



# Honoring Both Worlds- Visible and Invisible

Jerry R. Wright

To imitate the barnyard alarmist, Chicken Little, “Our world is *shrinking*, our world is *shrinking!*” Technologically, we greet this fact with a sense of accomplishment that the world is at our fingertips, and with hope that we no longer need to be strangers—a hope obviously yet to be realized. From a psychological and philosophical perspective, however, our *shrinking world* is cause for great alarm. More precisely, the danger I wish to address here is our *shrinking worldview*; and, even more specifically, the “disappearance” of the invisible world and the Invisible Ones.

For many (perhaps most) moderns, the invisible world no longer has any relevance. It has been eradicated by science much like many earlier diseases and now exists as a relic on the shelves of our “primitive” ancestors. If it exists at all in the modern mind, the invisible world is the subject of science fiction or, more recently, dismissed as the province of New Age fringe elements. However, as Carl Jung reminds us, in spite of our rational dismissal of the power of the invisible world and our domination of nature, we are still the “victims of nature” as much as ever. For the rational mind, the numina (*gods or spirits*) may have fled from the woods, mountains, animals, and streams, and the gods may have abandoned Mount Olympus, but these Ancient Ones reappear now as manifestations of the unconscious. We may shrink our vocabulary about the Invisible Ones, but our limiting words have no effect on their active presence or power.

In the thirteenth century, addressing the shrinking world view of his day, the Sufi poet, Rumi, penned what remains an antidote for what may be our primary neurosis: the splitting of the visible and invisible worlds. He writes: **“Work in the invisible world at least as hard as the visible.”** I interpret the word work to mean “respect,” “relate,” or “honor the invisible world at least as much as the visible.”

In recent months Rumi’s poetic challenge has become a mantra rising to my consciousness unbidden: **“Work in the invisible world at least as hard as the visible.”** I find myself experimenting with the word “invisible” in place of the more familiar designation, “inner.” While “inner” will remain a favorite way to denote psychological and spiritual work, it does have the disadvantage of being too easily literalized and localized. Do you, like I, find yourselves imagining that the inner world or inner work is located somewhere inside the body? In a similar vein, we tend to imagine the psyche as being located in the head or brain. Jung reminds us that psyche meets us from the external, visible world as well as from the internal, “inner” world. Likewise it may be more helpful to image the body as being in the soul, rather than the soul being “located” somewhere in the body. Soul, or psyche, is the larger, more encompassing reality in which we live and move and have our being. So, it can be helpful to experiment with the designations “visible” and “invisible” to enlarge our worldview, as well as to expand our experience of soul.

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**visible.”** I like the worldview implied in Rumi’s crisp phrase. Both domains, visible and invisible, are given honor while implying a current imbalance of energy and attention given to that which is visible. No doubt all of us would agree with that assessment. When either of the realms is denied or devalued, both suffer greatly. For example, when we no longer have imaginative ways to honor the invisible Presences in creation (the *spirit* of the tree, water, earth, for ex.) we treat the natural world as if it has no soul which results in our relating to the earth only as an object for our use and consumption. Through a one-sided rational lens, the visible creation is viewed as *inanimate*, without spirit or soul. This leads to the erroneous conclusion that we are “to subdue” the earth and, unfortunately, we are doing that job all too well. Ecologically, our shrinking worldview has disastrous results on the visible world.

Even more sinister, however, are the psychological and philosophical consequences when the invisible world is denied or neglected. When the ego shrinks its worldview to that which is visible, tangible, and measurable, it has no means to take in or relate to the contents of the deep unconscious which are best personified as Invisible Presences and Powers. Psychologically, the ego may be imaged as a cup or container whose purpose is to catch, embrace, and metabolize the energies from the unconscious, the vast energies of the Self. Theologically, the container houses our God-images by which we encounter and relate to Mystery.

It is a psychological law that when something large tries to occupy something small, the latter will experience some state of discomfort or dis-ease. For example, when a current ego attitude is challenged by some new information or viewpoint, the ego experiences some degree of dread or fear. When the ego container is especially restricted (our *shrinking* worldview) and is approached by the Invisible Presences and Powers, the ego experiences what can best be described as terror. Stated dynamically, *as our worldview shrinks, our terror increases*.

A related psychological law states that the ego will meet in the visible world what it will not embrace or honor in the invisible world. This is the basis for the phenomena of projection. Projection is one of the Self’s most creative tools to reveal to us the Invisible Ones who vie for attention around our soul’s table, especially the Ones of whom we are most ashamed or afraid.

I find it psychologically instructive that we are now fighting a “war on terror.” The phrase has crept into our vocabulary almost unnoticed; we say it with such unconscious certainty: *we are fighting a war on terror*. Could it be that in the wisdom of the psyche we now have stumbled upon the correct psychological word, terror, yet we fight the war on the wrong front? Right war, wrong battlefield. Or, with a play on words, we continue to fight the war “out front” rather than “out back;” that is, out back in our shadow, with the forgotten Invisible Ones. The name of the greater war has crept into our national and international vocabulary so that we may be saying the right word but have yet to hear its deeper meaning.

We may be like young children who hear words being used and parrot them without knowing their meaning. A client told me a story of her little granddaughter, not quite three years old. The little girl is in the backseat of the family car and she and her father are going out their driveway to turn left as they usually do onto a busy street. As they approach the street the little girl, parroting what she had heard her mother express repeatedly, says in her sweetest voice, “OK on the right!” And

her father turns left onto the busy street. A few minutes later the little girl asks innocently, “Daddy, what does *on the right* mean?” Using the right words without knowing their meanings can be a very dangerous situation! “War on terror”—right words, wrong meaning; right war, wrong battlefield.

A final psychological observation seems pertinent. When the ego feels threatened it tends to double its efforts to remain safe and secure. The energy and resources currently dedicated to “homeland security” has reached worshipful proportions, revealing further that vast unconscious, invisible forces are likely at work.

**“Work in the invisible world at least as hard as the visible.”** Rumi’s challenge eight hundred years ago, echoed and deepened by Carl Jung in the last century, remains our most critical undertaking, individually and collectively. It is our *opus sacra*, our sacred work.

However, while difficult and critical, this sacred work is done in the most natural ways; natural, that is, if we resist the *shrinking* of our worldview. To conclude these reflections, then, we are doing this great work naturally *when...*

- We recognize and honor the Invisible Ones whose presences we know by a combination of intense emotion and a bodily response. Jung called these numinous, or archetypal encounters and they visit regularly, *called or not called, invited or uninvited*.
- We dialogue with the Invisible Ones, listen to their wisdom, and talk with them about their lives and ours.
- We honor the Invisible Ones who visit us in our dreams, and we visit them in *their* invisible domain before bringing them too quickly into ours.
- We honor the “great cloud of Witnesses” who hover among us.
- We allow ourselves to be addressed by the natural world *as if* the spirits of the tree, water, rocks, etc. are *seeing us*; thus, we allow the natural world to be the *Icon* it is.
- We pay attention to the intersecting of the visible and invisible worlds which we call synchronistic events.
- We resist religious literalists and fundamentalists of all stripes, including the ones who reside within us.
- We withdraw and integrate the projections of our shadow, both sinister and golden.
- We cover each other with an invisible cloak of compassion, which may be our most effective means of prayer.
- We trust the Mystery at the heart of our common existence rather than trying to master the Mystery.

Let us, in these ways and more, **“Work in the invisible world at least as hard as the visible.”**

*(This article is an excerpt of an address by the same title given to the Natural Spirituality Gathering, February 10, 2006 at Camp Mikell, Toccoa, Georgia)*