

**Grief and Gratitude in the Time of the Great Turning:
A Depth Psychological Approach**

Randy Morris, Ph.D.

Professor Emeritus, Antioch University Seattle

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Description: As the global community moves more deeply into the throes of the Great Turning – our collective initiation into a sustainable world – new emotional skills will be required to survive and thrive during the transition. Navigating the fields of grief and gratitude with flexibility and grace are essential for developing skills of emotional resilience and receptivity, opening the soul to hear the voice of the earth as it guides us into the next stage of our evolution. This lecture will provide a depth psychological framework for approaching grief and gratitude, along with ideas and experiential practices for engaging the wisdom being offered by these profound emotional states.

Welcome everyone to this presentation on “Grief and Gratitude in the Time of the Great Turning: A Depth Psychological Approach”! I want to thank all of the people who made this possible – Ryan and Bette for inviting me, Larry for managing the technical aspects, Shirley for handling registration, Eva for help with the powerpoint, to the Jung Society for its support of the interior life in a world that is one-sidedly outer directed, to our audience for taking time out of their social distancing caves to venture forth into this temporary learning community, to my family, friends, elders and teachers who have shaped the contours of my life, and to the Invisibles – those interior beings who announce their presence in our dreams and visions and who nourish and challenge us in ways beyond our capacity to know. I’m also talking about the interiority of you, Anima Mundi, the pets and plants that populate our homes, the trees and gardens that beautify our neighborhoods, the forest and lakes and animals and sea creatures who share our bioregion and this beautiful planet. I also invite our ancestors from the past, especially those former and current caretakers of the land on which we walk, the various Native Tribes of our beloved Salish Sea; those people alive today who would love to be here with us but for various reasons could not make it; and especially to those future beings who have not yet been born but who are supporting us from afar in hopes that they might have the privilege of the gift of life. Of course we invite Coyote Trickster, who we hope will be kind to us as we navigate this thin trail of electrons. We welcome you all here.

When Bette and Ryan first called to ask if I would speak to the Jung Society, it was early fall. They were aware of my work designing community grief rituals and they knew I was dwelling for some time within a particular image that I have called ‘extinction anxiety’ because I gave a paper earlier that year at the Care of Souls Conference in Tacoma entitled, “Therapeutic Approaches to Extinction Anxiety: Apocalypse as a Rite of Passage”. They were also present at an earlier

presentation for the Psyche and the Spirit of the Times series sponsored by the Seattle Jung Society entitled “Extinction Anxiety in the Age of Trumpism”. These ideas came out of the book I co-authored with my friend Walter Enloe called Nagasaki Spirits, Hiroshima Voices: Making Sense of the Nuclear Age. In all these presentations I laid out my argument for considering the current threat to our survival as a human species due to nuclear war and climate change as a rite of passage for the human species, initiating us into yet-to-be-revealed psychological and social structures in an attempt to avert the suicidal direction of late-stage capitalism and move toward a sustainable earth community. I said that the capacity to sustain the gaze of extinction terror, to seriously consider the end of our species, had the power of revelation, waking us up to new stories and worldviews capable of sustaining human beings on a regenerative planet Earth. So when Bette and Ryan asked if I could talk more about grief, I thought that a closer look at the role that grief and gratitude play in the transformative processes of human species initiation would be a good way to go. I submitted my proposal and a few months later the coronavirus hit. I had failed to add pandemics to nuclear war and climate change as ‘horsemen of the apocalypse’. My public talk was cancelled and I thought that was it. But then, through the diligence of Jung Society leadership, our meeting was back on in this virtual format. I was given the opportunity to alter the subject of my talk, but my original description still seemed relevant to the Age of Covid which, after all, is just a phase in the larger arc of the Great Turning.

But before we hit the main road, let me make two disclaimers. First, let’s take a moment to acknowledge that we are in the midst of a global tragedy of immense proportions. As of today, according to Johns Hopkins University, there are 2.2 million confirmed cases with 150,000 dead, and still counting. All were loved, and almost none got to say goodbye. Millions are out of work, with more to come. The backlash contains threats of violence. It is a dark time with only uncertainty on the horizon. We just don’t know what comes next. I bear witness to this suffering, and honor the courage and resourcefulness of all those who are on the front lines and all those who are making the necessary sacrifices to ‘lower the curve’. My remarks today may seem abstract and inadequate to the immediacy of what is happening around us, but to make meaning out of suffering we sometimes have to take an Eagle’s eye view. I dedicate my remarks and our deliberations here today to all those people who have suffered and died in this pandemic.

My second disclaimer is to say that I have not personally suffered significant loss in this crisis. Yes, I am inconvenienced by being confined to my house, but I am fortunate to have a house. I have not caught the disease, nor have I lost a loved one to the virus. My wife and kids and grandkids are all doing well, so far. I acknowledge with a heavy heart the way this virus has disproportionately affected communities of color and is running rampant in just those places that are least able to respond. Clearly, the virus is exposing the egregious fault lines in our society with respect to the poor, the marginalized, the uninsured, the homeless. But in the midst of my privilege, I offer what I can. In this case, I offer a depth psychological perspective that has been

honed by 40 years of tracking my dreams and working with children, adults and elders to craft an understanding of what human beings are and the role they play in the fate of our planet. In doing so, I am trying to model “contemplative leadership” by placing my interior life at the service of the greater good of my community.

So let’s get started.

I often tell my students at Antioch as they prepare to write a paper that there are two main considerations when staring at a blank page. One is to reflect on the approach they are going to take, since their intention will limit and condition what they are going to see. And the other is to pay attention to their ‘first cut’, the choice of the initial categories of analysis that will be most revealing of their subject. So let me take my own advice and say what I think is most important about a ‘depth psychological’ approach.

First, depth psychology is about the generation of meaning. As Jung pointed out, what happens to us is only half the story. Life will throw the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” our way. Our job is to make meaning out of it. As Victor Frankl taught us, even concentration camps are bearable if one can find a meaning in the suffering and death. So in our deliberations this evening, let’s work together as a learning community to discern the meaning of the coronavirus epidemic so that our suffering, and the suffering of the citizens of Seattle and of our global community, can be redeemed.

Second, a depth psychological approach is always about interiority. It is about going ‘down and in’, of deep reflection on the currents of our own souls as well as on the interiority of the beings of the outer world, the Anima Mundi, the soul of the world. Jungians are sometimes accused of being so inner-directed, so individualistic that they become solipsistic navel-gazers. This is a projection of the Cyclopean collective eye that values only what the senses reveal and rejects the gifts of the imagination. As Jung says, “At bottom, the psyche is simply world.” (1) Looking within, we see whole communities that demand our attention. These are not mere fantasies or disordered sense impressions, but the inner dimensions of the outer world appearing in the mirror of our soul, and they deserve a life too. Not only that, but interiority is given political significance when Jung makes his famous statement that “the world hangs on a thin thread, and that thread is the psyche of man”. The venerable Jungian Analyst M. Esther Harding puts it this way:

It may seem absurd to suggest that the attitude of the individual to his personal conflicts and problems could have any appreciable effect on an international situation involving the fate of millions, or to turn from the general problem to the personal one as if they were equivalents. Yet that is exactly what anyone with even a minimum of psychological insight is obliged to do if he

seeks to understand the age in which he is living or to contribute in a conscious way towards the solution of the world problem. (2)

Clearly, the powers of interiority are to be ardently sought when living in an age of what Jung calls, “the changing of the gods”.

A third attribute of a depth psychological approach is ‘reverence’. As usual, the great Irish poet and philosopher John O’Donohue says it best, “*A reverence of approach awakens depth and enables us to be truly present where we are. When we approach with reverence, great things decide to approach us. Our real life comes to the surface and its light awakens the concealed beauty in things.*” (3)

An approach of reverence is essential to a soulful life. If we approach our inner worlds seeking flaws and defects, we will never get beneath the surface where the beauty and inner communion reside. An approach of reverence invites revelation, intimacy and awe to enter our souls and reveals its sacred depths.

So let us begin our deliberations with a visit to the interiority of our own hearts. Let’s do a brief gratitude meditation together. For that purpose, I invite you to settle comfortably in your chair, with feet firmly on the ground, relaxing your body, closing your eyes or using a soft gaze. *(ring bell)* Now think of some moment in the last 24 to 48 hours for which you are grateful. It might be the kindness of a stranger, the way your partner looks in the morning light, a favorite cat licking its fur, a child or grandchild’s ridiculous antic. Don’t make this too hard or too precious – first thought, best thought. Whatever that moment of gratitude is, form an image of it, a frozen picture in time that captures the essence of that moment of gratitude. Hold that image in your mind’s eye and turn your attention again towards your breathing. Notice how it comes in through your nose and mouth, enters the back of your throat and goes into your lungs, those marvelous bags of tissue that are exquisitely designed to oxygenate your blood. Then notice the great turn, when your body decides it is time to move from an inhale to an exhale. The air moves back up your windpipe, through your throat and back out your nose and mouth. As you take a few more breaths, notice how that involuntary turn from in-breath to out-breath makes it possible for you to see that it is not you who are breathing, but something is breathing you. That is the force of life moving through your body. As you relax more into the breathing process, bring your attention to that part of your body in your heart area. Feel a golden light that surrounds your thoracic area extending 6 to 12 inches in all directions around you. Breathe into that light. Feel the center of that orb, which is the center of your own heart. While in this relaxed state, through a conscious act of the will, bring the image of gratitude that first formed in your mind’s eye down into the chamber of your spiritual heart and let it rest there. Allow it to fill your heart with gratitude. Continue to breath and receive the radiance of that gratitude... *(Announce 30 seconds left, ring bell)*.

Thank you for your participation in this meditation. Don't worry if you were distracted, or found yourself thinking of dinner or dessert, or any of the other myriad ways in which the monkey mind distracts us from our best intentions. As with most meditations, you get better at it with practice. This particular meditation is adapted from the HearthMath people. Their 'quick coherence technique' may be the most researched meditation practice on the planet. You can read more about it on their website – www.heartmath.com. My purpose for doing it at this point in my talk is to prepare us for entering into the Apocalyptic Mysteries. As one of my teachers Joanna Macy points out, if you are going to take a brutally honest look at the conditions of our planet and the role that human beings are playing in it, if you are going to grieve the losses that are necessary to facilitate a Great Turning, if you are going to open yourself to the atrocities and injustices that are taking place at this very moment, if you are going to consider the possibility that the human species is on the path to extinction due to its own ignorance, then you have to begin with cultivating an attitude of gratitude for the gift of being alive. Not only that, but when we enter the dark places of human experience, it is important to remember that we should never go to such places alone. As Andrew Harvey and Carolyn Baker remind us in their terrific book Savage Grace: Living Resiliently in the Dark Night of the Globe: "*Our work as awake human beings at this time then, is to be willing to descend into the dark night of the globe as well as the dark night of the individual soul and to do so in connection with trusted allies. Going downward and inward is the only way we can open to the mystery of the Self and be guided by it through whatever unfolds.*" (4) And so, armed with gratitude in our hearts and in the company of this assembled community of trusted allies, along with our trusted allies in the invisible realms, let us take another turn 'down and in' to see what we can see.

Let's take our 'first cut' by considering the idea of the Great Turning as a means to contextualize our current circumstances and advance our quest for meaning. As defined by Joanna Macy, the Great Turning refers to the gradual transition from an unsustainable industrial-growth society to a life-sustaining society. Such a large concept only makes sense when contrasted to two alternative narratives that account for what is taking place on our planet. We could, as most of our political and economic leaders do, proceed with the narrative that business as usual will prevail. The coronavirus pandemic is just a blip on the screen, the markets will rebound and the latest reports about the dying of the great Australian coral reefs are just temporary difficulties from which we will surely recover. On the other hand, we could go to the opposite pole and say that we are currently undergoing a Great Unravelling of the planet that will lead to our ultimate destruction. This story is supported by considerable evidence of the ongoing collapse of our biological, ecological, economic and social systems. Despite its nihilism, this is a tempting narrative to assume in the middle of a pandemic. But, contrary to the life of the imagination, it literalizes the future and assumes it knows what is going to happen. Of course, all three narratives contain some truth, and I have found myself living in different ones at different times, depending on my mood.

But since the future is a blank canvas and a projective field for us all, and no one really knows what is going to happen, I find it more generative to proceed with the assumption that we are involved in a Great Turning, an initiatory process that offers the possibility of becoming a rite of passage for the human species as a whole.

In their book Coming Back To Life, Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown make a useful observation about the dynamics of the Great Turning: *The Industrial Growth Society generates great suffering worldwide. Buddhist social thinkers see that what is at work here are institutionalized forms of the three mutually reinforcing poisons at the root of all human suffering: greed, aggression and delusion. Consumerism can be seen as institutionalized greed, the military industrial complex as institutionalized aggression, and state- and corporate-controlled media as institutionalized delusion. It follows that we are confronting in the Industrial Growth Society universal errors to which all humans are prone, rather than evil or satanic forces. It also follows that once these errors become institutionalized as political, economic and legal agents in their own right, they attain a degree of autonomy extending beyond the control and the conscious choices of any individuals involved. This understanding can motivate us not to condemn so much as to work to free ourselves and others who are in bondage to these institutionalized poisons.* (5)

A similar picture of ‘being in bondage to institutionalized poisons’ came to me in a dream during the election of 1988, when in the midst of a particularly vapid presidential campaign pitting Michael Dukakis against George Bush, Sr., I had the following dream:

It starts with a conference dinner at the United Nations. The dignitaries are at a table on the stage, while the rest of us are at dinner tables on the main floor. As a kind of necessary diversion, the coordinators of the event decide to do a quick honoring of the sacrifice of the UN soldiers who have died in the line of duty. A camera pauses to show a snapshot of a young man in his UN uniform, surrounded by his family. Then it pulls back to show another soldier, a woman, surrounded by her loved ones. The camera continues to pull back, showing more and more pictures of soldiers who have sacrificed their lives to the cause of world peace. The conference room is filling with tears. The organizers realize that things are getting out of control, emotions are too high. Finally, in the midst of this atmosphere of profound grief, one well-respected UN leader stands up and gives a stirring speech. He says, “We are all, myself included, held in bondage by forces which we must begin to identify and break free of, that we must give form to and consume. The time is now for huge international shifts of consciousness.” There is a final line to the speech, a real zinger that I can’t make out. And then the lights go out and the room is plunged into darkness. When the lights come back on, there is confetti flying from the ceilings, a band is playing and champagne flows. It is as if nothing had happened. The people at my table look at each other with puzzled expressions. “Did you just experience what I experienced?” I tell them that I think this whole thing is part of some larger lesson plan. End of dream.

If you substitute frontline medical workers for the UN soldiers in this dream, it remains as relevant now as it did 30 years ago. What I know is true is this: we are all, myself included, held in bondage by forces that obscure the truth and make it difficult to cut through the spin and the hype of our culture. We are all in need of a means to help us see through this miasma without losing our souls in the process. There are people sacrificing their lives right now to give us the time to change our ways. We are all in a cultural trance that we must give form to and consume. Let's call that trance The Industrial Growth Society and let's consume it by integrating it into our psyches; first by waking up to it and then by transforming it through conscious action. The future of the human species depends on it. Why? Because we are destroying the systems that support life on this planet. But how do we wake up from that trance, especially when those who are in a trance are not aware they are in a trance? Using a depth psychological lens, I want to suggest three avenues to pursue as a means to 'wake up' from the trance of late-stage capitalism.

The only way to discover you are in a trance is to be in relationship to a perspective or position that is outside of that trance. If we think of our conscious, waking worldview as saturated with the personal and collective forces that hold us in bondage, then one place to turn for a perspective outside of that ego stance is to your dreams. Every night, and several times each night, the dream poet of your dreams creates a picture of your existential situation and, as Jung points out in his compensatory theory of psychic energy, offers a viewpoint that is counter to the ego's. As a result, a great deal of dream interpretation is devoted to relating the perspective provided by the dream to the situation of the waking ego to see how that perspective can be enlarged. When reflecting on what the dream is saying, the ego occasionally has a felt sense of a 'click' or a kind of 'waking up' to a position it had not previously considered. When that happens, the ego has just awoken from a kind of mini-trance into a wider awareness of its situation. It has become more conscious. We can understand this as shadow work, the process of integrating the contents of the personal unconscious into the ego, thereby making it more whole. But as the apocalyptic forces of the Great Turning reach a fever pitch, as they are now in the Covid-19 pandemic, and which they will continue to do in the climate warming crisis, we need to consider in what ways our dreams are revealing perspectives that are outside of the trance of the Industrial Growth Society itself. Of course, to wake up outside of the trance of late-stage capitalism has its own problems. You are no longer part of the collective. You have become, in Jung's words, an individual. And in that position you have certain responsibilities, namely, to enact the hints being given by those dreams, which in a sense are no longer your own. As Jung so presciently said about the archetypal forces gathering in the unconscious, forces that will shape the world after the Great Turning, *"What is the Great Dream? It consists of the many small dreams and the many acts of humility and submission to their hints. It is the future and the picture of the new world, which we do not understand yet. We cannot know better than the unconscious and its intimations. There is a fair chance of finding what we seek in vain in our conscious world. Where else would it be?"* (6)

A second way to wake up to the destructive trance that holds us in bondage is through acts of individual conscience. While I have never been a fan of Mitt Romney as a political figure, I think he did the country a great service in modeling what an individual act of conscience looks like when he voted in favor of Trump's impeachment and gave a clear rationale grounded in his duty to conscience. I was reminded of Murray Stein's terrific book Solar Conscience, Lunar Conscience: An Essay on the Psychological Foundations of Morality, Lawfulness and the Sense of Justice. In that book, Stein distinguishes the differences between Freud and Jung on the development of conscience. Simplistically stated, in Freud conscience is an introjection of parental voices and peer groups that structure the super-ego. In Jung, on the other hand, conscience can only be discovered in the midst of a conflict of duty, when the opinions and judgements of your parents and peer group and the surrounding culture clash with a still, small inner voice that says you must do it this way, no matter what the cost. The eyes of your family, friends and community are relativized by the eyes of an inner sense of the Other, the archetype of the Self, the sacred eye of God. Loyalty to a higher power in an individual act of conscience has the effect of liberating you from the bondage of the trance of late-stage capitalism.

A third way to 'wake up' in the presence of a larger perspective that is outside of your ego can be found in the domain of the dark emotions – grief, fear, despair and their various feeling states. The psychic mechanisms of splitting, repression and denial are all ways of defending the ego from the pain of the dark emotions generated by 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune'. They are ubiquitous in human experience because we have all suffered from various degrees of trauma. Whenever I swim in these deep waters, I always turn to Miriam Greenspan and her book Healing Through the Dark Emotions. As the daughter of two holocaust survivors and an experienced psychotherapist, Greenspan knows well the fear of falling into darkness and not being able to return, that the more we lock up our dark emotions, the greater the fear they will devour us. Her therapeutic advice is to listen to what the dark emotions have to say, and then listen some more, since we get better at it the more we practice it. When we are able to be in the presence of these emotions with awareness and receptivity, they become our teachers. Greenspan writes, "*They bring us information and supply us with energy – the raw material of spiritual empowerment and transformation. When we know how to listen to them, we can ride their energy, like a wave, with awareness as our protection. Emotional energy flows, and a hidden doorway in the heart opens. Something shifts. A transmutation occurs: a movement through the pain to spiritual power. ... Finding the power of the sacred, not despite suffering, but in the midst of it: this is the alchemy of the dark emotions.*" (7)

So what do the dark emotions have to teach us in the midst of a pandemic, which itself is on the leading edge of the greater transformational dynamics of the Great Turning? And what is on the other side of that "hidden doorway in the heart" that opens?

Another elder I consult frequently when working with my own dark emotions is Francis Weller, author of The Wild Edge of Sorrow. His specialty is grief, which he refers to as a ‘threshold emotion’ because when you enter the door of grief, it opens the door to all the other rooms. He often tells the story of walking up to a woman in Africa and saying to her, “You have so much joy!”. She turns to him and replies, “That’s because I cry a lot.” It was a key moment for him as he made the connection between joy, play and laughter and the universal human experience of grief. He calls grief “an ironic state” because it is so feral, so saturated with life force that when we’re in it we feel most alive. He recommends that we form an “apprenticeship to sorrow” that will allow us to soften our hearts and enter into “holy ground”. (8).

I cannot say what you will discover should you turn to face your grief consciously and, powered by the feral life force of grief, discover that hidden doorway in the heart and walk through it, but I can report back a few insights from my own apprenticeship with sorrow. And is this not what Jung encourages us to do: to engage the unconscious and report back what we discover there? And is this not the purpose of the Jung Society, to provide a community venue for people to share the wisdom of their encounters with the unconscious? And are these encounters not one important way in which the Anima Mundi, the dream of the earth, speaks to human beings and provides what Thomas Berry calls the ‘genetic guidance’ that will lead the systems of the earth, humans included, into higher levels of organization and integration?

So allow me to place my inner experiences in service to the greater good of my community. There is no lack of things to grieve in my life story – in addition to the personal griefs of lost parents, fears of dying, betrayals and shame, there are my experiences with the collective griefs of the 120,000 souls who died in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima where I lived for three years, the indiscriminate slaughter of civilians in the Bosnian war, the poor souls forced to jump from the towers of 9/11 or be burned alive, the hundreds of thousands who died in our name in Iraq, the incredible rate of extinction of species, the nine million who die of hunger every year, the indiscriminate victims of Covid-19 – the list goes on and on and on. While my apprenticeship with sorrow is far from over, I would like to briefly report back three revelations that have come to me through my apprenticeship to the dark emotions that might be relevant to the Great Turning. My hope and my method is that these stories will stimulate memories of some of the revelations you have experienced in your own apprenticeship to sorrow.

First, it was only after baking in the sun for days while fasting on a summer vision quest, grieving the recent death of my father and meditating on a rattlesnake that had grazed my bare foot, that I was released from the sense that I was a skin-encapsulated ego, an island unto myself that had to make his way in a competitive, atomistic, reductionistic world grounded in the materialism of cause and effect. In the burning desert heat and tears, the fears and synchronicities that surrounded me, I was given a vision of what Joanna Macy calls ‘the greening of the self’. My sense of self,

my identity, expanded far beyond myself and merged with the plants and animals and landforms around me. I was able to be with my father in the imaginal landscape of the afterlife, I was able to hear the snake speak and learn about its life ways, I could feel the personality of this micro-climate, and I could see myself seeing this. I was experiencing wider circles of identification of who I really was -- a tiny ephemeral leaf on a vast Tree of Life whose purpose and destiny was clearly my own. I was a member of my human community, yes, but I was also a member of a vast more-than-human community that included the earth and the whole cosmos. It was a vision of connection. I learned, too, that there was a kind of flexibility in this expansive state. I could choose to be the Randy Morris whose father just died, a father and husband who just survived a close encounter with a rattlesnake in the middle of nowhere, or I could at will move out into widening circles and identify with the suffering of our planet and the sorrows of people I had never met. I had read about these kinds of experiences, but now I finally had a direct encounter I could not deny that liberated me from the sterile and ineffectual metaphysical worldview in which I had been raised. I was not only an individual self, I was also an ecological self. I was not in a world of random matter, but in a world of mystery, wonder and beauty. Fueled by my grief, I had stepped through that doorway in my heart into a new self-conception that has remained with me ever since. I am reporting back from that place to say that a resilient, green ego is essential for navigating the Great Turning.

A second insight occurred to me in my mid-40's as I railed against a heart condition that I feared would kill me before my children were grown. The thought of my children growing up without a father terrified me. My sorrow and anxiety about this only seemed to make my condition worse. I managed to work myself into a real state of fear, anxiety and grief, when once again on a vision quest of fasting and prayer, I had an encounter with death that liberated me from fear. I somewhat playfully put my story into a poem that goes like this:

A Divine Antidote

There is a rule of creation,
 Writ deep across the sky
It says that if you live,
 Then you must die.

It's a brute and merciless fact
 That gives one pause,
You might think the whole thing's
 A meaningless game,
Unless you know the cause.

You see, Creator built into every living thing
A meaning to its existence,
And every creature knows it,
‘Cept mankind, the most insistent.

He it is, so afraid to die
When all the others seem to get by fine.

So God said,
For all these dopes,
I’m gonna have to come up
With a Divine Antidote.

And this is it:
That you will fear,
Until deep down in your underground,
Profound blessings appear.

Gratitude so fierce, and so strong
You can’t help but burst out in song.
In such a state,
Death is a piece of cake.

So it truly behooves you,
To link the beauty that moves you,
To God’s infinite mercy,
A Divine Antidote,
For you, me, and like-minded dopes.

I had come to a door in my heart that was littered with images of death. I myself was going through a dying process and I could not tell if it was a literal death or a mid-life rite of passage death holding out hope of an inner transformation. By turning to face my fear, I was gifted with this poem that makes clear the role that gratitude plays in surrendering to death. I try, with varying degrees of success, to cultivate an attitude of gratitude every day so that every day is a good day to die. As we face the existential threats posed by the Great Turning, the archetype of death will be constellated. You can feel it in the air of the pandemic – every sniffle and sore throat the ‘beginning of the end’, every siren in the distance a tragic love story of family and community loss. And yet I am here to report back that to practice dying in a state of gratitude is an essential discipline in preparation for the rigors of the Great Turning.

My third brief story about the doorway in our hearts that can be accessed through the dark emotions took place in a Dream of the Earth sweat lodge not long ago. In the midst of the heat and sweat and prayers for the suffering of the earth, the ceremonial leader led us to a flame in our heart that was born of our passion for the gift of life. In the midst of our physical distress, he then asked us to pray for what we needed to keep this flame alive. I immediately heard a voice say the word “Beauty!” “Huh?” I thought to myself. “That can’t be right. It seems too tame for the times we are in.” So I then considered Beauty’s companions, the Good and the True. Surely in the age of Trump’s lies we need to cultivate the True when it is in such short supply. “No!” the stern voice said, “It’s Beauty!” I went into jousting mode: “Well, what about Justice? Who can be against Justice? Surely Justice is sorely needed in these times.” And with this thought, I immediately entered into a waking dream and saw that I was in a Japanese martial arts dojo like the one I used to practice in. An old Japanese sensei I recognized from previous dreams, with a black belt so old it had become silver strands, was walking over to the wall of the dojo with a stern look on his face to get his bamboo stick so he could whack me over the shoulders with it. “No! No!” I cry. “I get it! It’s Beauty. I swear, I see it clear as day. It’s Beauty!” And so it is, for me, that Beauty is a means to keep the flame of my heart alive. It’s not that the Good and the True and Just do not play a role. But when I entered that door in my heart, Beauty is what presented itself, and so I report back to you that Beauty has a pivotal role to play in the Great Turning. For example, I admire the work of Trebbe Johnson and her book Radical Joy For Hard Times: Finding Meaning and Making Beauty in Earth’s Broken Places. It is her thesis that by directly facing what is sad, perplexing and frightening in our world and in our hearts we can, through these dark emotions, discover connection and joy by taking simple actions to find and make beauty. She encourages people to search out the wounded places that abound in our world and bring beauty to them through ritual and ceremony, practicing the art form of “guerrilla beauty” to, in her words, “love the ugly back to life”. (9)

So I offer these three personal revelations that have emerged from my apprenticeship with the dark emotions in the time of the Great Turning. Notice that the common denominator of each story is the turn to the interior, the movement through the door of the heart and the encounter with a presence that is mysteriously Other, facets of what Jung calls the archetype of the Self, that lets us know that we are not alone in these interior precincts. That Sacred Other is like an oracular cauldron that holds the stories of the future we so desperately need to hear. It is the deep well from which the healing waters of a new world will flow.

What happens when you turn to face the gaze of your own dark emotions and, in the presence of gratitude for the gift of being alive and the ritual protection of your allies, move through the door of your own heart? My own revelations are conditioned by my limited experiences and my own positionality – my race, class, gender, able-ness, etc. My view is only a partial view. We need the

blessings of your contributions because, as Thomas Berry points out, the greater the diversity, the greater the integrity of the whole. It is not an easy task to meet the gaze of the suffering of the world. But I believe the coronavirus epidemic is just the beginning of a Dark Night of the Species Soul. As the ever-prescient climate activist Greta Thunberg says, “There is a lot of talk about returning to normal after the Covid-19 outbreak. But normal was a crisis.”

If it is any consolation, as a vision quester and vision quest guide, I can tell you that being in the Dark Night of the Soul is not such a bad place to be. Everything that you love and hold dear is heightened in intensity, gratitude and beauty live on the surface of things, excitement hovers in the midst of the uncertainty, synchronicities abound, which means that new stories abound, and we are given the opportunity to live the most meaningful lives ever lived on this planet, as we join hands as a global community to avert the demise of our species. John O’Donohue reminds us that if we approach this pregnant time with gratitude and reverence, “great things will decide to approach us.” Our real life, as individuals and as a global community, will come to the surface and its light will awaken the concealed beauty in things. In the spirit of those words, let me conclude this part of my presentation with John O’Donohue’s *Blessing For Beauty*:

A Blessing for Beauty

May the beauty of your life become more visible to you, that you may glimpse your wild divinity.

May the wonders of the earth call you forth from all your small, secret prisons and set your feet free in the pastures of possibilities.

May the light of dawn anoint your eyes that you may behold what a miracle a day is.

May the liturgy of twilight shelter all your fears and darkness within the circle of ease.

May the angel of memory surprise you in bleak times with new gifts from the harvest of your vanished days.

May you allow no dark hand to quench the candle of hope in your heart.

May you discover a new generosity towards yourself, and encourage yourself to engage your life as a great adventure.

May the outside voices of fear and despair find no echo in you.

May you always trust the urgency and wisdom of your own spirit.

May the shelter and nourishment of all the good you have done, the love you have shown, the suffering you have carried, awaken around you to bless your life a thousand times.

And when love finds the path to your door may you open like the earth to the dawn, and trust your every hidden color towards its nourishment of light.

May you find enough stillness and silence to savor the kiss of God on your soul and delight in the eternity that shaped you, that holds you and calls you.

And may you know that despite confusion, anxiety and emptiness, your name is written in Heaven.

And may you come to see your life as a quiet sacrament of service, which awakens around you a rhythm where doubt gives way to the grace of wonder, where what is awkward and strained can find elegance, and where crippled hope can find wings, and torment enter at last unto the grace of serenity.

May Divine Beauty bless you. (10)

Thank you for your attention this evening. My ardent hope is that some element of my presentation, some word or image or idea, has stimulated your imagination and moved you to remember some of your own soul experiences with respect to what is happening in our world right now. Consider the possibility that your soul experience was not just about you, but may be a grain of sand in the larger movement of the Great Turning, a fractal of the Great Dream that is yearning to be born. To that end, I invite you, after we take a short 5 minute bio-break, to join a small chatroom of two other people that will be randomly generated by the wonders of Zoom technology. When you all land there, I invite the oldest of the three to be the host and time keeper. After each person introduces themselves with a single sentence that includes their first name, the host can invite a person to speak for six uninterrupted minutes, guided by these two questions:

1. What word, image or idea has resonated with your soul in response to this presentation? Where might this hint be leading you?

2. Have you had any soul experiences you would like to share that are relevant to the Covid-19 crisis or to the larger currents of the Great Turning?

The responsibility of the other two people in the room is to actively listen as attentively as possible to what the speaker has to say, noting how their words resonate in the soul of the listener. Please do not interrupt the speaker during their six minutes, and if they finish before their time is up, please use the remaining time for a ‘sip of silence’ to check in on your own soul’s echo. Sometimes the medicine is in the silence. The host can hold up a finger to let the person know when they have one minute left and then wave ten fingers when the time has expired. When all three have gone, there should be another five minutes for group dialogue. You will then see a one minute warning to come back to the main room, during which time I invite you to affirm your commitment to confidentiality, thank your soul companions, and hit the return button.

When we return, Laura will ask me some of the questions that were generated in the chat room. I'll do my best to respond in a generative way. So now I will leave these two questions on the screen as we take a five minute bio-break. I hope to see you on the other side of that time.

Group Discussion

Final Closing Ritual – Release Invisibles, Flintstone ending!

End Notes

1. C.G. Jung, Collected Works, 9i, Paragraph 291.
2. M. Esther Harding, Psychic Energy: It's Source and Its Transformation, (Princeton: Bollingen Press), 1963, p. 14.
3. John O'Donohue, Divine Beauty: The Invisible Embrace, (New York: Bantam Press), 2003, p. 24.
4. Andrew Harvey and Carolyn Baker, Savage Grace: Living Resiliently in the Dark Night of the Globe (Bloomington: iUniverse), 2017, p. 11.
5. Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown, Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide To The Work that Reconnects, (Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers), 2014, p. 3.
6. C. G. Jung, Gerhard Adler, et.al., Selected Letters of C.G. Jung, 1909-1961, (Princeton: Bollingen Press), 2014, p. 197.
7. Miriam Greenspan, Healing Through the Dark Emotions: The Wisdom of Grief, Fear and Despair, (Boston: Shambhala Press), 2003, p. 12-13.
8. Francis Weller, *Of Grief and Reverence: Interview with Charles Eisenstein*, found at <https://charleseisenstein.org/podcasts/new-and-ancient-story-podcast/episode-04-grief-and-reverence/>
9. Trebbe Johnson, Radical Joy for Hard Times: Finding Meaning and Making Beauty in Earth's Broken Places, (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books), 2018, p. 114.

10. From John O'Donohue, Divine Beauty: The Invisible Embrace, found at <https://www.karenwyattmd.com/apps/blog/show/14682802>.

A video of this talk may be found at:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1530D4KrQCeFt6xGxpspGSLeWDbqLJFDY/view?usp=sharing>