teach the majority. Or we could consider the situation in totalitarian societies where those who hold the best and highest values, in the view of many outsiders', are the very ones who are persecuted, with at least the assent of the majority.

No, trying to change the world, as Thoreau noted, is "too often motivated by our own ailment."[80] Perhaps the only effective way to begin any meaningful change is to hold in mind Socrates admonition: "Beloved Pan, and all other gods who haunt this place, give me beauty in the inward soul. May my inner and outer man be as one. May I reckon the wise to be the wealthy. . ."[81]

And to recognize that we cannot in the end create values, we cannot intentionally create our myths, but only open ourselves to their "arising" in us – individually and collectively. (And what might arise could be new, or a return to the old).

12

The Return

And so, to wind back to our story, the mythic realm is that place where we come to grips with who we are in the greater scheme of things. It is the "sacred space" – out of ordinary time and space – where the hero or heroine in a great story is transformed (and we with them, insofar as we identify with them and learn our lessons through them)[A]. In the great stories, the mythic realm casts giant images on the screens of our mind's eye to represent to us the inner struggles that each of us is undergoing as we move through life. It paints in graphic pictures the issues that we must each deal with on a life's journey that is whole and complete.

This mythic realm is an internal region, where the lessons are learned and a fuller understanding is reached of who we are and what life is about. It is the place where we wrestle with the meaning of life and with the values that are essential to that meaning. It involves lessons about how to act in the world, as well as a growing insight about our personal motives and fears. It is the place where we learn how to live out the rest of our lives.

In most of us, as we attempt to make this journey, we do not leave our daily world completely. A few do choose to leave the ordinary, daily world – those who join monasteries, take long journeys, or perhaps go off to war. The majority of us, however, struggle with our inner journey while simultaneously "getting by" in our daily lives.

As our representative, for 10 long years Odysseus has been immersed in this mythic realm, giving us guidance for our own journey home. Now he is ready to return to the world of his human life, and we will be able to see if he can practice what he has learned. At this point in the story, this sound and peaceful sleep seems to be a sign that he is leaving the mythic realm, the realm of the unconscious, archetypal world, and is returning to the human world. This sleep, then, is perhaps meant as a line of

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[A] According to Mircea Eliade, the other great mythologist of the 20th century, it is only in sacred space that meanings can arise.

demarcation between the night sea journey and life in the real world. (It gets confusing when an activity, sleep in this case, becomes symbol for two very different things in the same story. If we're supposed to follow the guidance of these stories, why don't they make them simpler? I want my symbols to be consistent! This is too confusing! It's too much like life!)

Another way to think of this sleep is to remember that these two worlds are not totally separate, but interpenetrate each other throughout our lives. We can be primarily working and moving in the inner world, or we can be primarily focused on our in-the-world lives. When we have been primarily focused on our inner journey, there can be a fairly dramatic shift when we move back into a relationship to the daily world. Our attention is shifted in a way that is not so different from the shift of attention that occurs between our waking world and sleep. Thus perhaps this "sleep" is a sign that Odysseus is now crossing this line of primary focus from the inner to the outer world.

Living the Lessons

When our hero finally awakes, he at first doesn't recognize that he is truly home, and fears that the Phaiákians have deceived him. (Perhaps indicating that even when everything seems rosy we must still practice a healthy skepticism – and take responsibility for our own fate.)

> "Where shall I take these things? Where take myself,
> with no guide, no directions?
> . . . I'll be busy.
> I can look through my gear. I shouldn't wonder
> if they pulled out with part of it on board." (p. 236)

Not very charitable to those who have been so good to him. But he has been tricked so many times before. In any case, he is home, and soon Athena appears. However, she does not immediately identify herself, but appears in the guise of a young shepherd. When the "shepherd" asks who Odysseus is,

> . . . he answered her
> with ready speech– not that he told the truth,
> but, just as she did, held back what he knew,
> weighing within himself at every step
> what he made up to serve his turn. (p. 238)

Again the issue of truthfulness, and the role it is to play in our lives. In the latter part of this story, the model Odysseus sets for us would seem to be this: When he first meets someone, he is not immediately truthful. He clearly believes that there are charlatans in the world, and those who might mean him ill. He believes that it can be a cold, cruel world. He believes that there are people in the world who will take your money, your dignity, your life. (And anything else they can get their hands on.) Odysseus' model is thus not one of innocence or naiveté. On the contrary, it seems to suggest that there are many levels of truth, and that it is a person's task – through effort and discernment – to discover the right level of truth to use at each moment. Thus he doesn't bare his soul to a stranger, until he first discovers a reason to trust them.

On the other hand, he doesn't start by assuming dishonesty on the part of others, perhaps because he recognizes that in some way that would call forth dishonesty. Rather, he begins carefully to feel out strangers, to learn who they are and what their motives might be. He might make up glib stories, but not to harm the other person. His 'tales" seem to be designed to keep the conversation going until he can learn what the other person's true intentions are.

What he doesn't do (at least very much) is lie to take advantage of a stranger. He might not reveal all he knows, and he might make up "cover" stories to hide a truth that is too dangerous to reveal at the moment, but he doesn't lie to a stranger to take what is not his. He doesn't lie to a stranger in order to cheat, to steal, to usurp.

His interaction with a stranger, or an old acquaintance, is like a fencing match where he tests and evaluates the other, until he can make a judgment as to what their motives really are. And this is deadly serious business, for on his judgment rides his happiness, his future, his life. He also recognizes that he can't wait forever, that at some point he must make a judgment. And when he makes a positive decision, when he concludes that it is time for honesty – with a fair and generous host, or with loyal friends and family – then he is honest, even painfully honest. Perhaps because he recognizes that this is the only way to be connected with other people at a deep level, and in the end the only way to have relationships that have depth.

When he has determined that someone is dealing with him honorably, then at the appropriate time he tells the truth clearly and honestly as he knows it. But if he concludes in the negative, that a person means him ill, is an enemy, then he uses his

wits as a tool to overcome them. Then tricks, or disguises, or misleading statements are used to save himself and gain what he feels is rightfully his.

Shall we follow Odysseus' example toward truth? Or is there a better model that has arisen since that time? This is a choice we must each make in our lives.

The Surface of Things – The Persona

As the "young shepherd" and Odysseus begin to converse, Athena says, “You play a part as if it were your own tough skin.” (p. 239)

In Jung's imagery, the part we play on the surface of our lives is our persona, the role we take on, the face we put on in our day-to-day dealing with other people. In his view, it is extremely important to do two things with one's persona: (l) Be able to use it, live it out when it is appropriate, and (2) Recognize that it is only a role and not who we are inside. Clearly Odysseus has learned this distinction, for he can "play a part as if it were his own tough skin," and yet when he is doing it, he knows he is playing a part. And when it is appropriate, he can quickly and easily drop his persona and express his inner thoughts and emotions. (I think Jung would have approved.)

Who Are These Guides Along The Way?

Throughout the story, Athena has played a major role in shaping the events that have unfolded. Returning to an earlier question, how should we understand her part, and that of the other Greek gods and goddesses in the story? There are many different ways to begin. One way would be to see them as actual figures that exist out there in the heavens, or on Mount Olympus, and who sometimes intervene in the affairs of humankind. Certainly many people in the Greek and Roman world experienced them just this way. And countless others believed in the existence of similar figures called by different names in other ages and times. We might call this possibility the Voice of the Transcendent Other.

Another way would be to see these figures in our story as the operation of the important forces of nature, or of fate; those forces that shape our lives but which we can't possibly understand or figure out from our limited perspective. When the weather, or accidents, or any unknown force affects people's lives, these forces are often given names so that they can be talked about, and in some way made less terrifying by the naming. This is often followed by a culture then developing

ceremonies to honor and propitiate them, the mysterious forces that have been named. We could call this the Voice of Fate. (Or the voice of the Personification of Nature.)

A third way to understand them, a way which we have discussed before, is to view the gods and goddesses of the ancient Greeks as the Voices of Collective Inner Wisdom. In this view, they are the personifications of the archetypes, Jung's term for forces that are imbedded within the human psyche. Let's dwell on this thought for a second time. (After all, Jung is our mentor in much of this work.) In his view, each person has within themselves a series of models of pure ways to be, to live, to act. Each model deals with one particular way of looking at things, or one particular aspect of life, or one way of approaching life. These models are much like instincts, so much so "that there is good reason for supposing that the archetypes are the unconscious images of the instincts themselves."[82]

For example, most of us have an instinct to protect ourselves when attacked. Most human beings who have ever lived have had this instinct. The exceptions would be rare, and would usually have a pathological cause. In Jung's view, standing behind this instinct, giving it its power, would be an archetype, let's say the archetype of self-protection. If we called this archetype the warrior, this instinctual urge to protect ourselves, we would be dealing with the simplest level of the archetypes. Where did this archetype come from? Perhaps it grew up over millennia as the most effective way of dealing with certain situations. Perhaps it was in our genes from the beginning. We can't say for sure. However it arose, this image of the warrior seems to be present in almost all humans, and it stands behind and gives energy – gives force – to us when it is called forward in our lives.

When and how will it be called forward? This is the crux of one crucial issue on our journey to wholeness.[B] If we are completely unconscious of this warrior in us, then we are much more likely to be taken over by it at certain moments, and to act aggressively and violently at inappropriate times. If we are not in relationship to our warrior, then we accept blows from people when we shouldn't, and then we explode toward someone else when they didn't deserve our anger at all. Or a person might

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[B] Robert Moore, the theologian and Jungian analyst, discusses this issue exceptionally well in his series of lectures, available on cassette, entitled "King, Warrior, Magician, Lover."

become completely unbalanced, and split off the warrior in a perverted way, and the "nice boy" next door is discovered to be a serial murderer, or the person who opens fire with a machine gun in a public place.

If the warrior is too dominant, has taken over our lives, then we go out toward the world attacking all the time – it is the only way we know how to be. In some cultures an out-of-control warrior will start war after war, will attempt to conquer enemy after enemy. In other cultures the compulsive warrior will engage in insatiable business attacks, or legal attacks, or will even continually attack those close to them.

In this view, the archetypes themselves are not good or bad. It is how we express them, when and how we let them out, that determines whether they are positive or negative in our lives. If we are unconscious of them, then we are likely to be taken over by them at any given moment in an inappropriate way. But the more we learn to use each when it is appropriate for our lives, the more healthy and balanced we will be.

In any person's life, some archetypes have been encouraged and developed by the family and the culture, while others have been discouraged. Some archetypes were naturally strong in each of us to begin with, and some weak. Our task is to gradually develop each of the archetypes within, and by practice, learn to use each when it is appropriate – and to drop it instantly when it is no longer appropriate.

Further, as Robert Moore emphasizes, it is never good for an archetype to take over one's life. A person being controlled by one archetype might be enormously effective or appealing, but if an archetype has taken over someone's life, there is no longer any person there, and it is a very dangerous situation. There is no core person to call forth the other archetypes when they are appropriate, or to moderate the excesses of the ruling archetype. (Many movies and books present just such one-dimensional characters as the villains, as supporting characters, or even occasionally as the hero or heroine).

So the goal is to gradually become conscious of the various archetypes within – the King, the Queen, the Wise Old Man, the Wise Old Woman, the Warrior, the Lover, the Fool – and many more. And gradually to learn to use, to be, each in its turn when it is called for in our lives. And to drop one and move to another instantly when the

situation changes. Not an easy task. In fact, a lifelong challenge. But worthy work on the journey to wholeness.

It should also be said that to do this work, one need not call the archetypes by this name, or to identify them by the names Jung or his followers give them. As Jung points out, these forces have been recognized by others in different ages and times and given many other names. He noted a similarity with Plato's world of Forms. And an interesting analogy could also be drawn with the Zen image of a monk responding instantly to each situation of life with exactly the appropriate action. Jung's archetypes are simply one way of thinking about and working on the challenge of integrating, of coming into relationship with all of the deep-running unconscious forces that seem to exist in each of us from the start of our lives.[C]

Exploring this train of thought one step further, Jung also discovered that most people who learn to recognize and listen to the archetypes often find one particular figure who acts as a primary guide at crucial moments in their life. This could be a constant figure throughout a person's life – as with Jung and his inner guide Philomon. Or a person could have a series of primary guides. In either case, in some ways, this primary inner guide is an archetype, but in other ways it is different from a strict view of an archetype as presented by Jung in the paper quoted above.[D]

Adopting this view of Athena for a moment, we will consider her as the primary inner guide for Odysseus on his journey. (We should keep in mind, however, that this is not necessarily the best way to understand her, nor the most valuable. In fact, such is the nature of the great myths that they can be looked at, worked with, understood

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[C] Several Jungian writers including Jean Shinoda Bolen in *Goddesses in Every Woman* and Karl Kerenyi in several books have discussed the Greek gods and goddesses as images of Jungian archetypes.

[D] As with many of Jung's ideas, the idea of the archetype is very complex, due to the fact that he is trying to grapple with complex subjects. Further, his ideas were developed over a period of more than sixty years of active writing and lecturing, and some of them changed over time; and Jung chose not to try to pin them down definitively in his lifetime. This might have been a failing on his part, but I tend to believe it was because he understood how complicated the ideas he was presenting were, and he more feared taking the life out of them by being too explicit than he feared leaving them vague and open, and subject to misinterpretation and abuse. That way they were at least alive and full of energy, and could be used by others in numerous and creative ways – which certainly has happened.

from many different angles. And each way of looking can be profitable in the quest for understanding.) This view is very similar to the previously discussed awareness of a still, small voice inside to which we can learn to listen. In Odysseus' case, through years of practice and the proper attitude and respect, he has so fully developed the ability to hear this inner voice that it is no longer a still, small voice – but a force and a power in his life. However, it is very important to note that Athena is not an archetype that has taken over his life, but one to which he has a healthy relationship. It is also interesting to note that this voice is a feminine figure, but a feminine figure who stands for logic and reasoning. She is in fact, the goddess of wisdom. Further, she is a goddess who loves to strategize and plan for battle, a feminine figure who is herself fierce in battle. Could this be a picture of how one can finally integrate all sides of oneself, so that the feminine element in a man is equally at home with logic and war when it is appropriate, rather than being limited to the more traditional stereotypes?

Whose Responsibility Is It Anyway?

To return once again to our story, as our hero begins to realize that this might really be Athena, he still doesn't rush to accept her word:

> "Can mortal man be sure of you on sight,
> even a sage, O mistress of disguises?" (p. 240)

Thus, if we attempt to follow Odysseus' model, we would be open to the dreams and inner voices that offer guidance. But we would proceed cautiously, evaluating carefully the point of view of that inner voice, and using all of our faculties in an attempt to fit the insight offered into a whole, integrated view of who we are and what we are about. We would ultimately know that we, and not the inner voice, are finally responsible for our decision. He continues:

> "Once you were fond of me – I am sure of that –
> years ago, when we Akhaians made
> war, in our generation, upon Troy.
> But after we had sacked the shrines of Priam
> and put to sea, God scattered the Akhaians;
> I never saw you after that, never
> knew you aboard with me, to act as shield
> in grievous times . . .” (p. 240)

Isn't this exactly the way many of us feel when we have lost our way on life's journey? Somehow we don't seem to hear the voice of our inner wisdom, our inner knowing of who we are and where we are going. In just this way, at the time Odysseus began his night sea journey he lost touch with Athena. But perhaps it was necessary. Perhaps for his inner transformation to occur, he had to leave his early guide, the one who had guided him through his exploits in the world, before he could come to know the other archetypes. Now that he has become more conscious, and is ready to return to the world of action, Athena returns. And she is ready to serve him on his journey back into the world. But how does he know that this is really Athena, and that what she says is true? How do we know which inner guidance to listen to in our own lives? Odysseus cries:

> "Hear me now in your father's name, for I
> cannot believe that I have come to Ithaka.
> It is some other land. You made that speech
> only to mock me, and to take me in.
> Have I come back in truth to my home island?" (p. 240)

Thus Odysseus shows a clear understanding that inner voices can lead us astray. Such is the nature of madness: inner voices take control of a person's life. In this model, we trust and follow inner voices only at great peril. We must first use the best of our human judgment to question and consider, for we must, here in this mortal realm, take the final responsibility for our own actions and choices. This is what separates us from madness and from possession by the archetypes. Athena responds:

> "Always the same detachment! That is why
> I cannot fail you, in your evil fortune,
> coolheaded, quick, well-spoken as you are!
> Would not another wandering man, in joy,
> make haste home to his wife and children? Not
> you, not yet." (p. 240)

In the face of his wariness, Athena gently mocks him, but also shows respect. For she understands all too well the reasons for this detachment – and which we have all seen vividly presented in the story. She knows that during his journey all kinds of mythical beings have attacked, tricked, and misled him along the way. If these are also inner figures, she realizes that he must be very careful of their statements and motives.

But gradually, through their exchange, Odysseus' inner wisdom convinces him that she is the right voice to follow, that she is speaking from a place of truth. For his wariness, for his clear determination to take responsibility for his own life decisions, she shows respect. And because of these traits, again offers help. Now she aides him in seeing his home island with discerning eyes, to see it for what it truly is – the home he has sought so long. She helps him recognize his own beloved Ithaka. He "sees" that he is finally home. Could this "seeing" or one's true home after a great transformation be another part of what T.S. Eliot meant when he said:

> We shall not cease our exploration,
> But the end of all our exploring
> will be to arrive where we started,
> and know the place for the first time.[83]

For Odysseus, as for us, this new vision of home is not the home of our fantasies or illusions, but the dramatic experience of seeing what our home is really like, and who we truly are – for the first time. To see our "home" in this way is to see the very ground of our being, and at that moment to know how we relate to the cosmos from that ground.

The Final Preparation

Sometimes in the story, the trials seem unending. Just because he is home, the struggle is not necessarily done. He has been gone a long time, and others have staked a claim to his throne. Unfortunately, after we return from our own inner journey, our position in the world might not have been preserved for us. We might, perhaps must, be faced with the task of carving out a new role in the world. To do this, we must first decide what our true role in the world should be, and then employ all of our courage, strength, wisdom and skill to create or recover it.

And this is just the place in which Odysseus finds himself at this moment. More than a hundred young noblemen have taken over his kingdom, and have demanded that his wife, Penélopê, marry one of them. It is clear in the story that they have become so brash and assertive that they would quickly kill anyone who showed up and claimed to be Odysseus. They would just kill him immediately and claim he was an imposter. They have already attempted to ambush and kill his son. Thus Odysseus, far from finding a joyous and safe reunion with his family, must first reclaim his rightful place

against overwhelming odds. Perhaps it is always darkest before the dawn. But he has made the inner journey, and he has learned his lessons well; thus the gods, or fate, and/or his inner wisdom are now aligned with him, and will work in his favor. But this does not mean it will be easy. Athena warns him:

> ". . . I can tell you of the gall and wormwood it is your lot to drink in your own hall," (p. 240)

before he will be restored. It was "not for nothing" that he was forced to learn humility and patience during his long journey:

> "Patience, iron patience, you must show;
> so give it out to neither man nor woman
> that you are back from wandering. Be silent
> under all injuries, even blows from men." (p. 240)

With Athena's guidance, a plan is made. Odysseus is to make his way into his home in disguise, and to do that he must be prepared to accept all manner of abuse before the moment comes to reveal himself and overcome the suitors.

After the plan is made, Athena assures him that in the end he will be victorious. Never before on this journey has he been given such definite assurance. There is something different here; now he is the transformed man, ready to act in harmony with the universe, or fate, or destiny. From our point of view, in our own lives, this might be a sense of confidence through and through that we are on the right course, that we have aligned ourselves with fate, or with our true destiny.

As we view Odysseus, there is a sense of a purified human being moving toward his true purpose. There is a sense of the rightness of his course, and of a victorious destiny. Not of a destiny without suffering. Nor of a destiny free of the necessity to use all of his wits and skill. Not even of a destiny without fear, without momentary losses of confidence, or even without humiliation. But at this moment, there is a clear sense of his final arrival, and, of success.

Their discussion at an end, Athena:

> . . . touched him with her wand,
> shriveled the clear skin of his arms and legs,
> made all his hair fall out, cast over him
> the wrinkled hide of an old man, and bleared

> both his eyes, that were so bright. Then she
> clapped an old tunic, a foul cloak, upon him,
> tattered, filthy, stained by greasy smoke,
> and over that a mangy big buck skin.
> A staff she gave him, and a leaky knapsack
> with no strap but a loop of string. (p. 244)

And in this tattered form, Odysseus begins the last leg of his journey home. What are we to make of this magical aging of Odysseus? To set the stage for further drama, it is a very effective device. We can easily recognize not only the dramatic value, but the logical value of entering his territory in disguise; he will be able to see how things stand, to see who will stand with him and who against him when the crucial moment arrives. He will be able to test his friends, and even his wife, to see if they are still faithful to him still.

Such a course is especially important for Odysseus, for all through his journey the example of Agamémnon's return from Troy has been burned into his mind. Agamémnon, the great king who led the Greek forces at Troy and who, the night of his return, was murdered by his wife and her lover. Odysseus has been reminded of this event, several times, so a disguise certainly would make sense.

It is also easy to see how Odysseus could have entered his kingdom in disguise. Even though he was a unique man, no one there had seen him for more than twenty years. Most of us have had the experience of seeing someone at a reunion, or on the street, whom we haven't seen for twenty years – and we don't recognize them at all. Most of us are aware that we can dramatically change the way other people perceive us by the way we carry ourselves– by how we dress and how we present ourselves. Most everyone has had the experience of being dressed in an especially disheveled way – especially when in a depressed or distracted state – and being treated like a tramp by a waitress or shopkeeper or clerk. Or of running into someone we know when we are in such a state, and realizing that they just don't recognize us at all. Conversely, most everyone has also had the experience of being dressed in the perfect clothing for an occasion, of being centered and confident, and of seeing everyone around notice them, and react to the presence and power they radiate. And perhaps of feeling at that moment: This is who I really am.

Thus it is not too hard to imagine Odysseus dressing as a beggar or tramp and, skilled performer that he is, adopting the mannerisms and bodily posture to such a degree that he could fool almost anyone. But if we continue to assume that every event in such a profound story must have an inner meaning, what does this event convey?[E]

[E] I must say that this episode has puzzled me at the level of the inner journey. This is the first time that Athena or any of the gods or goddesses have done something so directly to intervene that Odysseus could physically observe the direct consequence of their action. All the other interventions have been outside his field of vision. He could see the results, he could attribute the results to the gods, if he chose to see it that way, but he could not directly see their actions. In reading the story, we could therefore easily attribute these earlier events to fate, or to inner guidance. But it is not so easy to see this magical transformation in that way. The reasons for Odysseus' disguise, and the possibility that he could assume one, are easy to see. But Athena's direct intervention is not so easy to understand. Odysseus could have put on a disguise himself. Why didn't he? Why was he magically transformed by Athena?

Is this a sign that Homer really wanted to make clear that he believed the gods were real, and did directly and actively affect our human lives? Is this simply a case of poetic license, something that we should understand to be symbolic of one's power to mold the impression one makes at the level Odysseus has reached?

This remains a puzzle to me. Perhaps as you read this, you will have that flash of insight that will provide the explanation. For, as in seeing the meaning of a dream, there is a certain "Aha! so that's what it means!" feeling when one understands a specific piece of the inner meaning of a great story or myth. Any suggestions?

The True King

Thus hidden from recognition, Odysseus begins re-entry into his true kingdom. At Athena's direction, his first stop is the forest hut of a servant who has remained loyal through all these years – the keeper of the swine.

When Odysseus approaches the hut, the swineherd does not recognize him, but shows the "stranger" great courtesy and kindness, even though he appears to be a beggar. The swineherd explains:

> ". . . rudeness to a stranger is not decency,
> poor though he may be, poorer than you."
> "All wanderers
> and beggars come from Zeus . . ." (p. 249)

This is a theme that runs throughout and reflects a deeply felt value embedded in the culture. Courtesy and kindness to strangers are marks of character and goodness, and lack of these traits is a sure sign of disrespect for the gods – and of a foul character. If a stranger treats you ill, then you are justified in acting harshly toward that person; but if a stranger asks for aid, he or she "comes from Zeus" and should be treated accordingly.

Odysseus stays with the swineherd for three days, and during this time learns much about how things stand on the island. He tests the swineherd thoroughly, and finds that he is both unfailingly kind to a stranger, and deeply devoted to the long-departed Odysseus – his true king.

One day Odysseus tells the swineherd that he is going to try his luck at begging and doing chores for the suitors, for he does not want to further burden a host who has been so generous.

> ". . . I can drift inside among the suitors
> to see what alms they give, rich as they are.
> If they have whims, I'm deft in the ways of service. . .
> . . . no man can do a chore better than I can.

> Set me to build a fire, or chop wood,
> cook or carve, mix wine and serve– or anything
> inferior men attend to for the gentry."(p. 278)

What a dramatic shift from the proud Odysseus of earlier days. He has certainly learned to separate his true identity from the part he is playing at a particular moment. Or to say it another way, how many "important" people can switch to the role of beggar or servant so easily when that role is appropriate. No, most of us hang on to our image of self-importance at all times to reassure ourselves that we are important. But Odysseus has learned another lesson. His true identity is carried within himself, and he knows who he really is inside – no matter what part he is playing in the world. He can be the beggar or servant when it is called for without losing his confidence in who he is within. He can shed his "skin", his outward appearance and manner, anytime it is appropriate.

As they talk, we see the swineherd's deep affection for his missing king, and the reasons it was deserved by the young Odysseus 20 years before. We begin to get a picture of the chaos in the kingdom since the departure of the true king. Without its king, there is no force in the kingdom to restrain the various excesses that "flesh is heir to."[84] There is no one who has acquired the wisdom to see what is truly just, let alone be in a position to dispense that justice. There is no authority to impose discipline when someone departs from the values of the kingdom, so values are widely ignored. In fact, the kingdom has broken down to the point that values can no longer even be used to settle disputes. If someone is infringing the values, pointing this out does not call forth a positive response from their conscience. For many in the kingdom, values are mentioned only when they are being twisted to justify selfish actions. This is a kingdom where values have deteriorated until they have become an empty shell, used as outward rationalizations to justify the pursuit of selfish purposes and plans. There is less and less respect for the rights of others, and an ever increasing pursuit of wealth and aggrandizement. There is less and less attention paid to anything greater than oneself – to any purpose larger than one's private pursuit of power, wealth and pleasure.

What would this state of affairs mean if it were encountered in the inner kingdom, if this state is seen as a metaphor for the inner journey? Perhaps the description would be much the same. If there is no inner king to decide which urges to follow, an

individual's life will likely be made up of the random pursuit of numerous base urges. Following the thought of Robert Moore in his excellent lecture on four male archetypes, in the individual without a developed inner king there is no force inside to make decisions between the various urges that we feel, so our lives are made up of the undisciplined pursuit of first one base urge and then another.[85] There is no force or power within to decide what is really important, or to follow through with such a decision if it is made.

Without an inner king, there is no one home who "knows" what is just, or fair, or true, or good – so the individual is ruled by the lower urges of greed, lust, and gluttony, or the emotions of envy and fear. There is no inner authority to override a momentary whim that runs counter to a longer-range value. How would this relate to the living of our lives today?

- If you have committed to eating healthily, and even experienced how eating healthily makes you feel better, that does not prevent those intense moments of wanting to splurge on ice cream, or chocolate, or your favorite dessert. How do you counter these momentary urges?

- If you have a committed relationship which is very important to you, and you know that an affair would do it great harm, that does not prevent the temptation of an attractive co-worker who becomes seductive and available at a party or at an out-of-town convention. Which part of you decides how to respond?

- You might be committed to finishing a project, but that does not prevent the urge to watch TV, or go to the movies, or visit with friends instead. What force inside can keep you at your task?

- You might have a friend or a family member who is very precious to you, but that does not prevent you from becoming very angry at that person at a particular moment. How do you decide whether to express that anger? And if you decide it is not appropriate to express it, how do you restrain yourself?

- You might believe that "honesty is the best policy," and even see how the only way people will come to trust and respect you is to be honest. But what happens when you discover that you can get something you want very much with just a "little white lie?" Who decides whether you will tell it?

- You might be committed to showing respect for everyone you meet, including strangers, and realize that only by practicing this respect moment by moment can the fruit of mutual honor and respect be harvested in your life. But what happens when you are late for an important appointment, and the car ahead of you is driving very slowly? And there is no room to pass. Who decides how you will act?

- You might know that a life without courage will gradually degenerate into a life of self-pity and fear, but what do you do when you see an armed man beating up someone on the street, or discover that your company is doing something illegal, or that a potentially dangerous neighbor is selling drugs. How do you respond?

How do you deal with those moments when a strong momentary urge runs counter to a longer-range value that you have embraced? Perhaps only if there is an inner king who can decide what is really important, and can command the respect of the various urges within – and override momentary whims – can one experience a sense of the deeper meaning in life.

In this context, who then is the swinekeeper? If we return to an earlier image of pigs as a person's basic instinctual urges, perhaps we could say that the inner swinekeeper, the part of us that manages our basic urges and desires, must have an inner King to give it guidance, must have an inner King to give life meaning and order. Thus when our basic urges are being lived out, when we are eating, drinking, and playing, we must maintain our loyalty and connection to our inner King while we do these things. Only if we maintain this loyalty, only if we keep our values in place while we are experiencing the basic urges in life will we remain healthy and whole. On the other hand, if we give in to the base urges, the hundred suitors who just want what they want right now, then we will have betrayed our deeper values and meaning. In such a case our inner swinekeeper will have become the enemy, will have sided with the "suitors".

In a beautiful image of this concept from a different age and time, the king is the owner of a carriage, and the horses are the raw desires and urges.[86] In this image, the horses are very important, for they provide the energy for our lives. If the horses are unbridled and unrestrained, they will always be going off in different directions, or one will be sleeping while another is trying to run. In this case the carriage will get nowhere. But if the king can organize the inner state so that the horses are harnessed and are working together, then the whole human being (the king, the

driver, the carriage, the horses, the harness) can move swiftly and surely in any direction the king decides. (Some might ask, why can't each horse be free to roam where it chooses? But a human being is made up of more than one desire, and in this imagery each horse stands for a different urge or desire. We each have a whole stable of desires within. The best analogy to a human being is the whole system, and not just one horse.)

Reunion With The Son

Back in ancient Greece, swineherd and beggar are becoming friends, and one evening Odysseus asks the swineherd about his life. The swineherd replies:

> ". . . we'll drink on, you and I,
> and ease our hearts of hardships we remember,
> sharing old times. In later days a man
> can find a charm in old adversity,
> exile and pain." (p. 280)

Has it always been true that adversity, even exile, when lived through and remembered becomes an essential part of one's story, becomes part of the charm of one's life? Has it always been true that the sharing of tales of hardship and pain can become a badge of identity in one's life story? If this was true three thousand years ago, as it is for many today, then in at least this way human nature hasn't changed much in a long time. And poetic insight, as evidenced by this passage, has certainly been alive and well for at least three thousand years.

Odysseus has now been on his home island for three days, but no one knows of his presence. The only person he has encountered is the loyal swineherd, and he has not revealed his identity even to him. Yet without any direct connection to Odysseus' presence, events on the island begin to unfold at a fever pitch. It is almost as if his presence were in the air for everyone to sense, to feel – if they are open to it. Jung called this synchronicity, when events seem to have a connection, but there is no logical or rational explanation for that connection.

In one such case, Odysseus' only son is returning to Ithaka just as Odysseus reaches the island. Telémakhos, born shortly before his father left for the Trojan war, is just reaching manhood. A few weeks before Odysseus' arrival he had undertaken his own journey of initiation, a journey to seek news of his father. His mother did not want

him to go, but Telémakhos had broken the strings of childhood and taken charge of his own life. He had stolen away at night and made the journey against her wishes. In so doing, he had left the days of his boyhood, and was now returning as a man.

During his absence, however, the suitors developed a plan to ambush and kill him on his return. (Becoming a man can be treacherous). But Athena warned him of the ambush. (Or, if you wish, his inner instincts symbolized as Athena). Whatever the source of the warning, he escaped unharmed. Fearing further attempts on his life if he went to the castle, he remembered the remote swineherd's hut, and made his way there. And there is Odysseus, disguised as a beggar. They meet, but Telémakhos does not recognize his father – which is not a great surprise since he has not seen him since he was a small child.

After a brief meeting between father and son, Athena tells Odysseus to reveal himself to his son. He steps into the woods for a moment, and Athena:

> . . . tipped her golden wand upon the man,
> making his cloak pure white, and the knit tunic
> fresh around him. Lithe and young she made him,
> ruddy with sun, his jawline clear, the beard
> no longer grew upon his chin. (p. 295)

When he reappeared,

> . . . his son was thunderstruck.
> Fear in his eyes, he looked down and away
> as though it were a god, and whispered:
> "Stranger,
> you are no longer what you were just now!
> Your cloak is new, even your skin! You are
> one of the gods who rule the sweep of heaven!"(p. 295)

Odysseus replies:

> "No god. Why take me for a god? No, no.
> I am that father whom your boyhood lacked
> and suffered pain for lack of. I am he." (p. 295)

Then:

> Held back too long, the tears ran down his cheeks

as he embraced his son. (p. 295)

But Telémakhos still does not comprehend the change, cannot take it all in, cannot so quickly absorb such an overwhelming moment. He is thunderstruck. Odysseus attempts again to let his son see who he really is:

"This is not princely, to be swept
away by wonder at your father's presence.
No other Odysseus will ever come,
for he and I are one, the same; his bitter
fortune and his wanderings are mine. . . .
. . . As for my change of skin,
that is a charm Athena, Hope of Soldiers,
uses as she will; she has the knack
to make me seem a beggar man sometimes
and sometimes young, with fine clothes about me.
It is no hard thing for the gods of heaven
to glorify a man or bring him low." (p. 296) [A]

When Telémakhos finally realizes it truly is his father, his emotions well up and burst forth:

. . . Salt tears
rose from the wells of longing in both men,
and cries burst from both as keen and fluttering
as those of the great taloned hawk,
whose nestlings farmers take before they fly.
So helplessly they cried, pouring out tears . . . (p. 296)

Here again we have an image of the manliest of men, both a proud young man as well as a man at the height of his powers, being able to freely express joy and sorrow, and able to let fall the tears when tears alone can express what is in their hearts. No false

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[A] The same problem arises here with regard to understanding the inner meaning of Athena's direct, observable intervention. It is not hard to see in this reunion the natural wonder and awe a son might feel for his long-lost hero father. The incredulity and then the awe are easily understood. But the direct reference to Athena's observable intervention is unusual, and hard for me to understand symbolically. Further suggestions please!

pride here, even for a young man at the door of manhood. In this model of male wholeness, when tears are the best voice, they are spoken proudly and freely.

At the inner level, how shall we understand the son? Since Telémakhos is just entering manhood, perhaps he stands for new, fresh male energy and power, the energy and power necessary to attempt great deeds, to fight difficult battles. For Odysseus, who has for ten long years been learning not to live from this energy and power, perhaps before he can fight one last battle he must welcome that aspect of himself back into his life. But with a crucial difference. Now the raw male energy and power does not control his life or make the decisions. The mature Odysseus, who has learned his many lessons and has integrated all the different parts within himself, will be in command. The son, the raw male energy, will place himself at the service of the mature, whole Odysseus, the true inner King.

Finally the tears are done, and Telémakhos asks Odysseus how he came back to Ithaka. Odysseus replies, "Only plain truth shall I tell you, child." (p. 296) And he does. There is no cunning or manipulation now. Here is a man who understands when truth is appropriate, and can tell it clearly. This brings into sharper focus the judgment necessary in the use of truth, at least as our story portrays it. In the model presented here, we must constantly decide when the whole truth is appropriate; and that we must not flinch from telling it fully in such moments. But we must not to be a slave to truth when it is inappropriate.

Penélopê – A Feminine Ideal

Odysseus now asks Telémakhos about the forces arrayed against them, and discovers that in the hall there are over one hundred suitors who have aligned themselves against the house of Odysseus. Over one hundred men, the finest young and middle-aged men of the region, demanding to be picked as the new husband of Penélopê. Even if she were extraordinarily beautiful, still a curious thing. She had been wed over twenty years ago, so she can no longer be a vision of youthful beauty. And she would have to be much older than some of the suitors. So what is happening here?

On the dramatic level the image of Penélopê being pursued by so many suitors is a very effective device. It sets up the final test for Odysseus. And it makes especially vivid the loyalty of Penélopê – the wife who will wait for her husband even though the finest men of the time are seeking her hand, and even though there is every practical reason to believe that her husband is dead.

On the mythic level, having Penélopê pursued by so many suitors helps to establish her image as a feminine ideal – an outer manifestation of the feminine that Odysseus has been seeking his whole journey. At this level, when he is whole and complete within, when he has completely integrated the feminine side of human nature within himself, he will be ready to reunite with the perfect feminine as personified by Penélopê.

To say this in a slightly different way, at the inner level Penélopê is the healthy anima of Odysseus, the symbol of the perfected inner feminine of his nature. In this role, she exemplifies a feminine that has developed all sides of herself, as we shall see as her story unfolds. She is a feminine that has incorporated the masculine abilities and discrimination of wisdom, even of resourcefulness in preparation for combat.

Seen as one fundamental aspect of Odysseus, she would be the part that provides his connection to the earth, to the flow of life, to the rest of humanity. In this light, it is interesting to consider the fact that she is still being pursued by the hundred suitors, by a hundred immediate worldly desires. She is not completely disembodied,

ethereal, removed from the world. The world is all about here, clamoring after her. But she has learned to keep it at bay. She has learned to wait patiently for her own wholeness.

At the level of the story, however, none of this explains why all the men are seeking Penélopê's hand. But since every such question about this story seems to have a boon to bestow if we wrestle with it long enough, let's dwell on this question for a moment, and see if we can gain the prize it holds. One persuasive answer is that when the legend of Odysseus first began to emerge, long before Homer, the island had a matriarchal culture, a culture where women held great power. And in that culture, perhaps the husband of the Queen became King. From other such cultures, we know that the succession of power was often passed on through a daughter. This would explain why neither Odysseus' father nor his son seemed to have the right to take over the kingdom in his absence.[87] And although this matriarchal succession is not explained in the work itself, it could be that this is background information that everyone listening to the story already knew. Thus even though the Greeks in the time of Homer did not have matriarchal succession, everyone simply took this for granted as background to the story. Certainly the image of Penélopê as presented here, and of many women throughout the work, suggests a culture that had a deeply imbedded respect for the strengths of women, and of their importance.

But we are still left with the question of Penélopê's uniqueness as an individual, of why this particular woman is worthy of Odysseus' 20 year struggle to return to her. Or, to put it another way, how does this individual woman manifest the traits that would make her a true heroine, a worthy match for our hero? What traits does she possess, when viewed as an independent character in the story, that would carry into their relationship the image of a whole, complete woman – a woman who can meet our transformed hero on a level of equality?

In a beautiful postscript to Fitzgerald's translation of *The Odyssey* this question is answered magnificently. In background to this answer, we should note that any translator of a long poetic work – especially between languages as different as ancient Greek and modern English – would have to spend many years in absorbing the language and culture from which the work arose. Then he or she would have to go over the text many, many times – line by line, word by word – trying constantly to catch the true meaning of each line and each word. Every possible nuance of

meaning of each word would have to be considered before the appropriate English replacement was chosen.

After his years of study and reflection, Fitzgerald summarizes some of his impressions and insights in his postscript. Commenting on Odysseus' desire to rejoin Penélopê, he says:

> In the resonance of this affection, and by way of setting it off, the poem touches on a vast diversity of relationships between men and women: love maternal and filial, love connubial and adulterous, seduction and concubinage, infatuation super-human and human, chance encounters lyric and prosaic. There are many women, young and old, enchantresses and queens and serving maids. In the "society," as we say, of The Odyssey, women can be very distinguished: Athena is powerful in the highest circles. Arêtê holds equal power with her husband in Phaiákia, Helen has been reestablished in the power of her beauty.[88]

He then goes on to wonder about the powerful attraction of Penélopê:

> Three of the principal adventures of Odysseus are with exquisite young women of great charm and spirit, and during each of these episodes the audience must wonder how he can possibly move on. He wants to regain his home and kingdom, it is true. But besides that, as Kalypso inquires, what is it about Penélopê that draws him homeward? Her distinction is often mentioned, but do we ever see it overwhelmingly demonstrated? [89]

Fitzgerald believes that we do, and in describing the evidence he paints as beautiful a picture of inner wisdom, courage, and resourcefulness as can be found in all of literature. All possessed by Penélopê. And if this reading is correct, and I believe that it is, then we can certainly understand why Penélopê is the perfect match for our hero, and the perfect symbol of the feminine to which he longed to return.

This picture of Penélopê turns on the fact that when *The Odyssey* was first created, it was not read, but performed. No one read *The Odyssey* in ancient Greece. People only encountered it as a play, a performance. Their experience came through attention to facial and body expressions, tone of voice, pregnant pauses, and the dramatic glances of the performer. On the other hand, the modern reader encounters *The Odyssey* only as words on a page. Because of this difference, the true Penélopê ". . . has been missed by many people . . .". [90]

To emphasize this point, Fitzgerald points out that more than half of the poem is made up of dialogue and that commentators from the culture as learned as Plato described performances as being very dramatic presentations. One scholar even commented that the text often resembled an acting script.[91]

In the context of this type of performance, Fitzgerald focuses his attention on one particular sequence of events:

> Once he lands on Ithaka his problem is a tactical one; how, with his son and two fieldhands, to take on more than one hundred able-bodied young men and kill them all. By the end of book XVI he has thought his problem through to a certain point: Telémakhos is to precede him to the manor, he is able to follow as a beggar, and at a signal from him the young man is to remove all shields, helmets, and throwing spears from those racks in the banquet hall. . . . To be exact, not all are to be removed; a few are to be put aside for use against the suitors. My first observation is that this is as far as Odysseus ever goes, by himself, in planning the final combat. [92]

Another point to emphasize here is that since *The Odyssey* is a long work, a complete performance would not have occurred in one sitting. In Fitzgerald's view, the complete work would usually have been performed over six consecutive nights, usually during festival season. And just as in any "to be continued" performance, there would be threads of the story hinted at toward the end of each episode, but left to be resolved in the next. There would be clues that would leave the viewer guessing, but which none-the-less pointed in the direction of the eventual outcome. Looking at the story in this way, on the 5th night of the performance, "Telémakhos leaves the swineherd's hut, goes home to the manor hall, and passes on to his mother the news given him by Meneláos at Sparta – that Odysseus is not dead but alive."[93]

Next a wondering soothsayer who had come home with Telémakhos "swears to Penélopê that her husband is not only alive but on the island at that very second." [94]

This news might seem totally unbelievable to Penélopê, but it ". . . must at least quicken her interest in any stranger who appears." [95]

And as we the audience know, "the only stranger about to appear is Odysseus in his rags." [96]

Now, we may or may not recall Helen's boast of having recognized him through a similar disguise in a similar situation at Troy; if we do – and after all we heard the story only the other evening – our feeling of suspense may be heightened. Presently, strange to relate, Odysseus is in fact recognized just outside the manor. A dying old hunting dog who hasn't seen him for twenty years knows him by the sound of his voice.[A]

At this point in the story, Odysseus reaches the manor as a beggar. Penélopê hears the arrival of the stranger in the hall, and asks the swineherd to see if he has any news of Odysseus. The swineherd replies that "the beggar does indeed have news. . . he has sworn that Odysseus is nearby on the mainland and will soon be home." [97]

After this third prediction, Penélopê makes "the most hopeful speech she has" made in the play.[98]

> At this point Telémakhos, downstairs in hall, sneezes, and Penélopê laughs at the good omen – the first time she has laughed in *The Odyssey*. She goes eagerly to the door, but Eumaios returns without the beggar, who wishes to put off a meeting until the young men have left the hall for the night.[99]

Fitzgerald then asks, "Are we to suppose here . . . that it has even crossed her mind who the stranger might be?"[100] His answer is, "probably not" at this point, although he notes that she has clearly become quite excited.[101] Jung would probably say an "unconscious knowing" preceded her later conscious recognition of the truth.

Fitzgerald goes on to point out that from the perspective of the audience, this is a highly dramatic and interesting question – just what does Penélopê think about the beggar who has arrived at such a propitious moment?[102] The audience knows the secret, but identifying with her as they would in a performance, what would they emotionally feel along with her at this moment? Continuing his description of the action on the 5th night:

[A] What might be the inner meaning of this recognition by an "old hunting dog"?

> Penélopê feels impelled for reasons she cannot analyze to go downstairs among the suitors, to dazzle the young men with her beauty and to be solicitous of the beggar, who has come off well in a fist fight. She is now in the beggar's presence. Is it his presence that prompts her to a rather gratuitous speech, a speech with an air of being "to whom it may concern," recalling her husband's instructions when he left for the Trojan War? Her point is that she cannot hold out much longer against marriage with one of her suitors. She induces the young men to give her some gifts (to the amusement of Odysseus) and then withdraws until the evening is over and the suitors have left the place. [103]

Here especially we can feel the magnificent drama taking place before the audience, the tension they must feel in this first meeting between Penélopê and Odysseus in 20 years – a meeting taking place in the royal court before all of the suitors, and with Penélopê unaware (but is she really) of who the beggar truly is. Fitzgerald continues:

> It is after dark. From the empty banquet hall Odysseus and his son remove the arms and put them back in the storeroom. Before they do this, however, Telémakhos has the old servant, Eurykleia, temporarily lock all the maids in the women's quarters? Why? Because among these women there are a dozen mistresses and accomplices of the suitors, who are only waiting until the house is quiet to slip out and join their lovers in the town. We already know one of these girls, Melántho, mistress of Eurymakhos. When Penélopê comes down to interview the beggar by firelight, this girl is with her, as the poet carefully makes us see. The whole interview is conducted in her presence. If she should suspect the identity of the beggar, Odysseus' tactical plan – to catch the suitors in hall without spears and trust to Athena – will miscarry, to say the least. [104]

Again, what a dramatic moment. Penélopê and Odysseus are finally, after so many years, face to face, but only in the presence of a maidservant who is in league with the enemy. As Fitzgerald is demonstrating, the power of this scene can only be appreciated when understood as a play, with the audience experiencing the dramatic tension of waiting for one false word from our hero or heroine which would doom their cause, and cost his life. As the meeting begins,

> Penélopê asks the stranger who he is. His reply is evasive, though it is moving if we remember that these are the first words he has spoken to

> her in twenty years. She proceeds to explain to him – to him, a stranger and vagabond – what her predicament is. She tells him of the famous feat of weaving and unweaving by which she had kept her suitors waiting for more than three years. It is as if she were justifying herself aloud for being, as she tells him she is now, at the end of her resources. Justifying herself to her husband? That is the fact, but it may still be something of which we are meant to be aware while she is not. In return for her confidence, Odysseus confides that he is a grandson of King Minos of Crete and that he once entertained Odysseus at Knossos. The lady weeps. She dries her eyes and asks him to prove it by recalling how Odysseus looked. He does so, very accurately, describing a brooch and tunic that Penélopê had given him. He adds, with a typical Odyssean touch, that the Cretan women had found him a fine sight in his tunic. The lady weeps a second time and remarks that she will never lay eyes on Odysseus again. [105]

At this statement, the "beggar" contradicts her, and "ventures a speech that" is "a serious effort to impart information."[106] He flatly states that "Odysseus is on the mainland," and "swears very solemnly that Odysseus will arrive 'between the waning and the new moon'."[107] Since the audience already knows that the next day is a feast day of Apollo, they know that this sentence means "before another day passes." [108] "So he is telling her twice, cryptically and elliptically for the benefit of the maids in earshot, that her husband will be home tomorrow." [109]

Now we, the audience, must suppose that this lady, who has been represented often as extremely intelligent, will be asking herself with some urgency how the vagabond before her could possibly swear to anything so definite. She is controlled, as usual. She answers that if he were right he would soon know her love, but no, he can't be right. Odysseus cannot return. She offers him a footbath and he declines it unless there is an old maid-servant to give it to him. Penélopê says there is in fact an old woman who nursed Odysseus in infancy, and she tells Eurykleia to bathe him.

Now comes the line that would rival any soap opera, or Shakespearean drama, for dramatic effect. Penélopê instructs the old maid-servant: "'Bathe your master's—" the line begins, and a shiver runs through the audience," but the next word is not "feet," which would have given the game away, but "contemporary."[110]

I, for one, can almost feel the shiver run through the audience when I read these lines. Fitzgerald next describes the scene in which Odysseus' old maid-servant recognizes him by a scar on his leg. But before she can cry out her discovery, Odysseus silences her. She glances at Penélopê, as if to reveal her new and profound knowledge in her glance, but Penélopê doesn't notice for "Penélopê is lost in thought."[111]

And in Fitzgerald's view, the "outcome of her thinking" is very "impressive" – to say the least.[112] For in his view it is at this point that she has understood who Odysseus is, and we are witnessing "one of the most interesting recognition scenes ever devised" in the theater.[113] But remember, the untrustworthy maid is still present. Fitzgerald continues:

> When Penélopê speaks again, she tells the beggar that she has a dream for him to interpret – the dream of her pet geese killed by an eagle who professed to be Odysseus. In this there is a remarkable little confession that she had grown fond, in a way, of having the suitors about her, but there is more to it than that. When she says that on waking she saw the dream geese still there, what can she possibly mean except, "It is a dream to think that you can kill them; they are so many, they will survive and you will not." This at any rate is what the beggar answers. He assures her that there is no other way to interpret the dream than as Odysseus, in the dream, has already done: the suitors will be killed. Assuming the presence of the unfaithful maid – or maids – he takes a serious risk here in order to make it clear to her that he is ready for battle. She now remarks that dreams are not to be counted on, but that she has one more thing to tell him: listen carefully. She has made up her mind that *tomorrow* will be the day of decision as to whom she will marry, and the decision will be reached through the test of the bow. In reply to this the beggar says in effect that that will be excellent and tomorrow will not be too soon. [114]

Fitzgerald's final argument for this interpretation of the dramatic narrative seems to me conclusive:

> It is possible – though I think barely possible – to read the scene in the previously accepted way as involving no more communication between man and woman than is compatible with their respective roles of lady and beggar, the roles they stick to, though so precariously. . . . But that

> is simply not consistent with the situation as a whole – a situation built up for the audience in the course of this performance. During the day, before the evening, Penélopê has been told first that her husband is alive, second that he is on the island, and third that he is coming soon. She has been waiting for ten years with no such authentic news and no such startling expectations and had the suitors wait for nearly four. Are we, the audience, to believe that she wouldn't wait a few days longer to see if her husband turns up? Is it conceivable that, instead of waiting, the woman so distinguished for tenacity would this very evening give up the waiting game and seriously propose to marry the next day? How could she come to this abrupt decision in the course of her evening scene with Odysseus unless she realized that the stranger before her was indeed her husband? [115]

With this understanding of Penélopê, we can, with Fitzgerald, marvel at "the nerve, the magnificence" of our heroine.[116]

> Not Kalypso, not Nausikaa, not Kirkê could have played this scene. Consider what she bestows on Odysseus. Up to now his plan of action, as I have noticed, has been fairly desperate. Now it is she, not he, who remembers the big hunting bow that has hung in an inner room since he left Ithaka. Archery against men who have no missiles is in fact the only practical way of beating the numerical odds. Penélopê supplies the weapon for the suitors' downfall, and she does so for that purpose and no other. . . . [It] is Penélopê who insists at the crucial moment that the beggar be given a try at the bow; she all but literally places it in his hands. I conclude that for the last and greatest of Odysseus' feats of arms his wife is as responsible as he is. The reasons for his affection should now be clear. [117]

What a beautiful image Robert Fitzgerald has painted. No wonder Penélopê has come down to us as one of the most magnificent symbols of the full development of womanhood. Seen as the principal heroine in a great work of art, or as a portrait of the feminine aspect of a man's nature, or as both, Penélopê is a marvelous character and image. She portrays one possible ideal that women can attempt to live toward, as well as an image which men can attempt to integrate as the feminine side of their nature. (In just the same way, men can use Odysseus as a model of the masculine ideal, and women can use the image of Odysseus as a model for the development of the masculine aspect of their nature.)

One further "loose thread" concerning Penélopê. As we heard briefly, to postpone the suitors demand that she chose one of them for her husband, Penélopê agrees to make the choice once she has finished weaving a burial shroud for Odysseus' father. Then for many months, she weaves the shroud by day, and unravels the day's work by night. This image of the weaving and unweaving of the shroud to postpone her choice is one of the most famous images from *The Odyssey*. But since my brain doesn't seem to want to provide an inner meaning for this symbol that really "clicks", this is another call for assistance. What does this symbol of weaving and unweaving to delay a choice capture about the inner journey, especially from a feminine perspective?

Patience and Self-Control: Tested- and Tested- And Tested Again

We've been away from our hero a long time. Let's see what's happening at the manor. During his passage as a beggar among the suitors, Odysseus' patience and self-mastery are tested repeatedly. When he first approaches his old home, one of his former herdsmen insults him,

> And like a drunken fool
> he kicked at Odysseus' hip as he passed by.
> Not even jogged off stride, or off the trail,
> the lord Odysseus walked along, debating
> inwardly whether to whirl and beat
> the life out of this fellow with his stick,
> or toss him, brain him on the stony ground.
> Then he controlled himself, and bore it quietly. (p. 317)

As he enters the manor, he is warned that he might be beaten. He replies:

> But as for blows and missiles,
> I am not tyro at these things. I learned
> to keep my head in hardship – years of war
> and years at sea. Let this new trial come. (p. 319)

When he finally enters his own hall, it is not as a returning King, but:

> . . . Odysseus came
> through his own doorway as a mendicant,
> humped like a bundle of rags over his stick. (p. 321)

What must he have felt to have entered his own home, after so many years, in such a state. No recognition. No welcome. No rejoicing. Just a kick, a threat, and the humble disguise of a beggar. The prophecy of "gall and wormwood" is certainly being born out. After a time, he is offered alms by Telémakhos, and:

> Palms held out, in the beggar's gesture, he
> received the bread and meat and put it down
> before him on his knapsack – lowly table! –
> then he fell to, devouring it. (p. 322)

Approaching the suitors,

> . . . he appealed to them, one after another,
> going from left to right, with open palm,
> as though his life had been spent in beggary. (p. 322)

This continued until one of the suitors became angry, and threw a stool at him, hitting his shoulder:

> Odysseus only shook his head, containing
> thoughts of bloody work, as he walked on,
> then sat, and dropped his loaded bag again
> upon the door sill. (p. 326)

So we are presented over and over, perhaps to be sure it sinks in, with the image of a man who is in complete control of his emotions, his pride, of himself. This is a man who knows who he is and what his life is about, no matter how others treat him. Since there are so many tests of Odysseus' self-mastery presented in this encounter with the suitors, it does not seem to be an accident that the final test undergone before his return to the role of true king is that of patience, of self-control, even of accepting humiliation in order to achieve a greater purpose. Could it be that at a certain stage on the developmental journey these traits must be incorporated into our lives before we can assume our true role? Lest we miss this implication, our story goes on to say of the suitors:

> They, for their part, could not now be still
> or drop their mockery – for Athena wished
> Odysseus mortified still more. (p. 347)

Athena, the goddess who watched over Odysseus for twenty years, who pleaded his case before Zeus, who is about to stand behind him in his final battle, wished him *mortified still more*! Is there a resonance here of Odysseus, begging bowl in hand, with the image of Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and other spiritual journeyers throughout history with their begging bowls? Mortification is usually a religious image. Is there a connection?

Mortification is often understood to be that process by which a human being makes himself or herself humble, beats down selfish, self-seeking desires until he or she is pure enough to receive the blessing and power of the divine. Is not this just what is happening to our hero? The goddess requires the mortification, not for any petty reason, but to complete the process of Odysseus' transformation and to prepare him to be the recipient of her special grace – a victory over the suitors. To be worthy of this victory and the power it will bring, he must first master and purify himself through this mortification. Only then will he be able to receive and handle aright the power of the divine. Perhaps only when a person has learned patience through and through will that person be able to handle power in the right way.

In another echo of T.S. Eliot's famous lines, Odysseus has now "arrived where he started," and has "seen the place for the first time" – has seen through his beggar's eyes the cruelty with which immature, unrestrained masculine power can treat those who have less power. Perhaps this is another crucial lesson that the masculine must learn before it is ready to act from the fullness of healthy masculine power.[118]

Dreams – Where Do They Come From?

There are many different threads woven through this master work, and they appear and reappear in different pieces of cloth, in shifting relationships to other threads. Together they form not so much a photograph, but rather an impressionistic painting to which we each must bring the order we will eventually see. Each of us, working with the initial vision of the artist, must bring the various parts together to form our own unique vision of this work. Perhaps each of our visions will vary, depending on where we stand in the looking, on what feelings and beliefs we bring to the viewing. One such thread is the role of dreams in our lives.

Dreams are mentioned often in The Odyssey. In one such case, after Penélopê has recounted her dream to the disguised beggar, she reflects:

> . . . many and many a dream is mere confusion,
> a cobweb of no consequence at all.
> Two gates for ghostly dreams there are: one gateway
> of honest horn, and one of ivory.
> Issuing by the ivory gate are dreams
> of glimmering illusion, fantasies,
> but those that come through solid polished horn
> may be borne out, if mortals only know them. (p. 371)

One of the great "discoveries" of the modern era began with the publication of Sigmund Freud's Interpretation of Dreams, in 1900. There it is argued that dreams are not simply meaningless phantasmogoria, but that many dreams have a specific and meaningful relevance to the individual who is doing the dreaming. Further, it is asserted that the dreamer can solve some of their life problems if only they can "interpret" the dream correctly. Without stretching too far, it could be argued that psychology in 20th century Europe and America was founded to accomplish this task – to help individuals come to know the meaning of their dreams, and of the unconscious forces from which they arise.

In Freud's system of thought, the primary type of dream is the "wish fulfillment" dream, in which a person dreams of what his or her unconscious wishes for. Even more specifically in his system, at the base most dreams arise from a repressed sexual impulse. The theory continues with the belief that if the dreamer can find the right psychological interpretation of the dream, can discover his or her unconscious wishes, that person will then begin to heal old emotional wounds, usually with the parents, and will become emotionally healthier. Hardly seems a shocking thought today. But that is not a sign that it was a simple or obvious thought in 1900. Its ready acceptance today by many people is actually a sign of how completely Freud's insight has permeated our culture[A]

But in 1900, it was a breakthrough insight, for it was assumed in the mainstream western culture of the time that people did not have such an "unconscious" which could have a separate wish from the conscious wish of the person in a waking state. This was a time of the predominance of a mechanistic model of the universe, in which science had "proven" that the world was a grand machine completely controlled by mechanical laws, and the individual but a simple cog in the great deterministic wheel.[119] In this framework, Freud's insight was a bold and radical break with the existing world-view. Yet perhaps we are completely mistaken to assume that his insight was new. Perhaps the mainstream intellectual currents of the 18th and 19th century had lost the awareness of dreams and their significance, and perhaps Freud was instrumental in recovering that awareness, but how can one read the lines "Issuing by the ivory gate are dreams /of glimmering illusion, fantasies" without realizing that in the Greek world of Homer there was an understanding of wish fulfillment dreams. (In fact, the work of soothsayers and oracles in many cultures often dealt with the interpretation of dreams.)

But the insight of our bard does not end there. What could the lines "many and many a dream is mere confusion /a cobweb of no consequence at all" mean. As the study of dreams and dreaming has become a modern day industry, numerous other interpretations of the meaning and significance of dreams have arisen. One of these

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[A] It seems to me there ought also to be a category of "worry fulfillment dreams", dreams that bring vividly to life what we are worrying and fretting about in our subconscious minds.

theories is that dreams are the sorting and filing that goes on during the night, the cataloging and organizing of sense impressions, thoughts, and various other inputs that our mind receives during the day. In this view our dreams are the neuron firings that take place as our brain decides which bits of the day's impressions and thoughts are relevant, and decides where each bit that is relevant should be stored, i.e.; how it should be filed in relation to all previous memories that have already been stored. In this view, when we are dreaming, our dreams have no inherent meaning. We are simply tuning in on the ordering and organizing process that our brain is engaged in. Thus the dreams themselves are "mere confusion, a cobweb of no consequence at all." Doesn't it seem that this second view of dreams was also anticipated by Homer three millennium ago.[B]

If we stay with this view for a moment, a couple of very interesting questions arise. If "I" am asleep, who is it that is "tuning in" on the random bits of information? And if "I" am asleep, who is it that is deciding what information is relevant and how it should be stored? The particular pieces of information that are retained, and how they are stored in relation to existing memories, will have a *dramatic* effect on what I remember about my life – thus on what I perceive reality to be.

Have you ever had the experience of failing to remember something that you really "should" have remembered, or remembering it incorrectly – to your embarrassment or even pain? Who decided how the memory would be stored, causing this difficulty? For example, during the course of a day someone insults me, and at another point in the day another person compliments my work. Days later, in telling a friend about the day, I recount the insult at great length, but "do not remember" the compliment. I really don't remember it. But the friend had by chance been told about the compliment by the person who had given it. So my friend, being a good friend, recalls for me the compliment. Then I remember it. If such sorting and filing is done when I am asleep, who is doing it? Who chose that I would remember the insult and not the

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[B]This view of dreams has recently been carried one step further by Dr. J. Allan Hobson of Harvard in his article "The Dreaming Brain" (1988). He argues that since our brain does seek meaning, it takes these random firings and organizes them in ways that relate to our "drives, fears and associations." But there is no message, no inherent meaning or guidance for our lives in the dream itself. We provide the meaning as we think about the dream.

compliment? Who is creating my reality? (This is a fascinating question, but one we will leave for another time, else Odysseus will become impatient with our absence, and we don't want to incur his displeasure.)

Since Homer has so succinctly captured two of the most significant modern theories of dreams – in two lines each – perhaps we should pay close attention to what he has to say about a third type. Continuing our quote, it is said that dreams "that come through solid polished horn may be borne out, if mortals only know them!"

The words "borne out" bring us more into the realm of dream interpretation developed by Carl Jung. Jung accepted that some dreams fit the Freudian model of wish fulfillment, but he also came to believe that some dreams arise from a source which is deeper and wiser than simply repressed urges and desires. This deeper source – the Self in Jung's writings – knows more about where our lives should go than our egos know, and dreams arising from the Self are not provided to accomplish the ego's ends, to aid the "little me." Rather, the ego – the "me" I usually think of when I think about who I am – must attempt to understand and come to terms with the larger perspective of these dreams that come from the large Self. In Jung's view, if we can come to understand the guidance of the dreams from our greater Self, then we will gain from these dreams a deeper and more meaningful direction for our lives. Then the possibilities of growth and fulfillment provided by the dreams from the Self will be "borne out," will be brought to reality in our lives.

A fourth way of understanding dreams is the view that some important dreams, some "big dreams," come from a "transcendent other." In this view, the dream-maker is God – God as a transcendent force or power outside of us, a power that speaks to mortals through dreams, and gives guidance for our lives if we will but learn to "know them." In some cultures there has also been the belief that some "big dreams" provide guidance for the whole community, the whole nation.[120] Such was the Pharaoh's dream in the Bible, which Joseph interpreted to mean that seven years of plenty would be followed by seven years of famine. When this dream was "known," it provided guidance for the Egyptian nation. Such also was the dream of Oedipus, which explained the turmoil in his kingdom – and what could be done to end it. (Which Oedipus set out to "know," and which led him to much suffering. It is sometimes painful at first to know the meaning of our dreams; to come to terms with repressed events. But perhaps necessary before healing can occur.) Such was the

case with the creation of one of the world's largest religions, Islam. At its inception, it is related that Mohammed had a dream in which he was called to preach. Over the next several years, this man who could barely write his name dictated one of the most widely read books the world has ever known, the Koran, infused with much of the material he received in his dreams. Such also was the case with a modern American Indian, Black Elk, who had a great dream about the destiny of his tribe, which became for him his life's work.

In fact, many, many cultures have believed in the possibility of "big dreams," dreams that give prophecy about and guidance to the culture or community or tribe. Some cultures have even organized themselves to encourage the occurrence of these "collective dreams," and have developed a tradition of "wise ones" who learn to interpret both individual and collective dreams. (The forerunners of modern psychologists – I wonder if their training has any similarities?)

Of course it is easy for us today to decry these last two possibilities as pure superstition, or to view them as something that could only occur in the long, long ago. But let us pause for a moment. Perhaps as much as any other person, René Descartes gave rise to the rational, scientific world view which has been so dominant a force in shaping our world today. What is not generally recognized is that Descartes' own life course was set – thus the starting point for our modern world view came – from a series of dreams which Descartes had when he was a young man.[121] And this example opens a door behind which, if we are willing to look, we find an overwhelming series of examples stretching from the thinkers who created modern science, to some of the world's greatest authors, musicians, and religious leaders. In a series of excellent chapters in their book *Higher Certainty*, Willis Harman and Howard Rheingold summarize some of the most significant ideas in modern times that have arisen in dreams. They range from the creation of the atomic chart of basic elements to the invention of the lockstitch sewing machine by Elias Howe. They include a dream by Nobel Laureate Otto Loew which provided the foundation for his theory on how nerve impulses work; a dream by Neils Bohr which led to the "Bohr model" of atomic structure – and to a Nobel Prize; and a dream by Kekule that led to his theory of the cyclic structure of molecules.

An especially unusual case cited by Harmon and Rheingold is that of Srinivas Ramanujan, "an uneducated, lower-middle class lad from a small village in India,

whose exposure to mathematics was minimal at best, but who leapt to the forefront of mathematics in the early 1900's." [122] With a quote from a "Scientific American" article of the time they capture his extraordinary achievement:

> In areas that interested him Ramanujan arrived in England abreast, and often ahead of, contemporary mathematical knowledge. Thus in a long, mighty sweep he had succeeded in recreating in his field, through his own unaided powers, a rich half-century of European mathematics. One may doubt that so prodigious a feat had ever before been accomplished in the history of thought.
> They then ask how such a boy, with only the aid of an out-of-date mathematics textbook, could have achieved such a feat. Turning to Ramananjan's own writings, they discovered that he says he was presented "with formulas in his dreams."[123]

Many other examples are cited by Harman and Rheingold in which dreams and dream-like states played a major role in fields of endeavor such as music (Wagner, Mozart, Beethoven) and literature (Kipling, Stevenson, Longfellow, Coleridge). In many of these examples it is not easy to understand whether dreams that may be "borne out" are to be understood as coming from within oneself – from one's inner wisdom, or from some external source – from God.

But the purpose of this digression has not been to prove or disprove which of these four views on the origin and meaning of dreams is correct, nor is it to speculate on how any of these particular dreams came about. The purpose has been, and is, to demonstrate that *The Odyssey* succinctly captures all of these possible ways of understanding dreams. Let us return once more to these incredibly insightful lines, with a full appreciation of just how much they contain:

> . . . many and many a dream is mere confusion
> a cobweb of no consequence at all.
> Two gates for ghostly dreams there are: one gateway
> of honest horn, and one of ivory.
> Issuing by the ivory gate are dreams
> of glimmering illusion, fantasies,
> but those that come through solid polished horn
> may be borne out, if mortals only know them. (p. 371)

Not a bad summary for lines uttered several thousand years ago.

Dreams and Myth

Thus, as modern psychology has reminded us, in dreams we come face to face with our unconscious and partly conscious desires, fears, and fantasies – often dressed in fantastic garb or horrific countenance, perhaps better to get our attention. There we meet the hidden aspects of ourselves, the different urges within us that are vying for our attention, the parts of ourselves that are calling on us to live them out in our waking lives. Not to live them out in the phantasmagorical and grotesque ways we sometimes meet them in our dreams, for this could lead to chaos, to imbalance, to ruin. But if we can learn to listen carefully and aright, we meet in our dreams the call to live out these aspects of ourselves healthily, to consciously come to an understanding of and a choice about how these urges fit into our waking life. Here we meet the demand that we make conscious our unconscious or semiconscious urges, drives, desires, and fantasies; that we sort through and recognize the incompatible goals and overlapping ambitions within us, and make conscious choices between them; that we bring the various parts of ourselves into harmony with one another and into relationship with our conscious reality; that we find a way to bring them into accord with the life we live in relation to others and our world.

This is the first level, the level of our personal unconscious arising in dreams. At the next level, the ground plowed afresh by Jung, we learn that dreams just might provide images that show the way toward the highest possibilities that our lives can attain. But as Jung often pointed out, this is certainly not a new thought. Throughout human history dreams have served as a guide to self-understanding, and to an understanding of the world beyond the very limited view that most of us can hold in our conscious minds at any one moment. To illustrate this point all we need do is refer again to the role that dreams played in the Bible – from Jacob's dream showing him his destiny; to the revelation dreams of the young Joseph that got him thrown in the well by his brothers; to the dream of Pharaoh which Joseph correctly understood and interpreted, thereby gaining the power and position which allowed him to fulfill his destiny. There are also many examples from other lands. In The Mythic Image Joseph Campbell describes the widespread mythic belief in India that the world arises as a dream of Vishnu, and quotes a Kalahari Bushman from Africa who says, "There is a dream dreaming us."[124] There are in fact so many examples of the central role that dreams have played in people's lives that one of the wisest observers of humankind, William

Shakespeare, says through a character in The Tempest: "We are such stuff as dreams are made on."[125]

There could be many, many other examples attesting to the significance of dreams from almost every culture, leading one finally to wonder which is the true reality, the world of our waking lives, or the world of our dreams. To paraphrase Chuang Tsu, the ancient Chinese sage who captured this thought in his much-quoted imagery: "I awoke one day from dreaming I was a butterfly, and could not decide whether I was a man dreaming he had been a butterfly, or was now a butterfly dreaming he was a man."[126]

So which is real? Perhaps this is not the right question. The real question is, when we seem to be "ourselves", how can we manage to knit the world of our dreams and the world of our waking reality into the closest possible harmony. And as we follow this thread toward our unfolding, it might well be that the journey does not end with our individual dreams only, for "through dreams a door is opened to mythology, since myths are of the nature of dreams, and that as dreams arise from an inward world unknown to waking consciousness, so do myths: so, indeed, does life"[127]

To think this thought through another way, if dreams are a door to a person's unconscious urges, fears, desires, and fantasies, as well as an inner source of guidance on how we can best live our lives, perhaps on another level myths arise from the same fundamental ground, but are the "dream" of a tribe, of a country, of humanity – of the pitfalls that can befall us and of the pathways through to a larger life that have emerged from the combined "dreaming" of the tribe through the ages. Then we could say with the author of the Book of Job 33: 14-16):

> For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not.
> In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed;
> Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction . . .[128]

Or to try to capture this very important but illusive point one more way: In the mythic realm, as in dreams, perhaps the images we encounter stand for something beyond, something behind the surface that we first see. The images in dreams often represent to us unknown parts of ourselves, bringing to life unconscious fears, desires, and fantasies that are a part of us, but a part that we seldom recognize or

admit to ourselves. And taking the next step along this trail, perhaps the images in the myths of every land are representations of the fears, desires, and fantasies that are shared by the people of that culture, the culture in which they arose. Thus perhaps the images in myths of each culture, the images created by the "collective unconscious" of that culture, embody the fears, desires, and fantasies that are shared by the people of that culture. And again following the thought of Jung, just as dreams can point the way to the solution of problems in an individual's life, so perhaps the stories and myths of every land point the way to solutions that have been worked out in each culture to the common life issues that have arisen in that culture.

This does raise a fundamental question: Where does the wisdom come from? In dreams, does the wisdom come from within the dreamer, a part which the normal waking "I", the normal waking "myself" of the dreamer does not know is there? Or does it come from some source of knowledge outside the dreamer entirely? And so with myths. Does the knowledge come from the collective experience of the individuals within the culture, or does it come from some source external to the individuals. A very difficult question, and one perhaps only open to answers of faith, and not of proof.

But what does seem to be conclusively clear from the experiences of countless individuals is that dreams do at times offer guidance about and solutions to life's problems. The guidance might be cloaked in a garb that must be actively engaged to be deciphered, but if one reads only a small portion of the dream work now available from thousands of psychiatrists, psychologists, and therapists the world over dealing with hundreds of thousands of dreamers, it becomes unmistakable that there is guidance there. And so with myths. As one reads the myths of many different lands, and begins to examine the history of the peoples of that land and the role that the stories and myths have played in their lives, it becomes unmistakably clear that there is wisdom embedded in the myths. Does that wisdom arise from the collective unconscious of the culture as it unfolds? Is it worked out consciously by a few very wise mythmakers in the culture? Does it arise in the "big dreams"[C] of a few individuals, dreams that some tribes believed belonged to the tribe as a whole rather than to the individual? Or is it through dreams and myths that a transcendent God reveals the pathway through to wholeness? Significant questions. But, if followed too

[C] Role of big dreams in a few cultures discussed here.

far, they would lead us far afield from our story. Let us be content for the moment with an assumption that both dreams and myths do contain wisdom from a source that we will not now try to pin down.

Thus along this path we come full circle. We move from our waking life to our dreams, and begin to be aware of our personal unconscious urges; continuing our attention to our dreams, we begin to discern guidance for our personal growth; maintaining our attention to the dream world, some of us perhaps begin to encounter the collective dream of our tribe, of our culture, or even of humanity. These special ones, the great storytellers who have learned to understand the larger dream, the world dream of who we are and why we are, encode their visions in the great myths of the world. Then each of us, if we will but listen, can use these great stories to guide us in the living of our waking lives. Simultaneously, those great stories can point us back to our own dream-world and aid us in its deciphering.

If we view this journey to wholeness as a path that leads round to its starting point, but with a dramatically different view of that point after we have completed the circle, then perhaps we begin to understand one of the many resonances our journey has with T.S. Eliot's famous lines:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> and the end of all our exploring
> will be to arrive where we started
> and know the place for the first time.[129]

And if this image of the circular path holds true, could we not enter it at any point along its way? We could enter through our personal dreams, but we could also enter through the great myths of the world – which would be precisely the function they have arisen to serve.

Even Heroes Have Doubts

So on with our story. After his interview with Penélopê, Odysseus makes his bed for the night on the floor in the entryway. But he sleeps fitfully. Some of the women of the house slip by, making their way to the suitor's beds. Odysseus is furious, but:

> His rage
> held hard in leash, submitted to his mind,
> while he himself rocked, rolling from side to side,
> as a cook turns a sausage, big with blood
> and fat, at a scorching blaze, without a pause,
> to broil it quick: so he rolled left and right,
> casting about to see how he, alone,
> against the false outrageous crowd of suitors
> could press the fight. (pp. 375-376)

As he rests fitfully on the floor of the entryway of the manor (or speaking symbolically, as he spends the night humbly on the threshold of his castle, awaiting his homecoming as the true King), some of the maid-servants slip by to spend the night with the enemy. How could we understand the inner meaning of this event? How might we view the traitorous maid-servants as inner aspects of Odysseus? Perhaps we could say that since our hero has spent all these years incorporating the feminine side of his nature, he must now wrestle with the shadow side of the feminine, the potential negative manifestations of these traits within himself. This could mean that the traits of empathy and understanding, when carried too far, lead to selling out to an enemy when the appropriate path is to fight. It could be that the traits of a healthy acceptance of fate, and a gentleness of spirit, can give way to unacceptable compromise and lack of resolve. Or to say this in a slightly different way, during the night there arose in Odysseus a fear that would not have arisen in the young and impetuous Odysseus of old, a fear that leads him to consider giving up his rightful place and caving in to the superior power of the suitors. Having now the wisdom to see the true dangers he faces, and having incorporated the ability to see the other person's point of view, he must wrestle with the weak feminine parts of

himself that would give up and sell out to the enemy – the parts that would be passive when there is a need for action, the parts that would seek to propitiate superior force rather than stand for what is right. But if he is to act on the morrow from his masculine side, after all these years of incorporating the feminine, he must let the weak feminine parts of himself slip on by, and he must not let his true inner nature be carried along with them. He must overcome his fear, and let them go by.[130]

How Doubts Are Answered

Thus on the night before the final trial, Odysseus is troubled and restless. Even though Athena has assured him of victory, he is filled with doubts and anxiety. But as he tosses and turns, Athena appears to him once more, and asks why he is so wakeful. He replies:

> "I have some cause to fret in this affair.
> I am one man; how can I whip those dogs?
> They are always here in force. Neither
> is that the end of it, there's more to come.
> If by the will of Zeus and by your will
> I killed them all, where could I go for safety?
> Tell me that!" (p. 376)

Hmm, another complication here. In this land where there is no king – where there is no authority to cry "enough" – even if Odysseus succeeds on the morrow, who can then put a stop to the age-old habit in this culture of revenge, of the belief in "an eye for an eye." If Odysseus and his son manage to kill over a hundred young men, through surprise and courage, who would then protect them from the revenge of the families when surprise was no longer on their side? As he later states to his son:

> "Whoever kills one citizen, you know,
> and has not force of armed men at his back,
> had better take himself abroad at night
> and leave his kin. Well, we cut down the flower of Ithaka,
> the mainstay of the town. Consider that." (p. 433)

Thus, even if Odysseus prevails over the suitors on the morrow, his troubles will not be at an end. So he is racked by doubts. But Athena replies:

> "Your touching faith! Another man would trust

some villainous mortal, with no brains – and what
am I? Your goddess-guardian to the end
in all your trials." (p. 376)

Athena is saying, with irony, that people in his situation would usually trust in human allies, even if they were not very clever. But although he has a goddess with great intelligence on his side, he is unable to trust even her. However, she again reassures him that he will prevail, not only against the suitors, but against their families as well.

It is very interesting to note that this whole exchange has in many ways the quality of a dream experience. It reminds of the way most of us toss and turn before a major challenge of our lives, and then, if we are lucky, make peace with our doubts, find our resolve, and at last go to sleep. This dreamlike quality of this particular appearance of Athena fits closely with an understanding of the goddess as the voice of inner wisdom, that inner voice each of us might wrestle and argue with as we toss and turn on a fitful night. Viewing her in this way for a moment, what is the message she gives? It seems to go something like this: You think you would feel better if you had more human supporters, but how much more should you trust your own inner strength and wisdom. When you are in touch with your higher Self, if you are aligned with this greater source of support, you will be much better off than with any number of human allies as you go to face the challenges before you. This way of viewing the restless night is reinforced the next morning, when, upon arising, Odysseus flings his arms wide and prays,

"O Father Zeus, if over land and water
after adversity, you willed to bring me home,
let someone in the waking house give me good augury[A]
and a sign be shown, too, in the outer world." (p. 378)

Odysseus doesn't here treat Athena's night-time assurances as the definitive voice of a god, but more like the assurances we each might gain from an inner voice we wrestle with twixt wake and sleep. Odysseus does not act as if he knows that he really saw Athena, but rather acts like a man who is wrestling with his own inner wisdom and strength of purpose. His inner resolve remains tentative. Now he wants

[A] In this sense augury seems to mean "forboding."

some sign from Zeus that he can see. And even that is not enough. He wants, in addition, someone in the waking house to give him a positive sign of encouragement. No small order here.

After he has spoken, there is a clap of thunder in the heavens, and from within the house, the voice of a woman grinding flour in the courtyard.

> "Ah, Father Zeus
> almighty over gods and men!
> A great bang of thunder that was, surely,
> out of the starry sky, and not a cloud in sight.
> It is your nod to someone. Hear me, then,
> make what I say come true:
> Let this day be the last the suitors feed
> so dainty in Odysseus' hall!
> They've made me work my heart out till I drop,
> grinding barly. May they feast no more!" (p. 378)

And Odysseus, as would most of us, took these two events as the sign for which he had prayed, and was "sure in his bones that vengeance was at hand." (p. 379) But let us note that this was not an unmistakable, direct intervention – it was not a sure sign from God. No god appeared directly to him in this morning light. He had to interpret the sign for himself. He had to make a choice as to whether he would believe that his prayer had been answered. Or perhaps after he has done everything he can possibly do himself, and after he has made his peace with the gods as best he can, he simply decides to move forward with what he believes to be right, leaving the outcome in the hands of fate.

If we think about it for a moment, we realize that such an experience as this is far from unique. How many echoes have there been of this type of exchange throughout the history of every people! In every land, there are stories of saints and prophets, and of ordinary people, who have asked for a sign from God, and who were answered in this fashion – in a way that the supplicant experienced as a direct answer to their prayer, but which was not subject to direct proof or verification by others.

Some might argue that this proves that such an exchange was all in the mind of the supplicant. But the inability to verify a sign from God does not prove that it was not from God. This would be like saying that our inability to prove beyond a doubt that

we love someone proves that we do not; or that the inability of a "radical" scientist in the 17th Century to prove for many years to the scientific establishment that the earth revolved around the sun proved that it did not.[131] Or that the inability for several years of a maverick doctor at the beginning of the 20th century to prove to his colleague that germs caused disease proved that they did not. (The inability to prove something does not establishment its untruth. This is a basic proposition of logic, but not always acknowledged by the participants in ontological debates.)

When a person from the past or the present has such an experience of inner assurance, from whence does it arise. Is it the voice of inner wisdom? Is it God? Is it delusional? Looking at one set of examples, say from people in mental institutions, we can say that it seems that some of these experiences are delusional. Going one step further, we can say that there is great danger here, and that a person must be very careful about listening to such voices. Or listening to someone who claims to hear such voices, for much suffering has been caused by such claims.

But that is as far as science, or psychology, can possibly go. They can say that some people who are hearing voices are quite likely delusional. But no one can prove, or even responsibly say, whether all such experiences are delusional. Whatever anyone believes about such a matter is strictly a matter of faith, of one's belief about what reality is, and cannot possibly be based on scientific knowledge. The scientific method, by its very definition, cannot prove anything one way or the other about forces outside of the world of things that can be observed. If there is a realm beyond the material world, science is not organized to deal with it.[132]

What then can we say. We can say that we must approach this territory with great caution, for there is enormous peril here. We can say that the more one knows oneself and one's inner fantasies and illusions – and one's deepest goals and yearnings – the safer the venture becomes. We can say that throughout human history some of the best among us seem to have had these experiences: Jesus, Paul, Moses, Jacob, Joseph, Mohammed, Buddha, St. Theresa, Descartes, Einstein, Mozart, Wagner, Jung, Plato, Dante, Yeats, Edison, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Nier Bohr, Beethoven, Keats, Goethe, Joan of Arc, Rumi.

We can say that if there is a realm outside of our normal, everyday reality, then perhaps the very nature of the kind of exchange that takes place with that other realm is unique and unverifiable. Perhaps, in fact, the reason that such experiences

can't be scientifically verified is that in order to have the experience, an individual must prepare himself or herself for the experience. In this sense, if a true experience does occur it is not by its very definition repeatable or verifiable, but is a unique experience of a single individual with that which is outside of the everyday world – with a different reality.

To say this in the words of E.F. Schumacher, if such an experience is to occur a person must first become "adequate" to receive it. In *A Guide for the Perplexed*, Schumacher argues that we can only know things which we have adequately developed our capacity to know. Aldous Huxley makes the same point in *The Perennial Philosophy:*

> What we know depends also on what, as moral being, we choose to make ourselves. "Practice," in the words of William James, "may change our theoretical horizon, . . . it may lead into new worlds and secure new powers. Knowledge we could never attain, remaining what we are, may be attainable in consequence of higher powers and a higher life, which we may morally achieve." To put the matter more succinctly, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."[133]

Huxley believed that there was a higher Reality that stood behind (or beyond) the everyday reality that we experience, and that the Perennial Philosophy was concerned with that Reality. However, he also believed that it could not be known in scientific or rational ways:

> . . . but the nature of this one Reality is such that it cannot be directly and immediately apprehended except by those who have chosen to fulfill certain conditions, making themselves loving, pure in heart, and poor in spirit. Why should this be so? We do not know. It is just one of those facts which we have to accept, whether we like them or not and however implausible and unlikely they may seem. Nothing in our everyday experience gives us any reason for supposing that water is made up of hydrogen and oxygen; and yet when we subject water to certain rather drastic treatments, the nature of its constituent elements becomes manifest.[134]

Huxley goes on to say that nothing in our everyday experience would make us assume that each of us has within a divine element that can be made manifest. By making

the proper experiment, we can discover that water contains hydrogen and oxygen. In just the same way, in the ordinary course of our lives,

> . . . the potentialities of the mind remain latent and unmanifested. If we would realize them, we must fulfill certain conditions and obey certain rules, which experience has shown empirically to be valid.[135]

In this argument, since most scientists, writers, and even poets don't fulfill the necessary conditions to have a direct experience of the higher Reality, they can only speak of it at second hand. However:

> . . . in every age there have been some men and women who chose to fulfill the conditions upon which alone, as a matter of brute empirical fact, such immediate knowledge can be had; and of these a few have left accounts of the Reality they were thus enabled to apprehend and have tried to relate, in one comprehensive system of thought, the given facts of this experience with the given facts of their other experiences. To such first-hand exponents of the Perennial Philosophy those who know them have generally given the name of "saint" or "prophet," "sage," or "enlightened one"[136]

How does all of this relate to Odysseus, and to each of us as we follow his path? It is to recognize that in each of our lives there might be moments, as with Odysseus on the night and morning before his great battle, in which we seem to gain an assurance of what lies ahead, or even have an experience of a greater Reality behind this worldly reality. Or even an experience of God. If this occurs, how should we understand it? How should we respond? Is it simply wishful or delusional thinking? Is it the voice of our internal wisdom? Is it a divine voice? Should we follow its guidance? What can we reasonably conclude about such experiences?

First, we can say that this is very treacherous terrain, and that to follow such a voice is very risky. We can also say that to fail to follow could also be risky. We can say that science and rational thinking should be used to evaluate the situation, but that they cannot finally answer our questions unless preceded by an act of faith that science and rational thinking contain all of reality. We can say that in the end each of us must decide for ourselves, and that how we decide can only come through an act of faith as to the nature of reality.

How should we respond to others who profess to have had such experiences? There are only two choices. We can say "perhaps," and go on about our lives. Or we can accept their vision through an act of faith, and we can then treat their vision as if it were divinely inspired.

This discussion raises one other profound question which we each must answer: Do we live our lives in such a way as to prepare ourselves to receive knowledge of a higher Reality – before we know for sure that such a Reality exists? Or do we live our daily lives "as if" such a Reality does not exist until we receive a clear sign that it does? There is no escape from one answer or the other. We must each decide.

The Great Battle

Enough philosophy! (At least for the moment.) Back in Ithaka, we have come to the moment of the great battle for the kingdom. As the day of reckoning unfolds, Penélopê brings out the bow and announces that anyone who can string it and shoot an arrow through the row of twelve axeheads with one shot, her husband's old trick, will become her new husband. But this is no ordinary bow. It is so stout that only Odysseus in his prime could bend it enough to string it. The suitors, one after another, try and fail the test. Then at a propitious moment, Penélopê maneuvers the bow into the hands of the "old beggar."

What a scene! After so many insults, so many failures and losses, so many tests of his patience and humility, his cherished bow is finally back in his hands – the bow that stands as a symbol of his strength and power as a warrior. Now he is ready for the great battle. Let us savour this moment with him:

> . . . [T]he man skilled in all ways of contending,
> satisfied by the great bow's look and heft,
> like a musician, like a harper, when
> with quiet hand upon his instrument
> he draws between his thumb and forefinger
> a sweet new string upon a peg: so effortlessly
> Odysseus in one motion strung the bow.
> Then slid his right hand down the cord and plucked it,
> so the taut gut vibrating hummed and sang
> a swallow's note. (p. 404)

With this musical note, the world is transformed. Odysseus is in harmony with the music of the universe. Nothing will ever be the same again – for him, or for the Kingdom.

> In the hushed hall it smote the suitors

> and all their faces changed. Then Zeus thundered
> overhead, one loud crack for a sign.
> And Odysseus laughed within him that the son
> of crooked-minded Kronos had flung that omen down.
> He picked one ready arrow from his table
> where it lay bare: the rest were waiting still
> in the quiver for the young men's turn to come.
> He nocked it, let it rest across the handgrip,
> and drew the string and grooved butt of the arrow,
> aiming from where he sat upon the stool. (p. 404)

Still sitting on his stool, Odysseus meets the moment for which he has so long prepared. As with the Zen archer who becomes one with the target, so that there is no separation between archer and target, thus no possibility of a mistake, Odysseus released his shot:

> Now flashed
> arrow from twanging bow clean as a whistle
> through every socket ring, and grazed not one . . . (pp. 404-405)

What a moment that must have been for our hero. And for each of us when it finally comes our turn to "string the bow" and "let fly the arrow" in our own lives. What is the similar moment for which you have prepared through your own years of struggle and effort and sacrifice?

In preparation for that moment in our lives, let's look once more at the inner level for any guidance it might provide. First, it is probably significant that it is Penélopê, our story's ideal feminine, who hands Odysseus the bow – a weapon he will use for combat. We can therefore note that this image of the ideal inner feminine is not always passive, or appeasing. When fighting is necessary, this inner feminine aids in the struggle. And let us register the image of the bow, a natural element – wood – drawn taut, perhaps with the tension of our intentionality. The shot must pass through twelve rings, perhaps symbolizing the necessity of bringing into balance all aspects of ourselves, all twelve parts. To make such a "shot" perhaps each part of our character must be in balance and harmony. It will not do to be one-sided or off balance in any of the twelve directions, else the side of one axehead will be grazed and the shot from then on will be completely off target. For such a moment, we must have brought all sides of ourselves into perfect harmony. Perhaps we cannot expect

to live in such a place all the time. But for this moment, all sides of our nature must be in perfect balance.[A]

For Odysseus, when this test is done, there is not a moment to lose. He turns his bow to grimmer work, toward the ringleader of the suitors. Throwing off his beggar's rags and leaping to a good vantage point he cries:

> "So much for that. Your clean-cut game is over.
> Now watch me hit a target that no man has hit before, if I can make this shot. Help me Apollo."
> He drew to his fist the cruel head of an arrow for Altínoös
> just as the young man leaned to lift his beautiful drinking cup,
> embossed, two-handled, golden: the cup was in his fingers:
> the wine was even at his lips: and did he dream of death?
> How could he? In that revelry amid his throng of friends
> who would imagine a single foe – though a strong foe indeed –
> could dare to bring death's pain on him and darkness on his
> eyes? (p. 409)

Thus in an instance, in the instant he least expected it, death came for Altínoös. And just so can it come to each of us. This is the very fact that creates one of the great dilemmas of life: Do we make plans and live toward the future, sacrificing today for things we hope to achieve at some future time? Or do we live each moment as if it were our last, because it might well be, and because in one sense the only moment we can ever really live is the present moment?

The complication in this dilemma is that many of the things that seem most worthwhile in life can only be achieved with sacrifice, effort, commitment, and discipline. If you want to be an artist, or a psychologist, or an entrepreneur, or a political leader, or a mystic, or a parent – or almost any other worthwhile thing you can name, each requires doing many things today because of what you hope will come tomorrow. But there is no guarantee tomorrow will come. Or if it comes, it will often turn out very different from what you expected. Yet if you live only to "enjoy" each moment, you might well miss most of what is truly meaningful in life, and simply exist in a state of indulgence and triviality. So which horn of this dilemma will you grasp?

[A] There are many other possible inner meanings of this great symbol. It is a rich vein to be mined by each of us in our life's journeys.

The best of the two answers seem to be these:

(1) The meaning is in the intentionality. Commit your life to some purpose, whatever purpose seems most important to you at moments of decision. Then live toward that purpose with effort, discipline and sacrifice, and don't worry about "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." Such things are out of your hands anyway, so just live toward the fullest intentionality you can imagine. Then either the force of your intentionality, or chance, or the flow of the universe, or God – wherever you place your act of faith – will handle how it all turns out.

Or,

(2) Live each moment as if it were your last. Be fully alive in the present moment, and don't live in the past or the future. The past is gone, and is only a memory. The future is a fantasy and an illusion. It never develops as we expect anyway, so to dwell on it is to be caught by yet another illusion. Thus be totally present in each moment, live each moment to its fullest.

Quite a dilemma, this choice. But maybe, just maybe, there is eventually a way in our lives to reconcile these two opposing positions. Is this what is suggested by the following story, or does it just support the second option?

> Three very serious people came to see a wise old Rabbi:
>
> "Rabbi, we have been discussing what we would do if we knew we were going to die in just one week. Would you tell us who is right?
>
> The lawyer spoke first: "I would travel. I would try to see all the places in the world I have never seen but always wanted to see."
>
> Next the doctor spoke up: "That is fine, but I would spend all of my time with my family and close friends. I would tell them all the loving things I have not yet had the time to say to each of them."
>
> The banker interjected: "Both of those alternatives are very tempting, but that if I had only one week to live, I would spend it in prayer. I would attempt to make my peace with God."
>
> The Rabbi was pondering their various positions, when one of them thought to ask: "Rabbi, what would <u>you</u> do if you had only a week to live?"
>
> The Rabbi paused for only a second, and then said: "I would do what I have been doing."

Is it possible to live life with purpose, with discipline, with commitment, even with sacrifice – and still live each moment as if it were the only moment of our lives? Where, how do these two lines cross? Back in the manor hall, the suitors must attempt to come to terms with their new dilemma:

> Now as they craned to see their champion where he lay
> the suitors jostled in uproar down the hall,
> everyone on his feet. Wildly they turned and scanned
> the walls in the long room for arms; but not a shield,
> not a good ashen spear was there for a man to take and throw.
> All they could do was yell in outrage at Odysseus:
> "Foul! to shoot at a man! That was your last shot!"
> "Your own throat will be slit for this!"
> "Our finest lad is down!
> You killed the best on Ithaka."
> "Buzzards will tear your eyes out!"
> For they imagined as they wished – that it was a wild shot,
> an unintended killing – fools, not to comprehend
> they were already in the grip of death. (p. 410)

The suitors "imagined as they wished." At that moment they <u>believed</u> to be true what they <u>hoped</u> was true. Again, one line of Homer captures one of the fundamental mistakes of life. In fact, a major function of modern psychology is to help people see what is <u>really</u> true, rather than seeing only what they <u>imagine</u> to be true. For the suitors, they are about to receive the final lesson in what their particular reality really is:

> But glaring under his brows Odysseus answered:
> "You yellow dogs, you thought I'd never make it
> home from the land of Troy. You took my house to plunder,
> twisted my maids to serve your beds. You dared
> bid for my wife while I was still alive.
> Contempt was all you had for the gods who rule wide heaven,
> contempt for what men say of you hereafter.
> Your last hour has come. You die in blood." (p. 410)

Can you imagine what that moment must have been like for the suitors? In an instant, their world was turned completely around. And yet, could they not have known, should they not have known at some level inside where their arrogance and

complete lack of respect for God and man would lead? When was the last moment they could have changed the course of their lives and avoided this outcome? But for them, that moment has passed:

> As they all took this in, sickly green fear
> pulled at their entrails, and their eyes flickered
> looking for some hatch or hideaway from death. (p. 410)

One of the suitors pleads with Odysseus, blaming all of the atrocities on the slain ringleader. But the one who pleads is the very suitor who had plotted Telémakhos' death. Whether sensing this or not, Odysseus is not to be placated:

> "Not for the whole treasure of your fathers,
> all you enjoy, lands, flocks, or any gold
> put up by others, would I hold my hand.
> There will be killing till the score is paid.
> You forced yourselves upon this house. Fight your way out,
> or run for it, if you think you'll escape death.
> I doubt one man of you skins by." (p. 411)

A long and bloody battle follows; Odysseus, his son, and the two loyal servants against all of the suitors. After a time, some of the suitors are able to find the hidden weapons, and they attack. But Odysseus is invincible. This is his moment. When almost all of the suitors have been slain, a voice calls out:

> "Mercy,
> mercy on a suppliant, Odysseus!
> My gift is song for men and for the gods undying.
> My death will be remorse for you hereafter.
> No one taught me: deep in my mind a god
> shaped all the various ways of life in song.
> And I am fit to make verse in your company
> as in the god's. Put aside lust for blood.
> Your own dear son Telémakhos can tell you,
> never by my own will or for love
> did I feast here or sing amid the suitors.
> They were too strong, too many; they compelled me." (p. 420)

Hearing this plea, Telémakhos, takes the supplicant's part. He tells his father that the minstrel is truly innocent, and that one other, Medôn the herald, cared for him when

he was a boy, and did not side with the suitors. Upon hearing these words of reprieve, Medôn crawled form under the chair where he was hiding.

> "Here I am, dear prince; but rest your spear!
> Tell your great father not to see in me
> a suitor for the sword's edge – one of those
> who laughed at you and ruined his property!" (p. 421)

And Odysseus, "[t]he lord of all the tricks of war," looked down on the frightened herald and smiled:

> "Courage: my son has dug you out and saved you.
> Take it to heart, and pass the word along:
> Fair dealing brings more profit in the end.
> Now leave this room. Go and sit down outdoors
> where there's no carnage, in the court,
> you and the poet with his many voices,
> while I attend to certain chores inside." (p. 421)

As the two depart, Odysseus surveys the hall to see if anyone else remains alive. As he looked:

> In blood and dust
> he saw that crowd had all fallen, many and many slain.
> Think of a catch that fisherman haul in to a halfmoon bay
> in a fine-meshed net from the white-caps of the sea:
> how all are poured out on the sand, in throes for the salt sea,
> twitching their cold lives away in Hêlios' fiery air:
> so lay the suitors heaped on one another. (p. 421)

With this grim image, the battle is done. All the suitors have been slain.

Was The Killing Necessary?

Why are they killed? Did they all – every single one – have to be killed? Fitzgerald suggests that throughout the story the moral order of the culture is being created. In this context, the crimes of the suitors could be seen as:

> Presumption, impious and reckless: a folly of greed. It is more than taking what belongs to a vague "someone else" – for you are permitted some raids and wars of conquest; it is claiming and taking more than

> your share in your own commonwealth, without a decent respect for the views of heaven or the opinion of mankind. Wife-stealing and murder, usurpation and insolence: these are the crimes against private and public order that the Olympians mediate as the poem opens.[137]

Or, as Penélopê says more succinctly, they were killed for:

> . . . their arrogance and brutal
> malice--for they honored no one living,
> good or bad, who ever came their way.
> Blind young fools, they've tasted death for it. (p. 431)

Or in the words of Odysseus:

> Destiny and the gods' will vanquished these,
> and their own hardness. They respected no one,
> good or bad, who came their way.
> For this, and folly, a bad end befell them. (p. 422)

How Is A Moral Order Created

From our perspective today, it is hard not to experience this battle as excessively brutal and harsh. Yet if we look at it in the perspective of history, we begin to realize that there have been countless bloody slaughters on a far greater scale — and in less "fair" situations — than happens here. Think for a moment of the numerous cities that were reported to be completely destroyed in the Bible – cities where every man, woman and child was slain. And often by the heroes of the stories, by the followers of God. Think of the numerous times the Roman legions or the Turkish armies destroyed whole cities. Consider the accounts of the Christian crusaders in the Middle Ages massacring whole villages as they passed through on their way to "free" the Holy Land.

Think of the slaughter of the early Christians in the Roman arenas. Read about the torture and death of the early followers of Islam, and then the slaughter of thousands by the followers of Islam – death for those who refused to acknowledge Mohammed as God's messenger. Think of the execution of thousands upon thousands of "heretics" by Christians at various times over the last 2000 years. Think of the burning of "witches" in New England a few hundred years ago. Think of the massacre of whole cities by Spanish conquistadores in the "new world," at times encouraged and supported by the religious leaders of the age.

What characterizes these examples, as opposed to common murder, is the fact that in each case the group doing the killing was attempting to establish a new moral order. Or to re-establish a moral order that seemed to be in danger of collapse. Or to provide a "better" moral order for the "heathens."

Examples of this practice are by no means limited to ancient times. In the 20th century we have many such examples – in fact, the bloodiest examples in all of history – where hundreds of thousands, even millions of men, women, and children have been killed because they did not support, or seem to support, a new moral order. Such was the case with the purges by Stalin in Russia, with the virtual

destruction of a civilization by Pol Pot in Cambodia, with the death camps of Hitler, and with the purges by Mao in China. It's easy for us today to condemn these particular atrocities. And I believe we should condemn them vehemently. But such judgments are not always so easy – especially at the "lived moment."

As long as we are looking back into another culture's past, into a value system and moral order we aren't involved with, it's easy to see what they did wrong. But it doesn't seem to have been so easy for the people living at the time, the people who were living in the particular culture involved, to reach this conclusion. Why is this so? Were they simply morally inferior to us?

Perhaps to understand this issue better we must look a little closer to home. Perhaps each person can finally understand this issue only by looking at examples from his or her own culture. To this end, let's focus on one country, the United States of America, for a moment. Most Americans can look back to the massacre of entire Indian villages, and the destruction of entire Indian tribes – which occurred only a bit more than a hundred years ago – and see that these acts were "wrong." We can read of the forced march of the Cherokee nation from their green, fertile homelands to an arid reservation a thousand miles away – a march that caused the death of thousands, a majority of the tribe – and we can feel sympathy, and even shame. (Footnote - Look up) But at the time these actions seemed completely justified to most Americans.

Similarly, most Americans recoil in horror if they look back to the time in our history when the slave trade brought the death and degradation of literally millions of human beings. Again, from the perspective of a hundred years, we can see the terrible wrongness of this practice. Yet at the time many, many "Americans" could justify this practice because the slaves were "black," and thus not a part of the perceived moral order of "Americans."

As we consider these examples that our culture has in retrospect judged wrong, it is not too difficult to see what would have been "right." But perhaps only when we begin to look at instances from our past that have been passed down to us as positive examples of our history do we really begin to understand our true relation to this question. For example, there was certainly much bloodshed in the Revolutionary War. Was it justified? Should the leaders who wanted to gain more rights for the people living in the American colonies have carried out the acts of defiance that ultimately led to so much destruction and death? Within that war, should traitors and deserters

have been executed for holding views different from their commanders? What if the commanders thought the executions would ultimately save other lives? But how would they know whether this judgment was correct? Should they have carried out the executions if they didn't know?

In another difficult example, should the leaders of the Union have waged a war that cost unthinkable death and suffering in order to prevent the people living in the Confederate states from setting up their own political and moral order? This war brought a million deaths, and many of the dead were innocent by-standers and children. Would it have made any difference if the Union leaders believed that a majority of the people in the Confederate states wanted self-determination for themselves? Should it have made a difference? And how could anyone possibly know what the majority really wanted? And which majority? From the point of view of the leaders of the South, the Civil War was a war of aggression of the North against the South, a successful attempt to impose a moral order. From the point of view of the leaders of the North, it was an attempt to maintain the deeply felt value of the "Union", and, for some, to end the morally abominable practice of slavery by imposing their values on the South through the use of force. And they are willing to sacrifice a million lives to achieve this goal. Were these deaths justified?

Such judgments become even more difficult as one moves closer to the moral order in which one is living. Yet with the advent of modern weapons, the killing is not a face to face encounter with the enemy as it was in Odysseus' time. In his case, he could choose to kill only those who had broken the moral law and could spare, one by one, the innocent. Today, when we act to preserve the moral order, the killing is often more ruthless and on a much greater scale. This is not necessarily a gain. For instance, in the middle part of the 20th century, Americans completely destroyed the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with atom bombs – and thousands upon thousands of men, women and children were killed. More than 100,000 people were killed. This was done in order to "save American lives" and to re-establish the American position of dominance in the Pacific and Asia. Should we as Americans have killed all of these people, some of whom by any definition would have been "innocent." Did it save American lives? Were the Japanese ready to surrender anyway, as some have argued? How do we know if this action saved American lives or not?

In looking at these examples, we are not dealing with the problem of a few leaders seeking power for themselves. This of course does happen. An individual leader or group of leaders can set upon a path of war or persecution just to gain power. But such actions cannot last very long. If the people of a country or a culture do no support the effort, it will soon collapse. When the people of a country do support such actions, it is at least partly to defend or expand their moral order – their system of values and beliefs which they feel to be "justified and right."

This thought leads us back to an earlier question – from where does the moral order arise? The only two possibilities would seem to be (1) "might makes right" – the person or group who has sufficient power gets to do what they want, or (2) the moral order arises from somewhere outside of any one person's or any one group's wishes. But if it does exist outside of any one individual or group, how does a person know for sure what it is? For instance, how does one know when one is hearing the promptings of true morality, versus an urge to one's own self-interest? Or how does one know when a religious or political leader is speaking from a true knowledge of what is "right", versus using such language to manipulate the crowd to his or her own ends. Certainly there are endless examples throughout history where leaders have roused the masses to brutal action — actions which in retrospect seem totally immoral to most observers.

Should Odysseus have killed <u>all</u> the suitors? Should he have shown compassion to some, and taken the risk that they might undermine the moral order he was establishing? How does a society establish and maintain a moral order? How should we today? If we are truly to grapple with this question about Odysseus, we must fully recognize that it is not a question of another time and place, but a question for each of us today. As has been said, it is easy to be compassionate toward those who threaten someone else's moral order. But we must each answer these same questions in our response to the issues that arise in the establishment and maintenance of the moral order of our present world. To do this, we must clearly recognize that the questions never look the same in the living of them as they do from outside.

Looking around the globe in the last few years we see the Communist rulers of Romania being executed, a thousand students being killed in China's Tiannamen Square, hear reports of terrorism and torture in Central and South America, and see

death reports daily from bloody battles in the Middle East, Asia and Africa. In most cases, these conflicts have to do with battles around the world between groups of people who have very different views about how a particular land should be organized and governed. About what particular moral order will be followed. And usually the supporters on each side of these conflicts feel that their acts of violence are justified in defending the true moral order, and that their opponents are committing brutal atrocities. If this part of the story of Odysseus is to have any value for our lives today, we must recognize that most of these conflicts in our world are about who will get to make the decisions about the moral order of a particular place, and what will happen to those who don't support them. The same issue with which Odysseus had to contend.

Again looking at this question from an American perspective, how has this question arisen in recent times? In 1989 the United States invaded Panama, resulting in hundreds of deaths. This was done because our leaders believed that General Noriega, that country's ruler, was a moral renegade involved in drug-running and other crimes, and because he had become hostile to the United States. But was this true? How could we know for sure? Even if it were true, should the U.S. have dropped bombs without warning on the buildings where we thought he was spending the night – destroying that complex in just a few minutes? Should we have done this not knowing who was there or how many would be killed? How many innocent children might be killed? Would it justify the action if we thought that the Panamanian leader was a threat to American lives? How would we know if this was true?

Similarly in Libya in 1986, should the U.S. have bombed without warning the place where we thought the Libyan leader was sleeping? Even though we knew that there were also children asleep there? What if we thought it would reduce terrorism in the world? How could we know if that was true?

But enough. It is not my purpose to argue the pros and cons of any of these conflicts. The purpose is but to show that many acts which seem excessively brutal from outside seem to make sense to the leadership, and usually to the majority of the people, in the culture at the time and place they are being carried out. And usually the reason they seem "right" has to do with the belief that these actions are necessary

to establish and maintain the moral order. And it is only in this context that we can begin to understand the bloody events on Ithaca.

Thus if we are to truly come to grips with these events, we must first decide just what means we will use in our own lives today to protect life, limb and property from those who would take it from us. Christ turned the other cheek. Many early Christians did not resist, but simply prayed as they were being killed. Socrates chose to drink the hemlock. Some Buddhists will accept any outrage rather than rise to their own defense. The Amish will accept physical abuse without retaliation. If we are not willing to adopt this radical acceptance, what means are we willing to use to protect and defend ourselves when we believe we are threatened? Or when we believe those we love are threatened? There are violent people in the world. And sometimes the best defense is to take preventive action. When should we act? What actions can we justify to protect ourselves?

Further, we must also decide what actions we will accept by our leaders to maintain our moral order. There are those in the world who would take power, would conquer and rule by force of arms. How do we respond to them? For those of us not willing to forsake all violence to protect our lives, our property, and our way of life – and who live in a moral order established through the violence of the 20th century – it is not so easy to condemn Odysseus. In his actions on that fateful day only a hundred people were killed, and only those who were guilty of treason in the eyes of the moral order he represented. No innocents were killed. In comparison to the loss of life in the foregoing examples, the death of a hundred rebels on Ithaca doesn't seem quite so dramatic.

From another angle, to fully come to grips with this act we must also look at the inner level. As has been said, it's very easy to conclude that someone else's actions to establish a moral order in another place and another time are excessively harsh. But as Jung clearly saw, if we really wish to understand such actions we must first look within. We must first look within our own soul. We must do this, not to find a justification for violence and killing, but to understand from whence the killing comes. If we wish the world to be less violent and brutal, we must first come to understand where brutality exists in us. Only then will we be able to respond in relation to others in a way that will have a chance of success.

For those of us who do wish our world to be less brutal, we must recognize that the urge to wipe out those who live by or support a different moral order than our own has existed throughout human history, and still exists in most human beings today. Why else would so many people all over the world be flocking to movies by the hundreds of millions to see modern day enforcer's such as Rambo, or Dirty Harry, or Charles Bronson in Death Wish, or Mel Gibson as The Road Warrior. (Or one generation earlier, the movies of John Wayne). These vast audiences have a deep urge to see "heroes" punish the villains and re-establish a "moral order" the audience can believe in, if only for a moment in a story. (Just as the telling of the victory of Odysseus must have done for Greek audiences)

To bring this question right down to the "live moment' for each of us, should the territories of drug king-pins or mafia dons be invaded to prevent their continuing "crimes"? What if most of the people who live in the town or village of the drug barons or crime bosses support them? What about invading another country where we think the leader is a "criminal"? What if most of the people in that country support the leader we believe to be "criminal?" How would we know what a majority thought? Would it matter? How many deaths would we be willing to accept as reasonable in an effort to overthrow such "criminals"? How many deaths of those we "judge" to be "guilty"? How many deaths of the innocent?

How should we deal with terrorists and suspected terrorists all over the globe. If we catch a terrorist, should we kill him or her if we conclude they are guilty? What if they ask for mercy? What if we don't believe they are sincere? Should we stage a raid in which innocent people might be killed if we think it might prevent a terrorist attack? What if we were wrong? How would we ever know for sure?

Do we as Americans fight a war to protect one group of leaders in the Middle East from another group? Or to re-establish one group to power that has been overthrown? How many lives are we willing to lose, or to take, in such an effort? Of the "guilty"? Of the innocent?

Should we kill those who have offended our sense of the moral order in electric chairs and gas chambers. Do we do this primarily to set a harsh example for all those who might follow in their evil ways? Does it work? How do we know if it works or not? Is this what Odysseus was doing?

These might seem like decisions that we as ordinary citizens do not have to make. But through all of our individual decisions about what we believe to be right, our leaders either gain the support they need for their actions, or they change their actions. (I believe this is especially true in America.) The point then for our own lives might be this: Almost every leader who undertakes a violent action claims that morality is on their side. What do we as individuals do in the face of these claims? We can simply take the side of our interest group — our family, our community, our ethnic group, our religion, our nation. Whatever group we most identify with. But since we can clearly see that many, many people in the past who have followed such a course have participated in what we now consider terrible actions, we certainly cannot have much confidence on this path that our actions arise out of anything other than "might makes right."

The other potential choice is to make an act of faith that there is a morality higher than simply "might makes right" which we can come to know, and that we can develop the ability to recognize which leaders speak from this higher morality. But to be able to recognize when a leader is speaking from this place requires just the kind of inner journey which Odysseus undertook. One must come to see one's hidden motives and ambitions, one's fantasies and illusions, and be willing to humbly listen to that inner voice that speaks the deeper truth. One must learn to recognize it and trust it, and then have the courage to follow it. As did Odysseus. From this place, we can then choose to give our support to leaders that are following this higher morality — sometimes even when they are not from our own interest group. In this century both Gandhi and Martin Luther King set out to persuade those outside their immediate interest group — and those who had the greater political and physical power — to recognize this higher morality.

In certain circumstances, perhaps even those who abhor violence might follow such a leader into battle. This was the position Lincoln captured in many peoples hearts and minds in leading the American nation into the Civil War. And the role filled by Churchill and Roosevelt in opposing the ambitions of Hitler. These leaders still inspire confidence today in many people throughout the world because they seem to have been speaking from a higher morality.

Returning to the battle on Ithaca all those years ago, and looking at it in the context of the creation of a moral order, it is very important to emphasize again that

Odysseus did not just kill the suitors for petty revenge, or simply to get what he wanted – although these motives might have been present. In the story there is a clear sense that the suitors were killed to re-establish the moral order in the land – the land in which Odysseus was the true King. In this sense, he was acting in a role similar to Roosevelt invading Europe to overthrow Hitler, or Truman dropping the atom bomb on Japan, or Bush invading Panama to capture the "outlaw" Noriega, or perhaps Lincoln sending Sherman on his march of destruction through the South. In each case, the leader of a culture was trying to establish the moral order of the land. This does not mean that each of these actions was right, (in my personal view some were, and some were not) but it is the kind of comparison we must make to be able to understand and come to terms with Odysseus' actions.

In the last analysis, perhaps we could say that the suitors were killed by Odysseus to re-establish the moral order of the kingdom, to establish what actions were unacceptable in that moral order, and to demonstrate the consequences of those actions to the people of that age and time. And if we wish to understand this act, we must look to the parallels in our own lives and culture.

Finally, if we wish to support a different, more compassionate way of being for our world, using the insights of Jung, we must find the source of the urge impose our views on, or even to kill opposing "others" in ourselves, and come to a new relationship to that force within. Only then will we be able to begin to reduce the violence in the world about us.

Besides attempting to come to grips with the brutality of this scene, this long digression also serves to raise one other crucial question. After the return from the inner journey, what is one's new relationship to the world of human life and culture? Does one participate in the affairs of the world, or does one live apart – removed from the issues of power and politics? The great teachers of various cultures have had different answers to this question.

In *The Odyssey* , the answer seems to be that after the journey to wholeness, at least at the stage which Odysseus has now reached, it is sometimes appropriate to act decisively in the world of human affairs. However, one does not act primarily from pettiness, or for revenge, or out of anger. These feelings must be under control. But if one has reached a place of harmony within — and with the universe without — one can at times act to establish or defend the moral order. For those of us who are not

the leader of a moral order, the lesson of *The Odyssey* would seem to be that it is sometimes appropriate, as exemplified by the loyal servants, to support the leaders who seem to be in harmony with the higher good. But which ones are in harmony? Now that is a question for each of us to ponder in our own lives!

Odysseus and the War in Vietnam

This question also brings us to one of the great American struggles of recent history — Vietnam. As we have seen, many acts which were supported by the people of a country when they were being committed are later viewed as wrong, sometimes are even considered atrocities. But one thing that has been true for most warriors from every land is that if they make it back home, they are treated as heroes and heroines upon their return. In most wars, the warriors' home populace believes the fighters are defending the moral order. In later years, the view about what was right and wrong might change, but such a process usually takes at least a generation. Thus the returning warriors, even the defeated ones, are seen as having fought for the tribe, or the Motherland, or the Fatherland.

But what happens to the warriors when the condemnation of the acts of war precedes them home? What happens when a war that was presented to the warriors as a war to defend the moral order is not seen that way by most people they encounter on their return from the war? This is highly unusual, although not unknown, in history. In a sense, this is what happened to Odysseus. Upon his return to his homeland, those in power did not honor him or his values. And this is what happened to many veterans of the war in Vietnam.

The underlying justification for the war in Vietnam was that America had to prevent Communism from taking over Asia. And if Vietnam fell, the theory went, the other dominoes would quickly fall. Then the opposing moral order, the Communists, would control all of the vast population and resources of the Asian continent. Was this true? No one will ever know. Perhaps American involvement in Vietnam stopped the advance of Communism and led to its ultimate downfall. Perhaps our involvement in Vietnam was a complete waste of lives and resources. Most have strong beliefs about this question, but in fact no one will ever know for sure what "might have been".

But one thing we do know. By the time most Vietnam veterans returned from the war, the view of that war in America was not a positive one. Rather than being

treated as heroes and heroines, the returning soldiers found that ,at best, to talk about the war made home folks uncomfortable. And at worst, they were called murderers — even baby-killers. Further, as psychologist Harry Wilmer (Footnote) has so movingly described, there was usually no homecoming ceremony or ritual for the veterans of Vietnam. No symbolic ticker tape parades down 5th Avenue for the returning heroes. Rather than being aided in their return to society, as were the veterans of most wars, these veterans discovered that those who stayed home had taken the good jobs and advanced their careers.

What should our Vietnam veterans have done when the leaders of America asked them to go and defend the crucial interests of their homeland? Should they have refused? In most ages and times those who have so refused have been called coward, or even traitor. Yet other Americans listened to other voices and resisted the war. Some showed great courage and took great personal risks to resist what they believed to be an immoral war. Which side was "right"? How could the young people of the time have known which leaders were "right?" We are perhaps still too close in time to those events to see the answer clearly, thus most of us will still see the answer through the lens of deeply-felt emotions. But perhaps we are far enough removed to begin to more fully appreciate the wounds that all of us received, for Americans over 20 years later are still grappling with these wounds.

But in this grappling, perhaps the story of Odysseus can aid in the healing. Odysseus left a war, and then had to spend many years preparing himself to return home. He had to calm the raw warrior power that we see so clearly in his encounter with the Kyklopes. He had to gradually learn to deal with the feminine in a new way — both within himself and out in the world. He had to deal with fantasies and illusions about what the world was like, and with fantasies and illusions about himself. He had to struggle with defeat and loss. He even had to deal with what to do about mind-altering drugs. And as we have been exploring, he had to deal with all of these things within himself. The healing of his life could not come from outside. Through his adventures he had to come to a healing within, so that he could then return home as a whole man. And before he could act decisively in the outer world, he had to align himself with the greater harmony of things.

In his great battle on Ithaca, Odysseus is the legitimate king fighting to establish the moral order of the land. In the outer world, none of the returning warriors from

Vietnam was the king of the land. Thus when they have used violence, perhaps in an attempt to regain their place, it has been from a confusion of the inner and outer worlds. But perhaps this is just what those who have taken up guns and started shooting people have been trying to do. Perhaps they were trying to re-establish a moral order in their world — to regain what they felt was their legitimate place. But unlike Odysseus, they were not the outer king, and perhaps even more importantly, they had not yet done their inner work. Thus their violent actions have been merely destructive. But we can perhaps better understand how these actions have arisen.

19

The Suitors Within

Very few individuals are ever designated the true King in their culture. Thus very few of us are faced with the decision as to who must be killed and who spared in order to maintain the moral order of the land. And if we are not the true King in our culture, to usurp that role and to initiate killing would not be following Odysseus' example.

But although few people ever become king in the outer world, each person has within the True King of his or her own life. And it is the role of this True King within to establish the moral order of each person's life. Further, this could well involve the killings of some "suitors" within. So let us turn to a look at this event on the internal level.

Seeing the suitors as parts of ourselves, it is much easier to understand why they had to be killed – although perhaps even harder to accomplish. At this inner, psychological level the suitors can be seen as symbolic, standing for parts of ourselves that would usurp the place of the true king within. In this view, "these interlopers correspond to all the inner confusions and distractions that block our inner homecoming, all those usurpers who move in to run things whenever our awareness absents itself."[138]

To understand this perspective, think of a moment when you seemed to see your life clearly – when the different areas of your life seemed to fit together in a natural way. Think of a moment when you seemed to see clearly who you were and how you wanted to live your life. During such moments, we often make a commitment to live from the clarity we then feel. We determine we will do certain things that fit with who we "really" are, and we pledge to ourselves not to do certain other things that do not seem to fit. At these moments, these pledges seem very reasonable and natural. However, for most of us it is not long before we find ourselves doing something we firmly decided not to do in our clear moment.

We find ourselves eating that second rich dessert, when we had resolved not even to have the first.

We are suddenly aware that we are shouting at a parent or spouse when we had clearly pledged to see their point of view and not get angry.

The late, late movie is just ending, and we remember that we had determined to start going to bed at least by midnight.

We might even watch ourselves angling toward a sexually seductive situation, or a business deal that would be unfair to another, or we might hear ourselves taking credit beyond our due – when we had decisively decided not to do these things. Yet even if part of us sees what we are doing, we do not always stop. Who then is in charge of our lives?

We might wake up one morning and realize it has been days, or weeks, or even years since we did something we had committed to do every day during our moment of clarity.

Or we find ourselves driving very fast when we had committed not to do this – and realize we have been driving this way for weeks.

Or we find ourselves with a completely full schedule, so full that we have no time left for the things that seemed most important.

It's perhaps comforting to know that we aren't alone in this predicament. Two thousand years ago Paul lamented: "The things I would do, I do not. And the things I would not, I do."[139]

When these things happen, who is at home? Who is in charge? To answer this question, Carl Jung developed his theory of the complexes. Following his thought, we could say that each of us is made up of a number of urges, fears, beliefs, desires, anxieties, etc. Some of these are conscious, some are unconscious, and some conscious at moments and unconscious at others. And within each of us, these various parts coalesce into several different bundles he called complexes. Each of us has within several complexes, and often these different complexes are quite incompatible with each other.

At any given moment, then, one group of these might be "in charge" or "at home." But since most of us have several different bundles of fears, anxieties, wounds, desires, fantasies – several different complexes, who we are shifts back and forth among the different groupings from hour to hour or even from moment to moment.

In this framework, to become whole we must gradually become conscious of these various complexes within, and we must gradually give up the pieces that are inconsistent with the unified, conscious person we are becoming. However, the goal is not to repress, to banish to the unconscious the parts that don't fit. Rather, the goal is to choose consciously which complex to live from at each moment, and in making this choice to consciously give up the others for that moment – to consciously sacrifice those parts that don't fit the unified whole, or at least to refrain from acting from them at that moment.

Thus in this imagery the complexes that do not fit with our new, transformed self are the usurpers that must be sacrificed, must be given up if we are to return home as a conscious, whole individual. Insofar as Odysseus' story is every person's story, what this means is that in order to live a transformed life, a life at a higher level of being, we must constantly discover the thing that we don't want to give up, the thing which we are refusing to sacrifice – and we must release it. And there is always something we are hanging on to – that we are refusing to sacrifice – that keeps us from changing, from moving to a new level of being.[140]

A Unified "I"

A middle eastern teacher from the early part of this century, George Gurdjieff, tries to make this point in a dramatic way:

> "One of man's important mistakes, one which must be remembered, is his illusion in regard to his I.
>
> "Man such as we know him,. . . cannot have a permanent and single I. His I changes as quickly as his thoughts, feelings, and moods, and he makes a profound mistake in considering himself always one and the same person; in reality he is *always a different person*, not the one he was a moment ago.
>
> "*Man has no permanent and unchangeable* I. Every thought, every mood, every desire, every sensation, says 'I.' And in each case it seems to be taken for granted that this I belongs to the *Whole*, to the whole man, and that a thought, a desire, or an aversion is expressed by this Whole. In actual fact there is no foundation whatever for this assumption. Man's every thought and desire appears and lives quite separately and independently of the Whole. . . . . Man has no individual I. But there are, instead, hundreds and thousands of separate

> small I's, very often entirely unknown to one another, never coming into contact, or, on the contrary, hostile to each other, mutually exclusive and incompatible. Each minute, each moment, man is saying or thinking 'I.' And each time his I is different. Just now it was a thought, now it is a desire, now a sensation, now another thought, and so on, endlessly. *Man is a plurality*. Man's name is legion."[A141]

Gurdjieff goes on to develop this point with an ancient story comparing the normal person to a vessel.

> "Let us imagine a vessel or a retort filled with various metallic powders. The powders are not in any way connected with each other and every accidental change in the position of the retort changes the relative position of the powders. If the retort be shaken or tapped with the finger, then the powder which was at the top may appear at the bottom or in the middle, while the one which was at the bottom may appear at the top. There is nothing permanent in the position of the powders and under such conditions there can be nothing permanent. This is an exact picture of our psychic life. Each succeeding moment, new influences may change the position of the powder which is on the top and put in its place another which is absolutely its opposite.
>
> As long as this state continues, there is no way to have a single identity, a single self. However, if a person is determined to have a stable identity, "The powders may be fused." "To do this a special kind of fire must be lighted under the retort which, by heating and melting the powders, finally fuses them together."[142]

In this system, then, if a person wishes to mold a consistent, individual identity from this chorus of competing "I's", it can be done. But it will be hard work. But through this work, this placing oneself in the "fire", gradually an individual identity will emerge in which the individual "I's" don't take turns being in control. Then one is an "individual". What is this "fire" that brings about such a transformation?

[A] Although Gurdjieff used the word "man" to talk about this process, he clearly meant it generically – meant it to include both men and women – for he worked with both men and women in this process.

The fire by means of which fusion is attained is produced by 'friction,' which in its turn is produced in man by the struggle between 'yes' and 'no.' If a man gives way to all his desires, or panders to them, there will be no inner struggle in him, no 'friction,' no fire. But if, for the sake of attaining a definite aim, he struggles with desires that hinder him, he will then create a fire which will gradually transform his inner world into a single whole.[143]

But "I" Don't Have Separate I's

If you would like a simple demonstration of the multiple "I's" within yourself, it is not difficult. Sit down comfortably in a quiet place, close your eyes, and make a simple resolution that you will concentrate on your breath for the next few moments. Muster all of the will and determination at your disposal, and resolve to keep your attention on your breathing through 10 complete breaths. The goal is to keep your attention on your breath the whole time – all the way in and all the way out.

Whoever "you" are at this moment, whoever is in charge, determine that it is very important to do this in order to demonstrate to yourself that you have the ability to make a decision about how you will spend your time, about where you will focus your attention. Resolve within yourself that it is important to do this experiment at least to discover if you do have an "I" who is in charge.

When you are ready, simply begin by taking a slow, deep in–breath, hold it for a comfortable moment, then breathe out slowly and deeply. Again pause for whatever time is naturally comfortable. That is one. Proceed with this process through 10 complete breaths. The hard part, the part that very few can accomplish, is to keep the attention only on the breath for 10 complete breaths. But try it. For this brief time, choose to concentrate your mind on your breath, and think about nothing else.

If you tried the experiment, one of three things happened:

1. You succeeded in thinking only about your breath during the entire time.

2. As you went along, all kinds of thoughts began to flood in. (Shall I go to the movies tonight? Why does my back ache? What time is that meeting? Did I feed the dog? Is my boss angry with me? Should I ask that cute man at the office to lunch? Etc. Etc. Etc.) However, in spite of this flood, you were able to maintain the count. But you were not able to maintain your attention or concentration on the breath.

3. Or, if you are like many of us on the first try, one particular thought, or a succession of thoughts, took you over, and began thinking you. The "you" who had decided to concentrate on your breath could not stay in charge through 10 breaths. Oh, you might have breathed 10 breaths, and counted them. But you did not keep your attention on the breathing. You kept up with the mechanical count, but the succession of "I's" attached to the different thoughts formed a parade in your mind, and "you" couldn't stop them. So which one is really "you".[B]

Psychologist Charles Tart commented on a similar experiment in his book *Waking Up*: "If you cannot use your will and awareness to do this simple, emotionally neutral exercise, what can you do in the real stress of real life?" He goes on to give these various I's a modern name:

> We will designate these various "I!"s by a term I introduced while studying states of consciousness: *identity state*. An identity state is a temporary constellation of psychological factors that has recognizable overall qualities that allow you . . . or outside observers to recognize it as a distinct entity. . . . An identity state, like any state of consciousness, is a construction. Selected characteristics (memories, objects of identification, propensity for certain moods, associated fantasies, certain skills, etc.) temporarily link together to function as a recognizable whole, a whole that has a distinct "flavor." This identity state then determines how you simulate the world around you, and thus how you perceive yourself and your world.[144]

To tie this thought back to our original point (and unabashedly mix several metaphors) in order to become whole, perhaps we must "kill" the suitors within – we must destroy their ability to take control of our lives – by melting them down in the fire of difficult, conscious choices. We must establish the central "complex" of our lives in the role of king, and put the usurpers in their proper place – sacrificing the ones that just don't belong.

[B] Many different writers have used such techniques in teaching people how to meditate. In fact, if you tried this experiment, you have just meditated. The best short description of this process I know is Lawrence LeShan's *How to Meditate*.

Or in a more straight-forward vein, if we wish to be whole we must become aware of our various "I's" – our competitive complexes, our incompatible identity states, and we must consciously choose which we will act from at each moment. And we must be willing to sacrifice the rest. And gradually from the heat of this effort, as this conscious sacrifice is made over and over, there will emerge from the mixture of many "I's" one unified, whole individual.

As this internal work is done, there will be a parallel movement in the way we live our lives out in the world, and especially in the choices we make about the people and things to which we give our time and energy. At this inner level, the suitors are symbolic, standing for the things in the outer world that distract us from our new self. As stated by Robert Milch, "For the new Odysseus to live in accordance with what he has learned and become during his adventure, it is necessary for outer things to be purged . . . so they can be harmonized with inner things."[145]

In other words, if we do accomplish an inner psychological transformation, it will not work to try to live our new lives in the same environment in which we lived the old. Part of the reason for a journey of transformation is to get away from all of the things in the world that bind us to, or at least incline us toward, old habits and patterns. After the journey, after the return, we can't just re-enter the same old world. We must change it. We must be discriminating and decisive. We must throw out those things that do not support our new being, we must give up the habits, people, pleasures, organizations, recreations, attitudes, and acquaintances that pull us back from our transformed selves into the old ways. And if we don't act decisively, if we don't act quickly and surely we will soon be pulled back into the patterns and attitudes of our old lives.

Humility in Victory

Back in the bloody hall, Odysseus' old nurse comes in and starts to rejoice at his triumph. But he commands,

> "Rejoice
> inwardly. No crowing aloud, old woman.
> To glory over the slain men is no piety.
> Destiny and the gods' will vanquished these,
> and their own hardness." (p. 422)

Still covered with the blood of his enemies, with the surge of battle still in his breast, Odysseus demands respect for the fallen and gives credit for his victory to the gods. How far we have come from the young man so full of himself and his triumphs with the Kyklopes. Here is a man who no longer needs to "take credit," but who recognizes that in some way he is but an instrument in the play of destiny. Through hard internal work, he has aligned himself with destiny and the gods. Because of this, he can at the final moment enter into this great battle with a deep confidence, as opposed to the personal arrogance masquerading as confidence that characterized the suitors.

As we have seen, this is not a man who has done battle primarily out of anger or pride, envy or greed. In fact, one of the best tests of internal growth might be whether these emotions still take us over from time to time, or whether something greater in us can rule them when they arise, and let them be expressed only when appropriate. In this sense, here is a man who is in touch with his higher Self – Jung's term for that deep part of each of us that is greater than our individual ego. In this view, by coming to recognize the difference between our ego self and our higher Self, we can gradually develop a healthy balance between the demands and viewpoints of each.

Here then is a man who sees a clear separation between his ego and the greater forces at play around him. How common it is for most of us to take credit – at least in our own minds – for the good things that occur in our lives, or in our vicinity. Then we blame the bad events on luck, destiny, fate, or others. But still flushed with victory, Odysseus turns his nurse's attention – and ours – to destiny and the gods. Thus we have here a man who can separate his small ego, from the numinous, Jung's term for the forces in which we are all imbedded but which we cannot control.

Purification

Back in our story, Odysseus asks the faithful nurse which of the maids had betrayed Penélopê and aligned themselves with the suitors. She tells him that out of 50, twelve have betrayed his house. These are called for, and after they have cleaned the hall, they are put to death. One other servant, who aided the suitors in the battle, is cruelly killed, and then the killing is done. Viewing the maids as external characters, with this final killing I again feel shock. It helps to remember that only traitors were

killed. It helps to realize that no one innocent was killed, as opposed to so many examples given before. Yet I long for an act of compassion, such as that shown by Lincoln when the Civil War was done. Is this my timidity in the face of the need for establishing moral law? Is it just that I was raised differently? Or is this urge for compassion a gain by humanity since the time of Homer? How would we express such compassion while still maintaining our moral order today?

At the inner level, who are the maids, and why are they killed? As before, perhaps they stand for the negative feminine elements that Odysseus has absorbed in all his years of incorporating the feminine within himself. It might arise as a tendency to give in when he should stand his ground. It might be the desire to compromise when courage and determination are called for. It could be a tendency toward maudlin sentimentality, as opposed to the true value of feeling and expressing his real emotions.

With this act, Odysseus is purifying himself as well as the manor hall of the unhealthy feminine traits he has incorporated, so that henceforth the positive feminine traits he has successfully integrated will come forth when the feminine side of his nature is expressed. (In exactly the same way, Penélopê will have to release the negative masculine traits she has incorporated, leaving the positive masculine alive and functioning within her nature).

The Ultimate Union

The cleansing and purification of the hall is completed, the last symbolic step in sweeping away the old, corrupt influences so the new, transformed man can live in harmony with his world. This done, Odysseus sends for all those who have remained faithful to the true king and his house, and a quiet, wonderful reunion occurs.

> . . . [A]ll the servants came now, bearing torches
> in twilight, crowding to embrace Odysseus,
> taking his hands to kiss, his head and shoulders,
> while he stood there, nodding to every one,
> and overcome by longing and by tears. (p. 425)

At the outer level, this scene is the natural fulfillment of the return of a beloved King. At the internal level, it is the equally moving image of all the different parts of ourselves – including many of our weaker parts – being accepted and embraced, after they have demonstrated their loyalty and allegiance to the true King within.

The preliminaries done, we come to that magnificent moment for which Odysseus has been waiting 20 years. (Come to think of it, symbolically speaking, for which we have each been waiting our whole lives.) It is time for the ultimate reunion, the reunion with Penélopê. It is the moment of the uniting of the opposites within and without. How will they act? Will they fall instantly into each other's arms? Will they remain excruciatingly cautious as they have in the past? Let's watch!

Reunion with Penélopê

The old nurse who had washed Odysseus' feet and recognized his scar is sent to bring Penélopê. Finding her asleep, she cries:

> "Wake,
> wake, dear child! Penélopê, come down,
> see with your own eyes what all these years you longed for!
> Odysseus is here! Oh in the end, he came!
> And he has killed your suitors, killed them all

who made his house a bordel and ate his cattle
and raised their hands against his son!" (p. 429)

Hmmm, sleep again, at a crucial moment! This time, we find Penélopê asleep as the battle rages. Symbolically, this sleep is comparable to Odysseus' sleep on his boat ride home – a sleep to demark a final transformation, a final step in Penélopê's own inner journey to wholeness. As with Odysseus, to mark this final passage she sleeps, and can later say that she "had not dozed away so tranquilly since my lord went to war" (p. 429). And from this sleep she will awaken to the reunion she has done so much to make possible through her own years of effort.

However, when she hears the news, she does not immediately rush downstairs into Odysseus' arms. This is a very circumspect lady. Could the gods be playing a trick on her? Could Odysseus really have triumphed over so many suitors? And if he has, who is this man who has been gone for 20 years. Who has he become? What have these 20 years done to him, and to their relationship?

The nurse assures her that it truly is Odysseus, and that he really has conquered all the suitors. She says she did not see how it happened, but when it was over:

. . . Telémakhos came to the door and called me-
your own dear son, sent this time by his father!
So I went out, and found Odysseus
erect, with dead men littering the floor
this way and that. If you had only seen him!
It would have made your heart glow hot! – a lion
splashed with mire and blood. (p. 430)

But the thoughtful heroine restrains her nurse:

"Do not lose yourself
in this rejoicing: wait: you know
how splendid that return would be for us,
how dear to me, dear to his son and mine;
but no, it is not possible, your notion
must be wrong.
Some god has killed the suitors,
a god, sick of their arrogance and brutal
malice . . . (p. 431)

The nurse is a bit put out by this relentless wariness. She scolds Penélopê:

> "How queer, the way you talk!
> Here he is, large as life, by his own fire,
> and you deny he ever will get home!
> Child, you always were mistrustful!" (p. 431)

Assuring Penélopê that it is truly Odysseus, the nurse recounts her discovery of the scar as she washed his feet. Fully exasperated now, she cries:

> "Come down,
> I stake my life on it, he's here
> ! Let me die in agony if I lie!" (p. 431)

But the nurse does not have to judge who this man "really" is. It is enough for her that it is the physical body of Odysseus. But who is inside that form? Who will Penélopê meet if she takes this man into her heart? Has he become the man for whom she has waited so long, the man who can join her in her own wholeness. Has he learned patience through and through? Has he learned to accept as valid her point of view, even if it seems unreasonable? Has he learned to truly honor and respect the feminine? Or has some shallow "imposter" grown up within that aging form. The time to find out has come.

> She turned then to descend the stair, her heart
> in tumult. Had she better keep her distance
> and question him, her husband? Should she run
> up to him, take his hands, kiss him now?
> Crossing the door sill she sat down at once
> in firelight, against the nearest wall,
> across the room from the lord Odysseus.
> There
> leaning against a pillar, sat the man
> and never lifted up his eyes, but only waited
> for what his wife would say when she had seen him.
> And she, for a long time, sat deathly still
> in wonderment – for sometimes as she gazed
> she found him – yes, clearly – like her husband,
> but sometimes blood and rags were all she saw. (p. 432)

And so they sat, until the tension became unbearable to their son Telémakhos. Since he had already come to know to his own satisfaction who his father was, he could not understand the turmoil within his mother, the question she must answer. From his point of view, if he knew all he needed to know, why didn't she? With the impetuousness of youth he cries:

> "Mother,
> cruel mother, do you feel nothing,
> drawing yourself apart this way from Father?
> Will you not sit with him and talk and question him?
> What other woman could remain so cold?
> Who shuns her lord, and he come back to her
> from wars and wandering, after twenty years?
> Your heart is hard as flint and never changes!"
> Penélopê answered:
> "I am stunned, child.
> I cannot speak to him. I cannot question him.
> I cannot keep my eyes upon his face.
> If really he is Odysseus, truly home,
> beyond all doubt we two shall know each other
> better than you or anyone. There are
> secret signs we know, we two" (p. 432).

Perhaps Telémakhos does not understand Penélopê's wariness, but Odysseus does. Has he not been equally wary through his own long journey? Thus, a smile came his lips and he instructed Telémakhos:

> "Peace: let your mother test me at her leisure" (p. 432).

Then, with the mastery of himself which he had gained through all these years, Odysseus tore his attention from Penélopê and turned to the peril at hand – the families of the suitors. Since no one had escaped to tell the families what had transpired, he instructed that the manor be given a festive air, as if a party were in progress. This would give him time to spend with Penélopê before the families arrived.

The Symbolic Marriage Bed

Symbolically speaking, what are we to make of this encounter? If we think of all of the figures as parts of Odysseus, perhaps we could say that the mature masculine and the mature feminine within are making their final union, the alliance from which Odysseus will live the rest of his life. If so, both sides are aware, especially the feminine side, that things are not always what they seem on the surface. Has his masculine side really let go of its fantasies and illusions? Has the masculine side really replaced ambition and pride with humility and compassion? Is the masculine within truly ready to accept a union of equality with the feminine side of his nature? Of course the young masculine side of his nature, represented by Telémakhos, does not understand this caution. The immature masculine in Odysseus wants the feminine to come running submissively. But clearly the mature, balanced masculine is in charge, and that part of him understands the caution of his feminine side. Thus he accepts with a smile the necessary testing.

Before this final step, however, the blood and mire of battle must be removed. Odysseus must wash away the stains of war, and prepare himself for the meeting of their hearts. He goes to be bathed, and exchanges the rags for clothes to fit the occasion. Returning to the hall, he takes his seat in the exact spot he had been sitting. Penélopê has not moved. The final meeting is at hand. But what is the peril here? Why the need for so much caution? At the external level, perhaps we should ask if there is not great peril for anyone who would truly open, to the deepest depths, their heart and life to another. What if the other rejects that deepest, most hidden part? What if the other is not who they seem to be? What if they change once they are accepted into the deepest recesses of the heart? Yet if the risk is not taken, there can be no true relationship. Our drama unfolds. Our hero and heroine take the final step to truly "know" each other.

> "Strange woman,
> the immortals of Olympus made you hard,
> harder than any. Who else in the world
> would keep aloof as you do from her husband
> if he returned to her from years of trouble,
> cast on his own land in the twentieth year?
> Nurse, make up a bed for me to sleep on.
> Her heart is iron in her breast." (p. 434)

To this somewhat strange request, to make up a separate bed at this very moment, Penélopê finally speaks:

> "Strange man,
> if man you are . . . This is no pride on my part
> nor scorn for you – not even wonder, merely.
> I know so well how you – how he – appeared
> boarding the ship for Troy. But all the same . . .
>
> Make up his bed for him, Eurykleia.
> Place it outside the bedchamber my lord
> built with his own hands. Pile the big bed
> with fleeces, rugs, and sheets of purest linen." (pp.434-435)

Thus with a self-possession that is the match of even Odysseus', at a time when her emotions must be overwhelming, Penélopê coolly tests this man who claims to be her true husband one last time. A final test to learn as much as she can learn about who he really has become. She had acted on her best judgment that he was Odysseus when she gave him the bow. Now she has one last test to discover for sure if it is her Odysseus, and if so, to see who he has become through all these years. Test him how? As with the earlier encounter at the foot bath, we must imagine the scene as a drama. As Penélopê finally begins to let down the protective barriers that have been in place so long, to let her pent-up emotions burst forth:

"I know so well how you – how he – appeared boarding the ship for Troy," she coolly pauses, "But all the same, make up his bed for him outside the bedchamber my lord built with his own hands."

So what is the test? Their bed could not be moved, for it had been built by Odysseus' own hand, and no other man knew that one of the bedposts was carved from the trunk of an old olive tree on the spot where it stood, roots still embedded in the earth.

It is thrilling to imagine the drama for the audience – the pause, the nonchalant instruction to the maid, "But all the same ... Make up his bed for him... outside the bedchamber."

For this test, Odysseus is ready, perhaps had even set it up by his request for a bed. Thus with a mixture of understanding and indignation at her caution he responds to

the test. (His immature part must be saying huffily: "Why, the nerve of her. She should recognize the real me immediately!")

> "Woman, by heaven you've stung me now!
> Who dared to move my bed?
> No builder had the skill for that – unless
> a god came down to turn the trick. No mortal
> in his best days could budge it with a crowbar.
> There is our pact and pledge, our secret sign,
> built into that bed – my handiwork
> and no one else's!
> An old trunk of olive
> grew like a pillar on the building plot,
> and I laid out our bedroom round that tree,
> lined up the stone walls, built the walls and roof,
> gave it a doorway and smooth-fitting doors.
> Then I lopped off the silvery leaves and branches,
> hewed and shaped that stump from the roots up
> into a bedpost, drilled it, let it serve
> as model for the rest. I planed them all,
> inlaid them all with silver, gold and ivory,
> and stretched a bed between – a pliant web
> of oxhide thongs dyed crimson.
> There's our sign!
> I know no more. Could someone else's hand
> have sawn that trunk and dragged the frame away?" (p. 435)

After the years of waiting, after all the loneliness and despair, after moments of losing all hope, after all the wariness and restraint, Penélopê <u>knew</u> that it was truly Odysseus – her Odysseus.

> Their secret! As she heard it told, her knees
> grew tremulous and weak, her heart failed her.
> With eyes brimming tears she ran to him,
> throwing her arms around his neck, and kissed him,
> murmuring:
> "Do not rage at me, Odysseus!
> No one ever matched your caution! Think
> what difficulty the gods gave: they denied us

life together in our prime and flowering years,
kept us from crossing into age together.
Forgive me, don't be angry. I could not
welcome you with love on sight! I armed myself
long ago against the frauds of men,
impostors who might come – and all those many
whose underhanded ways bring evil on!
Helen of Argos, daughter of Zeus and Leda,
would she have joined the stranger, lain with him,
if she had known her destiny? known the Akhaians
in arms would bring her back to her own country?
Surely a goddess moved her to adultery,
her blood unchilled by war and evil coming,
the years, the desolation; ours, too.
But here and now, what sign could be so clear
as this of our own bed?
No other man has ever laid eyes on it . . .
. . . You make my stiff heart know that I am yours." (pp. 435-436)

With this one last sign, the caution is done. Penélopê concludes, "You make my stiff heart know that I am yours."

Whoever Odysseus now is she accepts him into her heart. The decision is made. She opens her heart. And our hero is fully ready for this meeting, for through all the trials he has learned to open his own heart wide.

Now from his breast into his eyes the ache
of longing mounted, and he wept at last,
his dear wife, clear and faithful, in his arms,
longed for
as the sunwarmed earth is longed for by a swimmer
spent in rough water where his ship went down
under Poseidon's blows, gale winds and tons of sea.
Few men can keep alive through a big surf
to crawl, clotted with brine, on kindly beaches
in joy, in joy, knowing the abyss behind:
and so she too rejoiced, her gaze upon her husband,
her white arms round him pressed as though forever. (pp. 436)

What a magnificent scene of homecoming, of the meeting of a whole man and a whole woman in complete knowledge and recognition of each other – in complete harmony and understanding.

But let us leave our glorious couple in their embrace for a moment and reflect once again: Why this last test, why the test of the bedpost? Why the constant wariness and caution in approaching loved ones?

One reason is certainly a practical one. Greek history, as well as most history, is full of examples of betrayal, deceit, and dishonesty within royal families. We are reminded of this many times within *The Odyssey*, when we are told of the betrayal of Agamémnon by his wife. Wives plot against husbands, sons revolt against fathers, brothers go to war against brothers. This is the backdrop of the caution.

At another level, Penélopê gives us guidance for our understanding:

> . . . I could not
> welcome you with love on sight! I armed myself
> long ago against the frauds of men,
> imposters who might come – and all those many
> whose underhanded ways bring evil on! (p. 436)

It can be a very treacherous world, full of those skilled at seeming to be what they are not, and who they are not. If one is to remain loyal to a person, a cause, or even an idea over a long period of time, one must arm oneself against the frauds that will inevitably besiege true loyalty – the honey-coated voices within and without that say, "It would be all right just to –," "no-one could expect me not to," "this is really all right because," etc. To remain loyal, one must arm oneself inwardly and be cautious, circumspect, careful. This is especially true as we begin to realize the full power of our own fantasies and illusions. At any given moment our fantasies can take hold of us, and at that moment we begin to aid and abet those around us who would lead us astray. And just this is the greatest danger. Because each of us at any given moment can fall prey to our own illusions and fantasies, we can at those moments be swept away from our true path by those who are only too willing to encourage our fantasies for their own reasons. As Penélopê says of Helen, concerning her actions that caused the Trojan war: "Surely a goddess moved her to adultery. . .” (p. 436)

If we consider for the moment the gods and goddesses as the inner voices of our own complexes, we see that these voices sometimes speak wisdom, and sometimes they speak for our fantasies and illusions. And when a fantasy complex is center stage in our lives, it will surely fail to see, does not want to see, the consequences of the actions being encouraged. Thus we must arm ourselves against our own fantasies and illusions if we are to be true to another, or to ourselves. And we must be aware that at any given moment, anyone else in the world might be motivated by their own fantasies and illusions. Thus we must be wary – we must make discriminating judgments about the motives of others, as well as our own. (There is a wonderful example of the need for this caution in Shakespeare's' *Cyberline*, where a suitor uses every trick imaginable to seduce the faithful wife Imogen. Her husband, being caught in a complex of pride and jealousy, aids the seducer in his attempt at seduction. Certainly a situation calling for great circumspection on the part of a faithful wife. Imogen, however, demonstrates real wisdom in her response. She is another great example of a heroine who outshines those around her, and in so doing raises everyone she touches to a higher level of consciousness).

Being circumspect, however, does not mean we must be overly cautious – paranoid – seeing evil or ill intention where it does not exist. Here, as in most spheres of human life, we must find the healthy balance. We must be able to act with trust when the moment for trust has come. In our story, Penélopê rises to this challenge twice: first, when she puts the bow in the hands of the stranger, acting on the best judgment she can muster that this is Odysseus – without being totally sure; and second, when she hears the secret of the marriage bed, she removes all restraint and opens her heart.

One last look at the need for wariness, from the point of view of our inner journey. At many points along the way we might think, "Aha!, this is it. I have found the answers. I see everything clearly now," only to fall again, only to discover that we are lost again. Perhaps we had gained a piece of the puzzle, but we were not yet ready for our true homecoming. There was more to be learned.

At these times, our inner guide, our anima, our Penélopê, must have proof that we have truly reached the point of wholeness. She will not accept just anyone who claims to be Odysseus. She must have proof. It must be clear that we are truly whole, that we are the whole and complete Odysseus, before there can be the final reunion, the final "mysterium conjuctionus."

The Mysterious Planting of the Oar – Again

Can you feel it? The breezes of time are stirring once again, so let us return to our royal couple in their embrace at the bedchamber door. And as we might have come to expect from our circumspect pair, they do not just rush inside to the royal bed. First Odysseus must warn Penélopê of one more crucial trial.

> "My dear, we have not won through to the end.
> One trial – I do not know how long – is left for me
> to see fulfilled." (p. 437)

And before they consummate their reunion in their marriage bed, (would we have expected anything different from our Penélopê?) she insists upon knowing what this last trial will be. And he respects her wish:

> "Teirêsias told me I must take an oar
> and trudge the mainland, going from town to town
> until I discover men who have never known
> the salt blue sea, nor flavor of salt meat . . ."(p. 437)

Recalling this central message of the journey to Hades, Odysseus was told that once the time came, he must continue inland for however long it takes, until some stranger falling in with him shall say:

> " 'A winnowing fan, that on your shoulder, sir?'
> There I must plant my oar, on the very spot,
> with burnt offerings to Poseidon of the Waters:
> a ram, a bull, a great buck boar. ' (p. 438)

Next, he must return home and make full sacrifices to all the gods, one by one. When all this has been accomplished, only then can he live out his remaining years, till:

> ". . . death will drift upon me
> from seaward, mild as air, mild as your hand,
> in my well-tended weariness of age,
> contented folk around me on our island." (p. 438)

Thus, after so many tests, so many years of trial and struggle, Odysseus finally reaches home, and there succeeds in his last great battle, overcoming the hundred suitors. But in order to reach the final goal, a peaceful and "well-tended" old age, he must accomplish this one last trial – he must plant an oar in a land that does not

know the sea. This task surely must be of momentous importance in our story, because it is the central instruction he receives in his journey to Hades, and it is the one crucial message he feels compelled to tell his wife before all else. But what can it possibly mean? We are given few clues in the story as it comes down to us. What is the meaning of this final task, this planting of the oar?

Having waited so long for this answer already, however, perhaps one more slight delay can't do any harm. And Penélopê and Odysseus have waited so long for their reunion. Let's get out of the way and let them consummate their meeting and enjoy each other. Back in the manor, the challenge of the planting of the oar being told:

> . . . they came
> into that bed so steadfast, loved of old,
> opening glad arms to one another. . .
> . . . The royal pair mingled in love again
> and afterward lay reveling in stories;
> hers of the siege her beauty stood at home
> from arrogant suitors. . . (pp. 438-439)

and he,

> . . . of what hard blows he had dealt out to others
> and of what blows he had taken, all that story. (p. 438)

And, as in all such profound moments, time stood still, for:

> . . . Athena slowed the night
> when night was most profound,
> and held the Dawn
> under the Ocean of the East." (p. 437)

Command Yourself

When their night of love and reunion is done, Odysseus and his three companions set out to find his father in the country. What he finds is a man,

> . . . wasted by years, racked, bowed under grief. (p. 452)

On seeing this sight:

> The son passed by a tall pear tree and wept,

> then inwardly debated: should he run
> forward and kiss his father, and pour out
> his tale of war, adventure, and return
> or should he first interrogate him, test him?
> Better that way, he thought –
> first draw him out with sharp words, trouble him. (p. 452)

But after only a little of this testing, his father groaned,

> . . . and the groan went to the son's heart. A twinge
> prickling up through his nostrils warned Odysseus
> he could not watch this any longer.
> He leaped and threw his arms around his father,
> kissed him, and said:
> "Oh, Father, I am he!
> Twenty years gone, and here I've come again
> to my own land!" (p. 454)

At the inner level, what could we say about this reunion of father and son? Perhaps the father stands for the part of Odysseus that is weak, and overcome with age and grief. Perhaps he is the image of a man who has not integrated the feminine, but has collapsed into its negative aspects in his old age. Or perhaps the father stands for feelings that Odysseus has had to push away in order to continue the struggle, for if he had given in to them he might have given up long ago. If so, then perhaps this image conveys that when the right moment comes, we must let in our grief, let in our weakness, and embrace it – even love it. So perhaps Odysseus is honoring and embracing all the sadnesses and griefs he has had to push away in order to fight his last great battle.

The Cast of Characters – Inner and Outer

Now that Odysseus has finished the reunions with the main characters in the story, let's look one last time at the meaning of these encounters. I believe it is valuable to think of these characters both as independent figures in their own right, as well as inner parts of Odysseus. Viewing them as independent figures, we can learn much about possible ways of dealing with other people in our own lives. By using the situations in the story as possible models for ourselves, both good and bad, we can test in our minds different ways we might behave in similar situations. By thinking

about these situations, and what we might have done if we had been in Odysseus' place, we prepare ourselves for the challenges of our own lives. And certainly by reading great stories from the past we can learn much about the values and customs of a different time and place, and see how well or ill we think those values and customs served.

But it is perhaps at the inner level that stories from other lands and other cultures have the greatest value. I believe Jung would argue that at the inner level – the level at which we make contact with the unconscious and the archetypes – human beings from different lands and different times are much more similar than they are on the surface, at the level of surface habits and customs.

At this inner level, what could we say about the main characters Odysseus has encountered since his return? Perhaps the loyal servants stand for those parts of ourselves that recognize the need for a ruling principle in our life, and are willing to give it support and loyalty. To follow Odysseus, an example in dealing with these aspects of ourselves, we would first test them to make sure they are truly what they seem, but then embrace them and give them guidance on how they might serve the greater cause.

The son might stand for the young male warrior, the part that is ready to assert, to fight, but which also needs guidance on how and when. The suitors in this view would be those masculine parts of ourselves that will not accept the guidance of the ruling principle, the parts which would constantly try to overthrow or subvert it, to lead us astray. If this story is any guide, then the most aggressive of these impulses must be sacrificed. However, their relatives, the families of the suitors – similar but less assertive impulses – can be spared if they are finally willing to make peace and swear their loyalty to the ruling power. The unfaithful maids would be the negative feminine traits that we inevitably take in when we open ourselves to the emergence of the feminine within. These too must be sacrificed.

As for the father, perhaps he stands for the frailties and weaknesses within us that must be finally acknowledged, accepted and embraced. Perhaps this reunion implies that we can never be perfect, and shouldn't even try to be, but must accept and embrace many of our fears and weaknesses. Not be ruled by them, as we perhaps once were. But we must accept them lovingly. Then they will perhaps blossom in positive ways – and help us with our future battles.

And Penélopê. She is such a magnificent character in her own right there is an urge to leave her purely as a separate person. But we started on an inner journey, so let us finish it so. At the inner level, Penélopê must be the ideal inner feminine, or at least one image of the ideal feminine within. Jung believed that the positive inner feminine served as a man's guide to his wholeness. In our story, then, she is that part which remains loyal to the possibility of the final union of wholeness – in spite of twenty years without any evidence and in the face of overwhelming pressure to abandon her truth. She is that side which can develop and use the mind without sacrificing tenderness and warmth. She is the feminine part that recognizes the need for a bow without giving up her compassion. She is that part which learns to be completely discriminating, that part which can once and for all tell when we have become wholly and truly ourselves. Finally, she is the feminine element within each man which must be fully valued and embraced if he is to be completely whole.

Permanent Vigilance

After the joyous reunion of father and son, there are still the families of the suitors to be dealt with. Some had accepted the wisdom of the blind seer, who warned the families after the battle that the suitors had gotten what they deserved. But one group vowed revenge, and went in search of Odysseus. When they discovered him at his father's hut, they attacked. But Odysseus was still aligned with fate, and with the gods. After a short skirmish, the families began to flee, but

> . . . with a cry to freeze their hearts
> and ruffling like an eagle on the pounce,
> the lord Odysseus reared himself to follow. . . (pp. 461-462)

But the goddess Athena, or his inner wisdom, instructed him:

> ". . . Odysseus, master of land ways and sea ways,
> command yourself. Call off this battle now . . ." (p. 462)

And with this instruction, he did command himself:

> "He yielded to her, and his heart was glad." (p. 462)

Thus, full of the hot blood of battle, Odysseus could turn in an instant and stop the battle with a glad heart – surely the mark of someone who has spent years of effort in learning to "command himself."

At the psychological level, why this last battle? If we view the "families" of the suitors as traces of complexes within that have been mastered, as "relatives" of the parts we have overcome, then perhaps it is a sign that even after we have overcome old attitudes and habits, they can still rise up at any moment and attempt to reassert their power over us. Thus we must be constantly prepared to defend our new self against the fears and weaknesses, the anxieties and desires that well up from within. We must maintain our vigilance with regard to the pull of the things of the world we have left behind, things which can and will attempt to reassert their position at any time in our lives.

At the same time, we must be equally prepared to recognize when the new, whole Self is again in charge, and be prepared to live in peace with our fears, weaknesses, and anxieties as long as they do not dominate our lives. Perhaps the message here is that we cannot ever as human beings expect to be perfect, and must accept our fears, anxieties and weaknesses as part of us, and not attempt to deny them or destroy them. Perhaps what we must learn is to keep them in their proper place, the proper perspective, and then to live in peace with them. So it was in our story. At the instruction of Athena, disguised as Mentor, a treaty of peace with the families was made, and the long journey home was at an end.[A]

[A] It is interesting that up to the final moment "Athena" is "in disguise", this time as the wise old Mentor. This certainly aids us in leaving open the question of just how we should understand the "gods."

21

The Last Stop on the Journey

All the battles are now done. The reunions have begun. And hopefully everyone lived happily ever after. But there is still the dangling thread – the mysterious, cryptic reference to the planting of the oar. It has twice, in the most profound moments of our story, occupied the central place. And yet, at least in the version of the story that has come down to us, nothing more is said. But perhaps to finish our modern day version, this is precisely the place to which we must return, especially if our goal is a deeper understanding of the search for meaning in our lives.

In the instruction, it was not suggested that this final trip with the oar would occur immediately. On the contrary, it seems to me that for the next period of his life – perhaps for several years – Odysseus re-ordered the kingdom, governed it wisely and well, and renewed all of his relationships. At the same time, he gradually let the effect of the battle and the killing recede from his life. Gradually he mellowed, as he let all of the powerful lessons work their way through and through his being. Only after this work was done would he be ready for the final journey.

To gain a better understanding of this mysterious end, let us return to a previous guide along our way, a "wise one" of our own day and time. One answer to this mystery that rings at least partly true, and which seems profound enough to explain the central role given this image in the story, is suggested by Helen Luke. In her deeply insightful book *Old Age,* she imagines Odysseus on his journey inland with the oar. After a long time, he meets the stranger who asks the crucial question, "What winnowing fan is that upon your shoulder?"[146] As they talk, the stranger asks Odysseus to think about the meaning of a winnowing fan. He replies, "Why, the winnowing fan is something that creates a wind whereby the chaff is separated from the grain at the time of harvest. What has that to do with an oar?"

The stranger, as imagined by Helen Luke, points out that the entire journey of Odysseus' life has been for the purpose of developing the ability to discriminate the wheat from the chaff in the daily living of his life. Further, he has been brought by

the seer who is blind to outer shapes, but who sees the meaning of things within, on this last journey precisely so he may recognize his own oar as a true winnowing fan.

Do you not know that your travels, your achievements and failures, the gains and losses to which your winged ship carried you were all slowly forging for you a "winnowing fan"? Now that the harvest is gathered and you stand in the autumn of your life, your oar is no longer a driving force carrying you over the oceans of your outer and inner worlds, but a spirit of discriminating wisdom separating moment by moment the wheat of life from the chaff, so that you may know in both wheat and chaff their meaning and their value in the pattern of the universe.[147]

The stranger, in Luke's imagination, points out that this final journey made no sense to Odysseus, seemed to be "chaff" blowing in the wind. But he undertook it anyway, because he at last fully trusted the blind seer hidden in his heart.

To grow out of this thought, throughout Odysseus' life the oar has been the one essential tool enabling him and all the men of his world to venture out, to conquer, to achieve, to gain wealth and fame and power. In the island world of his time, the oar is the perfect symbol of a man's outward journey, of the hero's journey out into life. It has in fact been used in just this way at least twice in our story; when the traitorous maid is insulting the disguised Odysseus, she mocks him for "putting your oar in, amid our men" (p. 346), which seems to mean for staying and engaging with the suitors rather sulking off as would befit his station; and during the visit to Hades, the sailor who had recently died pleaded with Odysseus to return to where his body lay unburied, and to:

> ". . . build a cairn for me above the breakers –
> an unknown sailor's mark for men to come.
> Heap up the mound there, and implant upon it
> the oar I pulled in life with my companions. (p. 187)

The clear implication here is that the oar is the final symbol of the life a person lives out into the world, and the planting of an oar on the grave is a sign that one has died to life in the world. After death, the planted oar stands as the memory of one's achievements in life.

But Odysseus is not dead. He is in fact being told to plant his <u>own</u> oar <u>before</u> his death. What could this mean, but that he is being asked to die to his life of ambition

and achievement? To mark this final passage, he is to plant his oar once and for all, in a place to which he will never return, so that he might then live out the rest of his years in harmony with the flow of the universe – that flow which stands beyond the reach of his personal achievement, beyond all his personal ego desires. The message seems to be that by releasing all attachment to further gain and achievement, he can finally align himself fully and completely with those forces greater than himself, and then live out the final stage of his life in the harmony of the universe – embedded within it. Or perhaps we could say that the harmony of life would then be living itself through him.

Another way to think this thought is to view the oar as a person's will – the need to assert oneself into life, to have an effect on it. It is the need to force life to recognize one's existence. But at some point, if we are to follow Odysseus, we must finally learn that there is an inner landscape which is beyond will, a place of pure "being." In that place, an oar would not be recognized. It serves no purpose there. And since death inevitably conquers every individual will, only when the will is completely left behind can one find true peace in the face of death. (This is the place beyond good and evil, beyond the dance of the opposites.)[148]

This interpretation is reinforced by the instruction he was given to make a sacrifice to Poseidon, his enemy among the gods, on the very spot where he planted the oar, then to return home and make a sacrifice to each of the gods, one by one. Again as imagined by Helen Luke,

> So Odysseus came home, and, day by day, he made offering to each of the gods in turn, under their Greek names and forms – names which differ in time and space throughout the centuries and in all the varying cultures of our world. They carry always for men and women the meanings of life, both human and divine, and in these final rites, Odysseus surely affirmed the wholeness of his life's journey, [as well as] his readiness to die.[149]

One further thought from Helen Luke's fertile rendering. When talking to the stranger at the crossroads, Odysseus asks why he should leave the oar, rather than taking it home to his son. Ms. Luke's imagined reply has to do with the age-old danger of parents trying to live out their ambitious through their children – and the wounding of the child that takes place when this occurs:

> To leave it is essential, Odysseus. If you were to put it in your son's hands, you would watch his sea-journey through life, transferring to him your yearning for great deeds; you would never let go of the goals of youth. Moreover you might thus prevent your son from carving his own oar from the wood, finding his own way.[150]

(Could this be part of what is meant in the Biblical image of the sins of the father being visited upon the son?)[151]

The Final Meaning for Odysseus

Thus, at the end of his life's journey – a journey that has seen almost as many highs and lows as the human imagination can hold, a journey that even involved pitting himself "against the gods' will" – Odysseus has come to the point where he must address the spiritual question fully and completely. He must come to final terms with the forces outside of his control – or even understanding – and he must come to them on their terms, not his own. He must sacrifice to each of the gods in turn, beginning with Poseidon, his sworn enemy. And there is no talk of compromise. He must surrender, for as Huston Smith argues in *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind*, it is only in the realm of material things that power and control can be virtues, while in life's higher reaches; "to be unable to give oneself to a person, a cause, the call of conscience, God, something – is to lack a capacity that is integral to being fully human"[152].

In every age and time, has not this been the final spiritual message? Do we not find in culture after culture the message that to enter into the serenity of old age, the "peace that passeth understanding,"[153] a person must die to their ambitions and achievements, and place their attention on something beyond their ego goals? Is this not what is meant by the admonition "Die before you die?"[154]

Some interpretations of this message seem to be that each person should give up their ego ambitions <u>now</u>, and immediately seek the Kingdom of Heaven, or Nirvana, or Enlightenment. However, if we look around us we discover that most people – even those who profess such goals – spend most of their time pursuing earthly ambitions. And where you invest your time, that is your true priority.

Given the way most people live their lives, one virtue of *The Odyssey* is the balance that it strikes between living out one's life fully in this world – this human life – over

against the call of the religious quest. As opposed to the models calling for the seeker to renounce this world for whatever is beyond immediately, *The Odyssey* paints a picture of a gradual coming to terms with the spiritual question through undertaking life's adventures. With the right attitude. *The Odyssey* seems to value both the call of this human life, as well as the call of whatever there is beyond. Perhaps for most of us, only such a balanced approach can ever really succeed. For most, to attempt to renounce the world before one "knows oneself" is to invite one's unconscious to use religious words and justifications to pursue worldly desires.

The Odyssey, however, is certainly not the only place we discover such an image. At the end of one of the greatest novels of all time, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, we find the hero experiencing, after his on tumultuous journey, what I perceive as a taste of the same possibility:

The very question that had formerly tormented him, the thing he had continually sought to find- the aim of life- no longer existed for him now. That search for the aim of life had not merely disappeared temporarily- he felt that it no longer existed for him and could not present itself again. And the very absence of aim gave him the complete, joyous sense of freedom which constituted his happiness.[155]

Why is this similar to Odysseus' final state? Tolstoy proceeds:

And by old habit he asked himself the question: "Well, and what then? What am I going to do?" And he immediately gave himself the answer: "Well, I shall live. Ah, how splendid!"[156]

Tolstoy's Pierre, like Odysseus, reached the place where he could just live each moment, free of ambition. He could just "live" and experience the immediate moment as "splendid."

Of course, this is not the image of growing old that we most often encounter – at least in Western culture today. Old age in our culture is often seen as a place of bitterness, of loneliness, of increasing irritability and crabbiness – a place of fading powers and failing memory. But each of us knows, or at least knows of, someone who moved into old age in a different way, a person who with increasing years became wiser and clearer – who increasingly gave off a sense of serenity, of peace, of joy. All cultures have this image – and most people have encountered at least one person who

approaches this possibility. And just this condition is the final end pictured for Odysseus.

But it is important to remember that for Odysseus, this condition was reached through his engagement in the world, through the trials, tests, and tribulations he encountered along the way, and through his maturing response to them. And it must be ever remembered that the prophecy foresaw that he would come to this place only after the final planting of his oar, after his final surrender.

For those of us who feel the need to undertake this journey, this quest for meaning, perhaps we will also arrive at this final step – at the planting of our oar. Perhaps, when we have sufficiently learned life's lessons, we will reach the point at which we have the chance to make our final peace with the universe. Then, after we have shown our respect for the mystery in which we are embedded, perhaps we too will come to a final understanding of who we are and what life is about. Perhaps that which did not yield its secrets to our striving, will, because of our striving, yield when we cease to strive. Perhaps only then will we live out our final years as Helen Luke imagined Odysseus living out his:

> In the time that followed I imagine the old Greek living the same simple life in the mode of his time, as so many in other times and cultures who have experienced the return of innocence. It is a life, we may imagine, both wholly symbolic and yet wholly natural, empty yet full, spontaneous as a child's, yet constantly chosen. "Love and do as you will," in St. Augustine's words. Thus, as Teirêsias saw, he would grow into rich old age until, when weighted with the length of years yet light as a breath of wind, death would come gently to him out of the sea.[157]

Perhaps for each of us, insofar as we undertake with Odysseus this journey to wholeness, we too will grow into "rich old age," surrounded by those who have been touched by and can honor the wholeness of our lives (our true "country folk"). And when we, and those about us, are at peace with this next natural step of our lives, perhaps then we too will find a death "mild as air" when we "are wearied out with rich old age" our "country folk in blessed peace around" us – in our true home.

postscript

Our play is done. Whatever meaning and guidance comes down to us through the filters and amplifiers of the consciousnesses of scores of interpreters through 3,000 years now rests squarely in your hands – or within your heart and mind.

What answer does it provide to our initial question? Perhaps that is the secret which cannot be directly spoken, but can only be whispered through the example of the living of one's life. Perhaps the purpose of the great stories of humankind is simply to bring up the fundamental issues which continually arise in the living of life. If they deal with them well (not necessarily providing answers, but giving us hints and clues); if they suggest possible approaches to life's dilemmas; if they provide images that come alive which we can follow, or rebel against, or compare ourselves to; then they have succeeded. If a particular story hangs around for centuries, or for millennium, then it must provide this service exceptionally well. With such a story, we each have the opportunity to grapple with our individual meaning through a tool that has been perfected for this purpose.

Such is the story of Odysseus and Penélopê. Millions of people in different cultures for 3,000 years have jumped in and swam in the river of this story, and have been entertained, distracted, and infuriated – and perhaps occasionally enlightened. Just so is your possibility.

May it serve you well.

[1] Muriel Rukheyser

[2] Creative Mythology

[3] Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane

[4] Transitions, p. 47

[5] Elliot, *Needs Reference*

[6] Masks of God

[7] Transitions, P. 51

[8] Masks of God, p. 168

[9] Elliot, *Four Quartets*, p. 54

[10] Helen Luke, Old Age, p.4

[11] Occidental Mythology, p. 162

[12] St. Augustine, Sermons, p. 43

[13] In Midlife, p.99

[14] In Midlife, p. 102

[15] Murray Stein, p. 102

[16] ibid, 107-108

[17] Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 141

[18] Stein, p. 121

[19] New American Standard Bible, John 3:7

[20] *The Great Mother*, Erich Neumann, p. 72

[21] *The Great Mother*, Erich Neumann, p. 332

[22] *The Great Mother,* Erich Neumann, as quoted from Zimmer, "The Indian World Mother," p. 81.

[23] *The Great Mother*, Erich Neumann, p. 153

[24] Dillard, Annie, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek,* p. ___ [Reference]

[25] *The Great Mother*, Erich Neumann, p. 332

[26] *The Great Mother*, Erich Neumann, p. 334

[27] Joseph Campbell, Oriental Mythology, p. 165

[28] Goethe, *Faust*, p. 152

[29] Jung's Quest for Wholeness, Curtis B. Smith, p. 42

[30] Psychology of the Unconscious, Jung, p. 284

[31] Valerie Andrews article, p. 88

[32] Jung's Quest for Wholeness, Curtis B. Smith, p. 43

[33] Valerie Andrews article, p. 88

[34] Psychology of the Unconscious, Jung, p. 391

[35] Luke 14:26

[36] Valerie Andrews article

[37] Transitions, p. 48

[38] Ibid, 48

[39] Thoreau, Henry D., *Walden*, p. 65

[40] Night and Sleep, Rumi, p. 26

[41] Occidental Mythology, Joseph Campbell, p. 168

[42] T.S. Eliot, The Four Quartets, p. 57

[43] Hamlet, "To Be or Not to Be" soliloquy

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Look up page, line

[47] Bridges, p. 50

[48] Bridges, pp. 49-50

[49] Bridges, p. 50

[50] *The Sickness Unto Death*, p. 163

[51] Elliott, *Four Quartets*, p. 27

[52] Rumi, *We Are There,* p. 17

[53] Phillip Moffitt said this well in a speech he gave in 1986.

[54] Shah, pp. [Insert page # here]

[55] van der Post, Laurens, Yet Being Someone Other. William Morrow, 1982, p. 73.

[56] Cliff Notes, p. 28.

[57] T.S. Elliot, LOOK UP

[58] C.G. Jung, LOOK UP

[59] Following the thought of Immanuel Kant.

[60] Campbell, Joseph, LOOK UP

[61] Jim Jones reference, LOOK UP

[62] C.G. Jung, LOOK UP

[63] Wm. James, LOOK UP

[64] Charles Williams, LOOK UP

[65] Thoreau, p. 57

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Thoreau, LOOK UP

[71] Luke 6:41-42

[72] LOOK UP

[73] Pascal, B., in Modern Philosophy, NEED BIBLIO INFO, David has text, p. 318.

[74] LOOK UP

[75] LOOK UP reference – article sent by Stephan?

[76] Macintyre, p. 195.

[77] LOOK UP

[78] Huston Smith in Forgotte Truth and Beyond the Post-Modern Mind, and E.F. Schumacker in A Guide for the Perplexed develop this thought exceptionally well.

[79] Toms, Michael, WHO? REFERENCE?

[80] Thoreau, REFERENCE?

[81] Socrates, REFERENCE?

[82] Jung, Collected Works, Vol. 9, No. l, p. 44.

[83] Eliot, Four Quartets.

[84] Shakespeare, Hamlet, *III:i*

[85] Moore, R., King, Warrior, Magician, Lover, LOOK UP FULL REFERENCE

[86] In Search of the Miraculous? LOOK UP REFERENCE

[87] Cliff, p. 20

[88] Fitzgerald, Robert, "Postscript" to *The Odyssey,* (1998), pp. 449-500

[89] Ibid, p. 500

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid., pp. 500-501

[93] Ibid., p. 501

[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid., pp. 501-502

[98] Ibid., p. 502

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid., p. 503

[106] Ibid.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Ibid., p. 504

[111] Ibid.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid., p. 505

[114] Ibid., pp. 504-505

[115] Ibid., p. 505

[116] Ibid.

[117] Ibid., pp. 505-506

[118] Phillip [Complete Ref.]

[119] Quote on "Nothing left to be discovered…"

[120] Aryeh Maidenbaums Discussion

[121] *Higher Creativity* and *Margin of Reality*

[122] LOOK UP REFERENCE

[123] LOOK UP REFERENCE

[124] Campbell, J., *The Mythic Image*, p. xi – Check this

[125] Shakespeare, Wm., *The Tempest, III, iv*

[126] LOOK UP REFERENCE

[127] Campbell, J., *The Mythic Image*, p. xi

[128] Reference translation?

[129] Eliot, T.S., p.59

[130] Phillip

[131] LOOK UP REFERENCE

[132] There is a good discussion of this thought by E. F. Schumacher in *A Guide for the Perplexed.* p. ___.

[133] Huxley, p. viii

[134] Huxley, p. vii-ix. [CHECK THIS.]

[135] Ibid. [CHECK THIS.]

[136] Huxley, p. ix.

[137] Fitzgerald, pp. 497-498

[138] Bridges, *Transitions Making Sense of Life's Changes,* p. 51

[139] LOOK UP

[140] This thought was captured and stated beautifully by my wife in a conversation one day.

[141] *In Search of the Miraculous*, p. 59

[142] Ibid, p. ??

[143] Ibid, p. 43.

[144] Waking Up, p. 119.

[145] Cliff's Notes on Homer's *The Odyssey*, p. 47

[146] Luke, Old Age, p. 17.

[147] Luke, Old Age, pp. 18-19.

[148] Moffitt, p. XX

[149] Luke, Old Age, p. 22

[150] Luke, Old Age, p. 19

[151] Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 5:9

[152] Smith, p. 86

[153] Phillipians 4:7

[154] The admonition to "die before you die" is from a Rabia poem, but she states that it is from the words of the prophet Mohammed in the Qu'ran

[155] Tolstoy, *War and Peace,* p. 1228.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Luke, Old Age, p. 24