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Transitions as Liminal and Archetypal Situations

From a lecture delivered
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My topic is about transitions or the stuff out of which life is made, liminal and archetypal situations. The word “liminal” refers to being over the threshold but not through to the other side. It comes from the Latin word “limen” meaning that place “in between.” When you’re in a transition zone, you’re neither who you used to be before you got into this transition, nor have you crossed over that threshold to where you will be settled next. Sometimes those transitions are very long, as when people talk about being in dark tunnels and taking a long time to even see the light at the end of the tunnel. There is always an ending of one phase of your life in order to develop and grow into another phase.

I’ve been interested to pick up along the way what people are saying about transitions. The cocoon is a place where the caterpillar totally dissolves; it is *insolutio* in the alchemical model of dissolving into the water, or the emotional side of life. Then it moves on, and from that beginning a butterfly forms in the chrysalis – that “in between” place that is neither caterpillar nor butterfly. I’d like to examine that whole notion of the middle phase. You don’t know whether it is the ending or the beginning. You don’t know whether it is a womb or a tomb. This is the whole image of the return to the earth. In the beginning is the end and the whole cycle.

Every time there is a major transition in your life, and you are in that in between place, you are in the chrysalis and you haven’t yet emerged into the next place. What is interesting to me is how you gather those pieces together when you are *insolutio*. What you chose to keep and what you chose to leave has a lot to do with what pieces form and move into the next stage with you.

There’s a very simple myth that applies to all of us at every major stage of life (when we want to be approved of, to be accepted, to have the right friends, or get into that right club or degree program, etc.) Whenever we have an idea of goal, whenever we have a feeling, it’s about *destination* and not about *journey*. Then we encounter and live out the myth of Procrustes and his bed – a very short myth.



In ancient Greece, if you wanted to be famous or creative, to have influence or power, or to be where all the interesting people were

doing and writing and acting or what have you, then you were certainly on the road to Athens (which is obviously a symbol of where all the action was.) In the myth of Procrustes, you had to pass by his bed in order to keep on the road. He put you on the bed and whatever part of you did not fit, he just cut off. Whack! So much for that piece! It's not going to be with you on the way to Athens. Whatever it was about you that needed to fit into what was accepted got stretched to fit the bed. So you got processed on the road to Athens.

Who among us has not been processed and reprocessed over and over again? What was acceptable to your family? What was acceptable to your significant other? What was success? What did you have to cut off and, in many cases, deny that was a significant part of you or a potential part of you?

Often there are gifts that emerge in childhood, only they're not the kind of gifts or abilities that your particular parents wanted you to have – and you got them. When people who are important mirror us, they focus on that which they find pleasing, and they cast a negative light on that which they find undesirable in us. We pick up the cues very early. And very early on our road to Athens, on the road to acceptability, we cut off that which was not supported, that which was not mirrored positively. We stretch those kinds of gifts that made us pleasing. It might have been our personality, a certain quality of charm. It might have been our brains or athletic ability – whatever was acceptable in our particular beginnings on the road to Athens.

The road to Athens is played out over and over and over again, and at every step along the way. New school: what's acceptable? New profession: from what do you have to cut yourself off? Sometimes in order to fit the mold, you have to do a major job of repressing your past in order to pass Procrustes' bed. In order to look like, to act like you belong in that fraternity or sorority or profession, you cut off and don't talk about certain historical parts of yourself that you deny.

Very often, when childhood was far from beautiful and included some very painful things, what is cut off is actively repressed and forgotten on that first road to Athens – and the second, and the third, and the fourth road to Athens. There are psychic elements about whatever we cut off, potential elements in our personality. Nothing we cut off dies; it just goes into the underworld. There we reconnect with that which we cut off from ourselves, but only in times of transition, and sometimes through major descents.

Sometimes that which we denied in ourselves meets us as Fate. We are in a transition because we were attracted to someone who carried that which we repressed in ourselves, and we're drawn to it. Very often major attractions begin transitions. We are attracted to that part of another person that we have denied in ourselves, and yet is our growing edge. By falling in love with that woman, that man, that guru, that capacity, something of our old form gives way. We are attracted by the projection, drawn towards something else that disrupts our old form and often cracks it, destroys it. We are in this "in between" period of chrysalis, and we don't know what will happen next.

The reality of metaphor is that death and new life happens often. For example, when you are in transition you may have a dream that someone is dying. Your first reaction is to think that it is a little precognition dream. It could be; that's not out of the question. Much more usual is that

something is dying about that particular relationship as an external event, or that particular part of you represented by that person, that character in your dream. Dying puts you on notice that a transition is taking place. Your dream life often knows that some transition is happening before you consciously acknowledge it.

Transitions are often referred to as midlife transitions, but they happen when they happen. Sometimes transitions are described as a crisis (midlife crisis, late life crisis, menopausal crisis, whatever crisis) because they can shake things up so. The Chinese pictograph for the word *Crisis* is comprised of two different characters: *Danger* and *Opportunity*. That is what the chrysalis looks like. Is it a womb or is it a tomb? Is it going to kill something? Is it going to kill you in some fashion? Are you going to despair? Are you going to give up that life has meaning? Or is this going to be a new opportunity to truly grow and enter the next phase of your life? And you don't know "in between."



The image of the snake is one of the major symbols that you might be drawn to. It may show up in a dream about transformation and transition. Human beings once lived much closer to all kinds of animals and very much close to nature. We observed certain behaviors. There's something about the snake that we project on. It is archetypal because it touches a symbolic layer of the psyche from which dreams come. It is comprised of those latent patterns and images that humans recognize and give form to when they are activated.

It's like a chemistry experiment. You pour a compound into a beaker of water, some of this, some of that. You stir it up and it is cloudy for a while and then becomes clear. You keep doing this and doing this, and it stays clear until it reaches a critical mass...or a critical amount of whatever this energy of the sauce that you now brought to the solution entered the solution. When a critical amount enters, a crystalline structure precipitates out. Now you can see the form that was latently there all the time. This is one of the metaphors of an activated archetype.

Another way of talking about an activated archetype is that it is like the seed of a potential. You have this little seed in your hand. Only when it is put into the earth, and watered, and enough time goes by, do you actually see what grows from it. That plant always becomes what was present in that particular seed. So there are seeds (or archetypes) in our soil (the archetypal layer of the collective unconscious) that we all have. Given circumstance and possibilities of birth, it is born with emotion and image together.

I liked what Michael Meade said this morning. He wasn't talking directly about transition, but he also was. Something is born that has both form and sound together. Michael Meade's comments moved my thoughts into the whole idea of womb/tomb and birth. Humankind has observed routinely and, at times, numinously the major transition and liminal experience of new life emerging from the body of a pregnant woman. The pregnant woman who carries this new life is herself the cocoon, the carrier of that fluidity out of which grows a whole new life. The time comes when the new life is able to live outside of the mother. In the timing of birth there is the movement, shifting, labor pains, the cervix that held all the fluid stretches and unblocks. The waters break and labor is initiated.

Well, labor is something that almost all of us have gone through. Cesarean section births cut short that usual process, but there is this experience that we've archetypally actually all lived out. Most of us came through labor, delivery, birth canal. There is a moment in the birth process which is called transition, and it is the most dangerous time of the delivery for both the baby and the mother. The head of the baby must pass underneath the pubic arch of the mother and enter the world. If this is going to work, if this baby is going to come out of the mother into the world, it has to go through that danger moment. This is often the most painful part of the labor for the mother. Mother and child go through this transition, which is a crisis, danger and opportunity. Then there is a new being that has never existed on earth before, but that has just come through the birth canal to the other side.

One of the fascinating things about the creative process and actually giving birth is that, not only have you brought something new into the world that wasn't there before, but when you go through this, you are changed. It affects you. Once you have delivered a baby you are no longer in the mother/maiden/crone archetypal form that women can go through physiologically. Your body has changed. You now have given birth to this child. Out of the darkness of your own creative process, out of the unconsciousness of your process but out of your labor has come new life.

Any artist, any writer, anyone who has birthed a business, who has had a vision of something new that can come into the world, knows that they must be willing to commit to whatever time it takes. A baby takes nine months; an elephant takes two years. Businesses usually take twice as long and twice as much capital to return half as much as predicted. Maybe that's true about children, too. (Laughter.) But anyway, there is this commitment that changes. An eternal adolescent, or in Jungian terms a *puer* (the eternal young man) or a *puella* (the eternal maiden), is transformed by making a commitment that changes her or changes him through the pain of laboring to produce something. You experience the commitment to bring it through, the pain of the production, and also that period when you don't know whether it's going to work. You don't know whether you have spent nine months of your life or even years of your life on something that is not going to survive. That you accomplish it is one of the most maturing things that we have all experienced. If we're talking about being a mother, it's not enough just to do something biologically. You can be a biological mother *and* the Mother archetype of commitment and caretaking, which is part of raising this child.

So, after the birth comes the raising, but this is true of most creative processes as well. If you want to take your book that you have written out into the world, you can't just write it and say it's done. Or you can finish a painting and put it away in a closet, but if you have something to bring out into the world, then you now have a responsibility to it. Whether it is the child or the business or the painting or the book that you are offering to the world, you do have to bring it out into the world. The next phase of it is that you've committed to raising it in some fashion. This is a maturing part of most of our lives. In making that commitment we often cut ourselves off from other possibilities in another way. It's not a Procrustean bed in terms of, "I have to cut myself off from this in order to be on the road to Athens." It's much more. "For now, in terms of time and commitment, I have to let go of certain parts of myself that I cannot give life to any more because I have this other something that I brought into the world. I am committed to bringing it into the world. I'm going to devote my energies to this task."

What I'm talking about now are, in one form or another, mostly experiences in the first half of life. But these days people are doing different things in different phases of life. Let's say that, in the first half of your life, you made a commitment to a relationship. You made a promise to bring something new, whether it was a family or a business or a creative idea, into the world. By doing that, you left others of your gifts behind. They sort of languished in the underworld of potential. What often happens next is that we are successful at what we set out to do, which is always a mixed bag. If you are praised for whatever you do so well, it is like stretching you on that Procrustean bed. One part of you now has this energy and form. Everybody has expectations that this is who you are. A transition occurs when you break that agreement that you are going to stay the same. That's what causes major crises in the relationship over and over again. One person grows and the other person says, "You're not the same person I love. You are somebody different."

What happens often when there are major choices on one's own personal integrity versus the collective? Somewhere around midlife, and yet more than just once, are crises of integrity, where you have to choose to either stay with the group or break with the group and be expelled. This is something that is especially hard for men, for whom the brotherhood of the corporation, the fraternity, the gang, matters a great deal. We learn from the work of people like Deborah Tannen that conversation differs between men and women as a general rule. Young women learn and continue to converse as a means of bonding, actually as a means of reducing stress.

When I was in medical school, the understanding was that under stress we all exhibited flight or fight. Recent research at UCLA came from watching women whose department happened to be studying stress and happened to have both men and women in it. What they noticed was that men and women behaved differently. Men as a group went into flight mode; that is, they withdrew. As stress rises, men are concerned about their jobs; men are concerned about how things are going to work out. In that moment men do not feel very powerful or in control. The two ways of expressing this stress reaction are flight (watch television, go to the basement, withdraw) or fight (anger, road rage). Women in this study noticed that their male companions as researchers did seem to withdraw, where the women reacted in a different manner. Women ended up talking to each other a lot about the stresses the department was going through. Then they started to examine whether men and women physiologically behave differently. It led to the research that said that women talk under stress, reducing the stress level. Oxytocin levels rise, which is the friendship and maternal bonding hormone. Oxytocin is enhanced by estrogen. Men experience flight or fight because adrenalin levels rise. Adrenalin is enhanced by testosterone. So, men and women react to what happens to us when we are stressed in this different way.

If, for example, there is this individuation experience where life looks like you're doing pretty well, you're part of the group, you're successful. Then you break the form either because you fall in love, or because you have a crisis of integrity over what the relationship you're in is about. It takes a lot of courage for men to break from the group or blow the whistle in the hierarchy because it's such an acculturation. Deborah Tannen talked about how men use conversation not only for information purposes, but also to find out, "Am I 'one up' or am I 'one down'?" Who is the more alpha?

If you're a boy, in order to get along and know your place within a group you've got to have your antenna out to learn how and what kind of indications mean more alpha/less alpha. Usually you can rank an alpha in casual conversations. "So how's business?" is not really about how is business. Now, women asking, "How is business?" want to commiserate over the worst news. "Business is terrible, really." By talking about the vulnerabilities, there is a reduction of stress and a sense of support. Women don't support winners as well, actually. There's much more of a bonding that happens if women share vulnerability.

If you do it as a guy, you're automatically 'one down', and men don't want to do that. It takes courage. Let's say that you are on your path, and life is moving along. Rituals develop as a matter of form. You always do this at every holiday. You're expected to behave in a certain way. At first it was who you were growing into being. Later you begin to feel constricted by everybody's expectations (including your own) that you'll always do Thanksgiving this way, you'll always do holidays that way, you're always the person who speaks up, or you're always the person who doesn't say a word. Then something happens in which new life threatens the old form. This is when transitions happen.

As an example, someone decides to blow the whistle on something that's going on in the company. Someone decides to speak up and challenge others in some kind of form saying, in effect, "I don't want to go along with how we've been doing it." If the idea isn't put out there and consciously worked through as a process, then what often happens is repression. The potential whistle blower says, "Oh well, I don't want to rock the boat." The potential challenger says, "I don't want to have the discussion. I don't want to talk about my vulnerabilities or my irritations because he/she/they will react negatively, so I'll stuff it." Jung pointed out that what we truly suppress is likely to encounter us as Fate. So, there we are, unconsciously drawn to that person who carries that which we have repressed in ourselves. We have a crisis between who we used to be and who we are in our current situation.

As most of you know, psyche is the Greek word for soul. It's also the Greek word for butterfly. If you have a protagonist in a story whose name is Psyche you might expect that she will go through a major transition and crisis. Will she survive it? Will she come through and be transformed, or will she die? That's one way of looking at the Psyche myth. Those of you who heard Robert Bly's *White Bear* story on the first day of this conference heard a variation of the Eros and Psyche myth.

The form that Psyche broke was the understanding with her unseen lover who came every night. The piece of the story I want to focus on is what happens in an unconscious relationship when it is broken. Psyche was the third most beautiful princess. She was considered so beautiful that she was worshipped rather than sought as a partner. Her father the king seeks to know whether his beloved daughter Psyche will ever find a husband. He goes to the Oracle at Delphi. You know, if you go ask the Delphic Oracle for advice, you are bound to fulfill the advice, so be careful. Don't ask for the advice unless you are prepared to really do what you are told to do.

The Oracle tells the king that he must abandon his daughter on a mountain top to meet her fate – an inhuman bridegroom. And so, with death is the beginning of the next stage, Psyche is dressed as for a funeral. All the people of the kingdom grieve. Undoubtedly the king must have had

second thoughts of, “Why did I ever ask?” The kingdom then mourned beautiful Psyche, left her on the highest crag, abandoned and wailing.

As it turned out, Psyche was wafted down this wonderful, magical valley where all her needs are cared for. All day long she wanders the valley, enjoying this wonderful home that has all the conveniences and provides for everything. Every night her bridegroom comes through the window, makes love to her, and leaves by morning, so she never sees him. In some ways this sounds a little like the suburban idyllic gated community. (Laughter). This goes on and it’s fine for a long time. In Robert Bly’s version of the *White Bear* it may have gone on for hundreds of years before anything changes.

Psyche’s older sisters, who thought their youngest sister dead, came to the crag to mourn and cry at her loss. And so Psyche beseeches her unseen bridegroom, asking him to let her see her sisters. She cries...and he tries to persuade her that this isn’t what she really wants. And she cries. Eventually, he gives in, only agreeing “as long as you do not tell the secret.” And he tells her, “Psyche, you’re pregnant. The child you are carrying will be a god if you keep my secret. It will be a mortal if you reveal it.” Then he leaves and allows that the sisters come down, which they do on two occasions.

In coming down and raising questions, the sisters reminded Psyche that she was supposed to wed an inhuman bridegroom. They stirred up the idea that “You must be married to a monster.” In her innocence Psyche thinks, “Oh, my God, what have I done? Maybe they’re right. What should I do?” And they say to her, “You must take a lantern and a knife. After your bridegroom comes to you at night, makes love, and falls asleep, take the lantern that you’ve hidden under this bushel basket. Lift it up over his head. If it should be a monster that you’re married to, take this knife and cut off his head.”

Now, those are the two symbols that really do matter to us: the lamp and the knife. If you are going to examine the relationship that you are in, you need both. The first step is the willingness to really take a look at the situation. You need the illumination of the lamp. This symbolizes your willingness to actually take a good look at the person you’re working with, or who you’re living with, or what you’re doing that is a question in your mind. “Who am I in relationship to this?” So the lamp is important.

But what good is the lamp if you don’t have the knife? This is a symbol that can discriminate, cut through the situation, end the relationship by severing its bonds. What good is knowing that you are in a very dysfunctional relationship, if you haven’t the capacity...that is the symbol of the knife...to draw boundary, to discriminate, to cut it off, to end the relationship if it turns out that what you see really is negative?

In this part of the story, Psyche takes both symbols in her hand. As you know, when she raises the lamp and sees her unseen lover, her unknown bridegroom, he turns out to be the immature god of love, Eros. Immature in that he was carrying on this secret affair. He had promised his mother, the goddess Aphrodite, that he would punish Psyche who was so identified with the goddess because of her beauty that the goddess’s shrines were ignored. People were worshipping a human girl as if she was a goddess, and the goddess plotted revenge for what

psychologically is true. If you identify with an archetype, you lose your humanity, your individuality. You get inflated by it. You get taken over by it. You do get Aphrodite's revenge.

In this case Aphrodite had told her son Eros to aim his arrows at Psyche in punishment so that she would fall in love with the vilest of men. This is the negative power of Aphrodite and Eros: to have Psyche fall in love with someone who would really be vile for her and her development. Instead Eros sees Psyche and falls in love with her himself. He decides to keep all that from Mother, and so he's been having this clandestine, hidden affair with Psyche.



Psyche betrays his admonishment, which was to really keep the form. ("Don't change anything. Stay unconscious about the basic agreement that we have.") She breaks it by lifting up the lamp. Then the lamp sputters, and a drop of oil falls and hits Eros' shoulder. He awakens, hurt and angry, blaming Psyche for destroying the situation as it was. He's got wings, this god, so he flies away and leaves her.

In this story we have a transition zone that begins with the end of the unconscious relationship. Pregnant Psyche is now abandoned, left on her own with no employable skills, as it were. When Eros leaves her, she feels so unable to cope that she throws herself in the river to drown and the river throws her back on the bank. It's like the river saying, "Your life force is too strong, honey. This isn't going to be the end of your story." Psyche then proceeds to go to the various temples of the goddesses, and they all say, "Ah, your issue is not with us. It's with Aphrodite." She's not who she used to be, but she must still confront the offended goddess.

Aphrodite gives her four tasks that she must learn to get through this particular zone. The story, then, is about her four tasks and her growth. As she learns each task, she grows beyond what she knew before. The first task is to sort all the seeds that are heaped up in this room. This is a wonderful metaphor for all of the possibilities, all of the emotions at the beginning of a transition period. Sorting the seed is really taking stock. What are all of the seeds of possibility in your psyche of your world? How much money do you have in the bank? How much energy do you have for this? How much talent do you have for this? What are you putting together out of all your possibilities? To plan to have a conference? If this is your particular dream, then you've got to sort out the seeds.

In this particular story, Psyche's first reaction to every single task is despair. It's more than she's ever done before, she's consciously not up to the task, and she wants to give up. Sort the seeds of possibility. At the beginning, she doesn't know how, and then the symbol comes to her. Ants. All the ants come sorting out the seeds, one seed at a time, so that by morning they've been sorted, each into its own kind, every one into its own stack.

Aphrodite comes back to find the task is done. The goddess doesn't seem to be at all pleased about it, so she then gives Psyche another task. The second task is to get some golden fleece from the rams of the sun, gather a small amount of it, and bring it to Aphrodite. So our young Psyche goes and looks at these ranging up and down the field, in this meadow, in that valley, all having a wonderful time. These rams are butting their heads up against each other, roughing

each other up. They've got a great deal of competitive power, but they're big and they've got the strength and they're doing fine. It's just a big game with them, this competitiveness.

Psyche looks at them and realizes that, if she goes out and tries to grab some fleece from the rams as they're charging and hitting each other and running up and down the field, she would be trampled. This does not seem to be the thing to do. So she goes down to the river again, and this time a reed tells her, "Psyche, you don't have to go out there and do it that way. They are energized by the sun. Wait until the sun goes down. Then you can go pick fleece that they have scraped off against the bushes and trees. Gather enough of it for your use and fulfill the task."

The reed that tells Psyche to bide her time has wisdom. It isn't just about attaining a certain amount of power, climbing to great heights or participating in competition. The wisdom of the reed tells you to listen to your own rhythms. It advises when and how you can gain the power that you need, but not have your soul destroyed in the acquisition. Listen and learn from the voice of the reed, which is organic and grows out of the water, the river.

The application here has something to do with the feminine psyche or soul, but it has to do with the soul of both men and women. When you are in a competitive game (and almost everything that is about outer commerce or outer success involves competition), you can be trampled if you get caught up in wanting to grab more and more and more golden fleece. The more you go out and take on the archetypes to play the game (because these are archetypes, these rams of the sun) if you should leave your soul behind or forget that you have a soul, it will be trampled.

The third task was the creative task: Psyche is told that she must fill a crystal flask with water from a stream that runs from the River Styx to the highest crag in a continual cycle. The great water of life, the water of creativity, cycles. It is archetypal. It moves and moves and moves, and yet each person needs to seize some of that fluidity and give it shape. Some of that is a conscious desire to capture archetypal energies, visions, emotions and give them shape through your own personality, which is relative to the great expanse of the archetypal world of gods and goddesses. It is symbolically fragile, and yet this is the task.



Again Psyche looks at the task. She sees this river that is carved into the side of the mountain. It goes down to the River Styx and then rises up through a spring to come up to the top again and down the face, etching its way into the mountain. If that isn't bad enough, there are snake-like dragons on either side warning, "Stay away! Stay away!" The water itself is hissing. Psyche again thinks, "Too much! I can't do it," when another symbol comes to her aid.

Now, this third task is supported by Zeus' eagle. Zeus is an archetype that succeeds very well as an entrepreneur in this world. After all, he is the Chief Executive Officer of Mount Olympus. He has lightning bolts. He can punish. His symbol, the eagle, has the ability to see what it wants and plunge from the sky to grab it in its talons. That ability to see the overall picture, to see the forest but not each individual tree, is a way of being in the world. If you're a man with Zeus as your innate archetype, then the world (especially capitalistic United States) rewards you

very well. An entrepreneurial woman with Zeus as an archetype finds it really helpful to see the overall picture, to not get emotional about losing a sale or being undercut in business. An eagle doesn't stop and have an emotional fit if that succulent mouse that he had his eye on suddenly follows intuition and runs under a rock. The eagle just flies up again and looks for another dinner somewhere else. That unemotional ability is very successful.

Of all the innate male air sign archetypes that have to do with the sky like Apollo and Hermes, Zeus succeeds very well in this world. Some people have more of them than others. If you are a man in this culture and you happen to have these archetypes, they will be stretched on that Procrustean bed to fill the picture. Those parts of you that have to do with creativity and emotionality are often ignored and, therefore, you are cut off from them.

Zeus' eagle now comes to this very personal Psyche giving her an overview of how to go after what you need, how you avoid the dangers, keep your eye on the prize, and go for it. The eagle takes the flask. It returns to give Psyche the flask, now filled with Stygian water that she was to get for task three. One would say that at each step Psyche has learned something new.

The fourth step is the first time that Psyche will end up accomplishing the task herself. As her very last task, Aphrodite commands that Psyche must go into the underworld, fill an empty box with beauty ointment from Persephone the goddess of the underworld, and return it to her. For the first time, Psyche thinks, "She must want me dead." The only way she knows to go into the underworld is to die. Psyche now climbs up the highest tower to throw herself off.. This time the tower talks to her saying, "Psyche, there is another way to finish this task. Go into the underworld via the Vent of Dis. Take coins with you for the ferryman. Take two cakes for the three-headed dog; one to let you into the underworld, and one to let you out again."

And then the tower warns her saying, "Three times you will be asked for help, Psyche. You must harden your heart to pity, refuse, and go on." And so Psyche does. Three times she is asked by very pathetic creatures or people to stop for a moment and help. Each time she remembers the advice. She says "no" and she walks on. She gives one of the coins to the ferryman who ferries her across. Even as she's going across the River Styx, a pathetic man says, "Just hold my hand and pull me across. I didn't have a coin." But she ignores his plea. There was one other piece of advice from the tower. "Psyche, once you get the beauty ointment in the box, DON'T OPEN THE BOX!" (Laughter)

Psyche enters the underworld, gives the three-headed dog one cake, fills the box with beauty, gives the three-headed dog another cake, comes back across the river because she has one more coin, and returns to the upper world.



All of the advice that the tower gave her was good. Psyche, having done exactly what the tower told her understands that, if she had stopped for help, she would have had to lend a hand. In each hand she had one cake and one coin. Had she lost what she was holding, she would not have had the means to return from the underworld.

People in the transition often have limited amounts of strength, health or energy as they go into the underworld. For example, the story of Psyche speaks to people living with cancer. They say, “Cancer was a cure for my co-dependency. Cancer was a way in which I could say to people ‘I can’t do that.’” The ability to say “no” is one of the challenges for a feeling man or the feminine psyche. When other people expect you to always be there for them, and you break form by saying “No,” you create a crisis in a relationship. It may be that you need to not stay in the underworld of your own depression or your own addiction or your own whatever it is, it is there. Addiction, illness, and depression are images of the underworld that you need to get through in order to get out. This liminal period of transition is a very long one. The tasks to be done keep on growing. It’s hard. It’s scary. If you’re going to make it through this transition to the new phase of your life in which you have integrated the new you, with all that you are for the next phase of your life, you’ve got to often learn to say “No.” Otherwise the people who have expectations of you will use your energy. Say, “No” and they’ll say, “You’re selfish.” Psyche manages to do all of that. She returns to the upper world. She’s no longer in the underworld. She has made it through.

By now, you can imagine, she’s very tired. She’s pregnant, and she’s been on this journey a long time. Because she is who she is, her archetypes are related to the relationship goddesses. That is, her archetype is she’s the Mother. She started out the Maiden very much like Persephone.



She became a Lover, so she was like Aphrodite. She is pregnant, so she’s like Demeter. And she wants to be reconnected with this bridegroom, so she’s got the persistent energy of Hera.

For all that she has learned in mastering these good things, these are not strengths that she particularly feels deeply connected to as her meaning. What she wants most of all, after accomplishing all these tasks, is to be beautiful in order that Eros might love her and return. Psyche opens the box and death-like sleep envelopes her. She falls, like Snow White, as if dead. This is the point in the story where some people find fault with her decision. “Oh Psyche, after all this, did you have to become unconscious again?”

It is this action that calls Eros to her side, but Eros has been transformed as Psyche has grown through her ordeals. He used to be this child who ran home to mother, who hid things from mother. He felt betrayed because Psyche actually looked at him. It didn’t matter that when she looked at him she actually consciously loved him. He was so wounded that she broke the form and disobeyed him. Now we see a very different Eros who comes to her side, wipes the death-like sleep off of her, and then takes her to Olympus. There, in front of all the gods and goddesses, Eros announces that this is the conscious relationship that he wants. The Olympians celebrate a grand wedding now, no longer a hidden affair, not this unconscious relationship of love and soul, because those are the names of these two folks.

What is really fascinating is that we know all along she was pregnant, which is the symbol of the journey. A new child is often present in dreams when you are growing into the next phase of your life. Sometimes the dreamer is actually pregnant, but more often the dreams I’ve listened to over the years show an exceptional, divine child (divine in the sense that it’s exceptional; it’s

little and it talks.) Something of this wonderful child is growing as a symbol in the person as they move into this new phase of life.

When it's announced on Mount Olympus that the marriage of Eros and Psyche is celebrated, she gives birth to the child that was forecast to be a god if she kept the secret and a mortal if she gave the secret away. The child is born, a girl, and her name is Joy. This is the first mortal in Greek mythology that is made an immortal. The soul (Psyche) is elevated and made divine as well, becoming part of the Olympian landscape. This is actually the archetypal world of the gods and goddesses in our psyches. She goes through this chrysalis phase. That's her name, after all: it is butterfly, it is Psyche, it is soul. Trust emerges when there is a willingness to die to the old, to be vulnerable and have faith. There is a time when you know that you have been taken only so far by your human abilities. Something else must come in to make the soul reconnect with Eros. And often when we start the transition journey there is a loss of love, or of our ability to love. We're depressed. We have had difficulties.



In a very similar way, womb or tomb is a story of Jesus. The short-form is that all kinds of people expect him to be the Messiah. He arrives on Palm Sunday with great hosannas, and by Good Friday he's crucified. On Saturday he is in the tomb. At that point in his story, Easter Sunday hasn't happened yet. Is this going to be a tomb? Or is it going to be a womb from which a new aspect is born out of suffering and dissent? Most of the myths that have to do with underworld have, as a story in our psyches, an implicit descent. There is the possibility of being like that caterpillar. In the cocoon stage, you enter into solution, and become vulnerable. You do not know whether this is a birthing place or whether it is an ending place.

I'm going back to the images of birth, of people who help others deliver babies living out the archetype of Hecate, the goddess of the crossroads, the goddess of twilight, the crone. Hecate was also the archetype of the Mid-wife/Healer. The first women who went to the stake in the Inquisition lived out of this archetype. As goddess of the crossroads, Hecate appeared at every major fork in the road where transition decisions are made. She sees where you are coming from and where the two paths will take you. At important forks in the road in ancient Greece, you'd see a little statue with three faces: one facing the direction you had come from, and the others facing two paths you might choose. This is the archetype of people who act as midwives to other people. It is also the archetypal observer in ourselves who has seen us through many descents and many transitions. This observer has an overview of the pain and the joy, the suffering and the changes.



This is the archetype of the midwife who is a therapist, because every therapist is a midwife. People come to therapists at times of transition and crisis. The Hecate in us can see where they came from. We have some idea of where their choices might take them. Patients stay with us

at the crossroad until they become clear which direction they will choose. The path that is most authentically them is about individuation. The choices often are to conform and go back to an old form, but one that other people are comfortable with as well as a part of themselves. Then there's the individuation path that does not promise that everyone will like you at all. Instead, this path promises that it will feel true as long as you do what Joseph Campbell says about living your personal myth.

Keith Thompson writes about how a man in his audience asked Dr. Campbell, "But how do I find my personal myth?" And Campbell answered with a question: "What gives your life bliss and harmony? Find it and follow it." Bliss is a strange word. It sounds too, too, too...actually (Laughter).

When you live from an archetype it means that you're in the world with the energy of whatever that role is that that archetype holds. That archetype is deeply rooted in the matrix of your self. There is a sense that when life is lived from an archetypal depth, that life has meaning. Someone else doing the same thing might feel like they were doing time. That's what it feels like when you've outgrown or chosen a path that is not deeply your own path but someone else's idea of who you should be. You're going through the motions. Life is okay if you can conform. When you live from an archetypal depth, then it may take suffering, but there's something worthy and true about who I am when I do it that is me. Living your personal myth, in fact, is all about the crises, the transitions, and the suffering. It is about integrating your personal myth into yourself as you move along the path. Those of us that are psychotherapists or artists or writers or anybody here who draws from the stuff of your own life, know that no experience you have ever gone through is wasted. You can use it in your art, in your therapy, in your compassion for or understanding of what comes through the suffering that you personally integrated into yourself. You can use the experience in your work, and nothing goes to waste.

As you get older, your path becomes increasingly a realization that you have moved in an authentic way along the journey. There are the archetypes in both men and women: goddesses in every woman, gods in every man. Had I known better, I would have written a big book called "Gods and Goddesses in Every Person." As I stand up here and talk about archetypes, I am not embodying a goddess archetype. I'm being Hermes, the messenger god, talking about entering the underworld and returning to the upperworld. Most men and women find that they're a mix of different archetypal energies, much as we are all mixes of human talents. Imagine if you had the gift of a Mozart and you never heard music. Then in the second half of your life you were introduced to music. You had a sense that said. "This is who I am!"

This individuation happens to people often in the second half of life. The middle-aged person has done that which was possible for them to do. You were either successful in fulfilling the educational career relationship patterns that first half of life is about or not. You either do it or you don't. And here you are. I wrote in my last book called "Crones Don't Whine" that the third phase of life is the actual real essence of being present to the path that you are on. Unless you can grieve for losses, let go of your sense of entitlement, you will stand at the gate, never get through that transition, never get under the pubic bone to the other side. If you sit at the gate whining, you're looking back at the past feeling that you, of all people, deserve better. Your kids should have turned out differently. Your marriage should have turned out better. The world

should have recognized you differently. You're whining about what happened or didn't happen to you. You have no perspective on the whole wide world experience of being human. For one thing, you don't understand the amount of suffering and pain and reality that exists if you're still here. You're standing at the gate into the individuation path of the Crone. The Crone, an archetype that both men and women draw from, is about wisdom, and compassion, and active action, and healing humor, and a lot of other good things. But it's an internal experience. The crone archetype exists in men and women who can change the world.

I see the metaphoric story about Psyche, the much more dramatic whistle-blower experience that Jesus represents. Did Jesus have a sense that what he was supposed to do would go against everybody's expectations, would scare everybody to death, and yet would involve him with great suffering? In the midst of the great suffering, he even felt that maybe he was wrong, that this was not what he was supposed to do at all. He did that. A number of people go against expectations, and they suffer as whistle-blowers. Or they make a choice that other people just didn't expect, and they experience anger and disappointment and crucifixion at some symbolic level. Once it happens, the old self dies.

We've returned to the symbology of death/rebirth. When you are no longer who you are, you're in a transition zone. You're learning something about who you are now, and what you have in terms of sorting seeds. You're giving form to your creativity. How much power do you have? Do you have the ability to put boundaries on your own energy? Then you can pass through into the next phase, a spiritual path, which may also demand of you that you now call upon something greater than yourself.

I've often said to look at us all as spiritual beings on a human path, rather than human beings who may or may not be on a spiritual path. At some level, think how absurd it is that an immortal soul comes into the dysfunctional lives we all have. An immortal soul has chosen to be human. Human path is very strange. At the beginning, most people seem to have their own version of dysfunctional family with lots of mistakes, and difficulties, and loves, and sufferings, and lessons along the way. Then it's over so soon. Nobody gets through without suffering. Now why would an immortal soul do that?

Yet, all of us intuitively would say, "I believe I have a soul." As soon as you do that, you assume that you are essentially a spiritual being in a human body for now. There must be something about this journey of vulnerability, of sharing it with others, of suffering, of learning, of trusting, of finding that sometimes grace comes in the form of love, and that Eros rescues us when we're unconscious again.

This is a story that resonates at many different levels and it's about us all. It's also about reconnecting with that which is in *solution*. We were caterpillars; we enter this solution in which everything got dissolved. Somehow, if we're fortunate, we reform and come out as a butterfly. In our transition times we travel down to the underworld, down to the unconscious, and reconnect with what mattered to us before. Or we uncover a talent that gives our life meaning, and we claim it consciously and bring it up. We make it part of what gets reformed when we break out of our cocoon into the next phase of our life.

As human beings and immortal souls in this life, the major metamorphosis for us all is just to know that the last metamorphosis is the great mystery. When we die and we leave this body, what of us continues on? What I find enormously heartening and fascinating on many different levels is how many people have had after-death communications from others who have gone on in many different forms. Sometimes there are visitation dreams. Sometimes there is a sense of presence. Sometimes there's actually a hearing or a seeing the person.

Recently, because I've had a number of people who are close to me who aren't here anymore but who I have had a real sense of presence. Now I'm going to tell you a story that was told publicly. I believe it because of my own other experiences.

I went to a memorial service for the son of two friends of mine. He had a head-on accident and died on the spot. It was a great loss. Jed was only 26 years old, and he had this wonderful soul and spirit. His sister was angry and weeping a day or two before the memorial service. She was really having trouble with it, and finally she just wanted to be by herself. So she said, "I'm just going to go for a walk." As she was walking, Jed appeared to her and walked along with her. He spoke to her saying, "I'm really okay, and I want you to be okay. I want you to hold my hand." The sister said, "People must have thought I was really dumb because they saw me holding his hand. I mean, I'm sure they couldn't see Jed, but there I was holding his hand."

Now, Jed was known for giving big hugs. It seemed to be his trade mark. Once he even got hit by a man who fell into a homosexual panic. The fellow moved toward Jed. Of course, Jed interpreted it as "He wants a big hug." And when Jed hugged him, the man felt threatened by that closeness and hit Jed. This is a guy who had this type of physical reputation, right?

This walk with Jed, which his sister said was 28 minutes long, calmed his sister down. At the end of the walk Jed asked, "Can I give you a hug?" and she said, "Sure." He gave her a big hug, and then he asked, "Can you feel it?" He was disembodied so, of course, she couldn't feel it. In her wisdom she said, "I can feel it in my heart."

The journey of spiritual beings on a human path holds major questions that have to do with the big picture at each major transition fork in the road. *What did I come to do? What is my purpose? What did I come to learn? Who did I come to love?* From a psychological viewpoint, those questions can only be answered from deep within. Nobody else can ever answer them for you. I see this all as having many incarnations, many important relationships that come and go, and many important experiences including this intensive conference to which the same questions could apply. *What did really I come here to do?* You may not find the answer to that question until the conference is over or almost over. *What did I come to learn, really? Who did I come to love? What did I come to love in myself, out here? What am I remembering and reconnecting by this emerging experience?* The journey continues. Whether it's a long weekend, or a marriage, or a career...whatever it is...if it did not go to waste, then it was part of your journey. There's something now to remember and learn about it in order to bring it into consciousness and have it in the full circle of who you are. You can reclaim those things from which you have cut yourself off because of shame. That's part of the learning experience: you might have compassion if you have compassion for yourself. You can then have compassion for others.

This is an amazing story, the personal myth business that we are all on. When that's said, I think it's an amazing story that we are in. We are here now. Humanity has the capacity to destroy this planet, the garden that we were given. I heard Robert Bly talk about the poem in which he presents men with the question: "What did you do with the garden I trusted you with?"

There has never been a generation of women the likes of which are in this room right now. The lives of 45 million American women over the age of 50 have been influenced by the Women's Movement. They have therefore had responsibility, the ability to have major choices, education, the birth control pill, and reproductive rights that may be taken from us. Here we are, this generation of conscious people, spiritual people, disoriented people who have possibly something to do with the fate of the earth. I think so.

Something that has grown out of my work is the notion of us needing to be in circle where the spiritual center is egalitarian in order to admit the feminine principle. This circle is necessary for men as well as women to be able to talk about vulnerability, share stories, and enjoy the strength, connection, and depth of being human with each other. Because I'm of the generation of the Women's Movement, I know that women together in conscious-raising groups have changed the world. It doesn't seem at all strange to me to think that we could create a critical mass of consciousness from the hypothetical millionth circle which grows out of the hypothetical hundredth monkey (which was a story that kept the anti-nuclear activists going.) It is, as Malcolm Gladwell says, "a tipping point." We should serve ourselves to have a support system of like-souled others who understand that the personal myth is something we are trying to live.

And so, I leave you with all of this as a transition because we are all in transition as a planet. We are in a transition as individuals. And we have a remarkable opportunity to make a difference. Every one of us who has gotten older and wiser can be a circle of influence in our nuclear extended families, our institutions and, really, the world. I think it matters a lot that we do spiritually oriented activism, political activism based not on anger and hate. Again, like the Beyond War people moved us with the anti-nuclear activist movement, it has to do with love of our potential and a wish not to destroy it. It may be, because we are born at this time and are here now, that we each have as part of our personal mythology to do something politically beginning now.