



# Carl Jung, Plato, *and* Tiger Woods

Pete Williams

“I always *knew* that I would someday realize this great and wonderful achievement”.

**T**hese are the words of Tiger Woods moments after winning the 2001 Masters Golf Tournament. In doing so, he became the first to have won all four major tournaments in a year – an event that has secured his place in sports history. But, just what did Tiger *know*? How did he know it? How *does* one know one’s destiny?

It is difficult, I believe, not to be in some way impressed by the power and certainty implicit in Tiger’s statement. There is something quite rare and at the same time compelling about words spoken with such humble confidence. One senses a certain prescience in them, as though this man truly did somehow “always *know*” that this achievement was indeed his destiny. He doesn’t speak of hoping, nor of believing or dreaming, but rather, he demonstrates his acute attunement to a certain knowledge – a knowing that perhaps comes from deep within our psyche, encoded into our soul.

Of course, we all know that there can be but one Tiger Woods, one Martin Luther King Jr., only one Mother Teresa. It is difficult for most of us to imagine ourselves to be women and men of destiny – that distinction it would seem has long been reserved for those of great achievement, fame, or perhaps infamy. But, we all do carry within our psyches our own, unique, inner knowledge and the soul’s longing for us to *re-member* this knowledge is an ancient and archetypal theme that holds relevance and meaning for each of us. To help us understand and make meaning out of difficult and perplexing questions such as this, depth psychology often turns to myth and legend. In Book Ten of The Republic, Plato offers us just such a myth – The Myth of Er, a story that Plato describes as “the tale of a warrior bold, Er, son of Armenius”.

According to Plato, the great warrior Er was one day slain in battle. Dead, he lay among the scores of corpses for ten days and yet, unlike all the others, his body was found intact and

undecayed. He was brought to his home and, on the twelfth day, as he lay upon his funeral pyre, he revived and began to relate “what he had seen in the world beyond”. Er stated that his soul had left his body and had journeyed to a mysterious region. Here he observed countless souls all gathered to choose the lives that they would lead upon once again being born into the physical world.

Having selected their lives, each soul would then pass before the daughters of Necessity, the three Fates, Lachesis, Clotho, and Atropos. To each, Lachesis first assigns one’s life guardian, the fulfiller of the choice – the genius or daimon. This “divinity” then leads them to Clotho who ratifies the destiny of the chosen life. And thirdly, it is Atropos who spins the web that makes the destiny irreversible. Finally, Plato tells us, all souls then journey to the Plain of Oblivion where they drink of the River of Forgetfulness, “each one as he drank forgot all things”.

This then, according to the Myth of Er, is the place from which all souls enter into this world – we choose our life; we are assigned a companion, our daimon, whose task it is to help us realize our chosen lot; our choice is ratified; our destiny is determined; and then, in the final act of the drama, all that we have known is forgotten. Plato is careful to tell us, however, that all is not lost. The knowledge we possess, while it is indeed forgotten, *is not lost* – the daimon, our genius and companion, remains with us, waiting to help us re-call and re-member what we once knew.

Many of us recognize Plato’s myth as the basis for James Hillman’s work, The Soul’s Code (1996). Dr. Hillman masterfully captures the imperative and compelling nature of the daimon and his book is full of poignant examples of well-known personalities whose lives are lived out in fulfillment of their destiny. And yet, many of us are perhaps left wondering how we might better live our lives in consort with our own, unique, but perhaps seemingly unexciting, undramatic, daimon. The tedium, routine, and demands of our daily lives can often leave us feeling somehow distanced, separated from something that we long for or that we belong to – our world easily distracts and estranges us from our daimon. When this happens, we can experience a deep angst, a feeling of home-sickness, or perhaps homelessness. These feelings are the soul’s call to us to remember, to shake off the effects of The River of Forgetfulness from which we drank.

Carl Jung devoted much of his life to his personal process of remembering. His fascination with Gnosticism, alchemy, and the ancient religious mystery traditions is due to his understanding that these are traditions founded upon an appreciation for the deep, inner knowledge our soul possesses. He realized that the knowledge we seek to re-call can be accessed through our exploration of the unconscious and the integration of its contents into our living, daily, conscious lives. Jung believed that

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our life task, our life journey, is to re-collect those parts of ourselves that have been split-off, repressed, or simply shoved beyond our awareness. It is Jung then who gives us an important clue as to how we can each begin to re-member our destiny, reclaim the life we once chose – the unconscious, Jung says, holds for us all that needs to be remembered.

I wonder then if perhaps Tiger Woods came to *know*, and thus fulfill his destiny, by working to come into conscious relationship with his assigned daimon. His life has been devoted not to learning how to play golf but to *remembering* how to play the game; for, that is the lot his soul once chose. While his enormous popularity is no doubt due to his remarkable skill and humble manner, there seems to be something almost transcendent in his easy, natural, ability that, I believe, stirs and inspires



*Jim Young*

within each of us a longing to re-member what it is *we* have perhaps forgotten.

Learning the art of re-membering our inner knowledge is a difficult, life-long process that requires determination and effort. Tiger Woods has committed his entire life to his process – he works tirelessly, constantly practicing and perfecting his art with patience and perseverance. For most of us too, this process demands an attitude of curiosity and a willingness to listen carefully to the daimon’s gentle whispers. When we hear, for example, a particular bird’s song that somehow sounds familiar, that somehow resonates in a different way, we can stop to wonder what it might remind us of. Has our soul perhaps heard that song before? When a place or a face or a feeling seems some-

how strangely familiar, we can stop to wonder of what it might remind us. Why and in what way does it call our attention? We can ask, of what do the images in our dreams remind us. Not simply what the images might mean, but why does that particular image choose to visit? How have I known this image before? Jung and Plato tell us that such attention and work will not go unnoticed – our daimon, Plato assures us, is bound by Lachesis to remain always with us, always close at hand, waiting to be recognized and invited into relationship: “And she sent with each, as the guardian of his life and the fulfiller of his choice, the genius that he had chosen, and this divinity then would lead the soul”.

I believe that as we all engage the life-long process of doing our inner work, we too, like Tiger Woods, can learn to trust what it is *we know* but have forgotten. We too can embrace the opportunity that we have to live out the life we once chose in all of its promise and all of its potential. For, it is my belief that by doing so, we can realize a deep, meaningful, and lasting sense of psychological and spiritual homecoming ■