



New Life: Symbolic Meditations on *The Holy Bible*

by Kathleen Wiley

“The Bible is a Special Book” has gone through my mind repeatedly as I have written this article. The phrase is the title of a book that I had as a child. I can see the light gray cover, with cloud like images, and a dark-haired little boy sitting with a Bible in his lap. The image constellates a feeling of warmth and yearning to know more about the special book that needs to be reclaimed for its sacred truths. Its symbolic stories need to be freed from concretization, so the transformative power of the Mystery it holds can work in us.

When something comes into a form, the energetic essence begins to subside. We acknowledge this when we say that someone starts to die as soon as they are born. Static Christian dogma, institutional laws, and rote interpretations squeeze the life force out of the living experiences on which they are based. The fiery ideas and stories that once stimulated psyche to grow become meaningless words. The symbol, the holder of that which is not yet fully known, gets lost.

The Bible is a book of living symbols encountered through story. My book series, *New Life: Symbolic Meditations (from The Holy Bible)* invites the reader to open to the power of conscious relationship with the energies symbolized in the stories. My written meditations consider the applied meaning of the scriptures in living with our selves, with our internal processes—thoughts, feelings, sensations, intuitions, impulses, desires, emotions, perceptions, and actions. The reflections explore the stories as illustrating movements within our psyche.

Jung’s work affirms a symbolic view of the sacred text. Jung wrote:

“Our Christian doctrine is a highly differentiated symbol that expresses the transcendent psychic—the God-

image and its properties....(it) contains practically everything of importance that can be ascertained about the manifestations of the psyche in the field of inner experience, but it does not include Nature, at least not in any recognizable form. Consequently, at every period of Christianity there have been subsidiary currents or undercurrents that have sought to investigate the empirical aspect of Nature not only from the outside but from the inside.” (CW, Vol.9ii, par. 270)

Jung investigated our psychic Nature to find the embodied expression of the transcendent. He described the transcendent forces as archetypes. In the scriptures, St. Paul refers to these as “powers and principalities.” Jung discovered that archetypes flow into instincts where automatic, reflexive behaviors are prompted. He saw these opposites as different ends of the light spectrum: instinct as the ultra red and archetype as the ultraviolet rays. They are different densities of the same energy. (Jung described the body and the mind in this way. CW, Vol. 18, par. 69, CW, Vol. 8, par. 621)

In conceptually joining biological behavior with spiritual force, Jung gave us a way to reclaim our body, as well as our mind, as an expression of God Within.

The scripture says, “Our body is the temple of the Lord.” Somehow, the institutional church lost sight of this. Our instincts of hunger, sexuality, drive to activity, reflection, and creativity are the *prima materia* with which we work. Our psychological and spiritual growth happens in our body and mind—the personal self. We are the vessel in which transformation occurs; our embodied self is the ground of the operation. The opposites of physical and spiritual, matter and spirit, instinct and archetype come together in us to create a whole.

Jung saw the symbols of wholeness in Christianity. He sought the connecting links between our psychic nature and the transcendent that we call God. Jung wrote, “Yahweh is a God concept that contains the opposites in a still undivided state.” (CW, Vol. 9ii, par. 18) He called the undivided state within psyche the Self. He defined the Self as the organizing princi-

Kathleen Wiley is a Jungian Psychoanalyst in private practice in Davidson, North Carolina. She is a Senior Training Analyst with the Memphis-Atlanta Jungian Seminar and a frequent presenter at The Haden Institute. She is the author of *New Life: Symbolic Meditations on the Birth of the Divine and New Life: Symbolic Meditations on the Promise of Easter and Spring*. Her meditations are also posted on-line at InnerDivineSpirit.com.

ple and totality of psyche, “a true *complexio oppositorum*” (meaning complex of opposites). (CW, Vol. 9ii, par. 355) Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa, in the 15th Century, had described God with the same phrase.

The stories of the Bible reflect the opposites within our nature and within God. We see the struggle between ego and Self played out in stories like Jonah and the Whale, Saul who becomes Paul, and Peter who loves and denies Jesus. We encounter the interplay of instinctive and archetypal energies that spur our growth. We find instruction about how to move in relationship to our impulses (instincts) and thought-forms (archetypes). We see the alchemical stages of transformation that we go through in the process of unifying these opposites.

Alchemy was a medieval science that attempted to turn base metals into gold. Jung saw the alchemical processes as a metaphor for the individuation process. In our psyche, the base metal is the primary process of our body’s sensations, emotions, intuitions, and accompanying images that are unmediated by consciousness. Our automatic, reflexive animal nature, via the instincts, acts of its own accord to set in motion felt experiences. The base material or primary process becomes gold through an innate transformative process that happens when we can consciously hold the tension of opposites within our nature. The gold is the bit of wholeness, integration, and “peace which passes all understanding” that we experience as our conscious and unconscious natures come together in a unifying third. (This is an example of the Transcendent Function. When we consciously hold the tension of the opposites, the innate Transcendent Function creates the unifying third that logic nor reason cannot create on its own.)

Jung saw the alchemical processes at work in the stories of Christianity. He was not alone in this view. Manly Hall, in *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*, writes,

“...The early philosophers recognized in *the Bible* a book of chemical and alchemical formulae. It is essential that this point be kept in mind at all times. Woe to the seeker who accepts as literal the rambling allegories of the alchemists. Such a one can never enter the inner sanctuary of truth.” (p. CLV)

Hall also writes,

“As the religious world interprets its scriptures with twentieth century educational facilities, it becomes ever more apparent that the sacred books were not historical documents, but that the kings, sages, prophets, and saviors whom Bible students have revered for ages as once existing personalities are in reality only personified attributes of man himself.” (p. CXIII)

With Jung’s approach, we are familiar with relating to the figures of our dreams as parts of our psyche. When we do the same with Bible stories, we access the living power of the God-image (the transcendent) at work.

Jung writes, “God is Reality Itself and therefore—last but not least—man.” (CW, Vol. 16, par. 631) We encounter God when we encounter the Self. The Self is an extension of God in the same way that the ego is an extension of the Self. We seek conscious realization of this reality within our nature. The reuniting of the opposites that have been torn apart is the work of

individuation.

Christian disciplines (like prayer and meditation) seek to create a state of wholeness where the physical body and mind are in communion with Christ Within. Listening for the Voice of God (*Vox Dei*) is integral in this. For Jung, the *Vox Dei* lives in the psyche as the Self. We hear the Voice of God in our psyche as we listen for the seed of the Self that is inherent in all our processes, responses, and actions. As we differentiate from our adopted roles, learned patterns, ego defenses, and unconscious contents, we have a self that can consciously stand in relationship to the larger Self. We have a self to hear God Within.

Individuation facilitates a clear, accessible pathway of communication between our conscious self and the unconscious Self. In Jungian psychology, we call this pathway the ego-Self axis. When we consider the characters in the biblical stories as representative of aspects of our self, we open to a viable, sustaining, and transformative relationship with our Self, or God Within. The inner Redeemer provides energy that moves us to individuate and be whole. (Jung writes, “The archetype of the Redeemer dwells in the psychic nature of man.” CW, Vol. 9ii, par. 285) Our ability to discern the *Vox Dei* is strengthened as we experience the flow of the life force between our ego and the Self.

When we open to the biblical image as symbol, innate knowing resonates in psyche as we are “rooted in Christian soil.” The collective psyche of the West is our inheritance. Christianity is the root of the Western world. It is accessible in all of us. Jung writes, “The premise we start from is and remains Christianity, which covers anything from eleven to nineteen centuries of Western life.” (CW, Vol. 911, par. 271) Other religious symbols do not express the past that is stored in us; they reflect the past of their culture. Individuation demands that we make sense of and grow from the roots with which we are born.

I have learned and continue to gain insights as I live into the images of biblical stories. My life’s work comes full circle in my written meditations on the scriptures. My undergraduate degree in Christian Education, my Masters in Counseling, and my training as a Jungian Analyst are the markers of my personal journey to find God Within my psyche/soul. My meditations come from a synthesis of my studies and personal history.

Jung states that when we individuate we have a responsibility to help the collective, from which we emerge, increase consciousness. My writings on the scriptures are a way for me to give back to the tradition that nurtured me and stimulated my analytical sensibilities. My hope is that the reader finds the truth of their psyche/soul and feels a stronger sense of self in relationship to the Self. As we do this, we elevate the level of collective consciousness. When our consciousness changes, it affects the world around us.

Our attitude, beliefs, and relationship to *The Holy Bible* are important. The rhythm of our collective life is shaped by its teachings. Every week with the common cycle of Sunday as the Sabbath, we are called to reflect on the Christian Way. The symbols work in our lives, consciously or unconsciously, throughout the year as our calendar is marked by Easter and Christmas. We have an opportunity to feel the power of transformation in the symbols, or we can stay caught in the deadness that has been inadvertently fostered. We have a gift in *The Holy Bible*. I invite you to open to its energizing, life-giving symbols one meditation at a time.

Excerpt from *New Life: Symbolic Meditations...*

The Light of Life: John 8:12–20

We have the light of life when we live in conscious relationship to God Within. Jesus said, “No follower of mine shall wander in the dark.” When we connect to Christ within our nature, we see the larger Self, the totality of our psyche. We realize that new life has been growing in the dark, dying places. Just as the light of spring brings new growth, the light of consciousness brings new life to our body minds.

Verse 12, “Once again Jesus addressed the people: ‘I am the light of the world. No follower of mine shall wander in the dark; he shall have the light of life.’”

Universally, light is associated with experiences of the Divine Mystery. Light is synonymous with Consciousness. The Western Mystery tradition teaches that the life force (also known as libido or *chi*) is synonymous with Consciousness. God Within flows through all levels of our psyche—our self-consciousness, “sub” or “un” consciousness, and “supra” or transcendent consciousness.

Self-consciousness is awareness and psychic energy connected to our ego. It includes our sense of self and our abilities to do things at will (when we want). Sub- or un-consciousness includes psychic energy that our experiences in the world have conditioned and shaped into patterns of body response, emotion, thought, and action. The center of each of these patterns is a feeling associated with a universal template of energy known as an archetype. The archetype represents a psychic energy that evokes certain feelings and responses due to the qualities inherent in the archetype. (For example, the archetypes of Good Mother or Bad Mother have universal associations.) Supra, or transcendent, consciousness refers to the psychic energy of God Within.

Jesus called people to move beyond relating to God through laws or commandments that keep instinctive desires in the dark. His invitation is for us to move toward a (self) conscious knowing of our inner psychic processes, including fantasies, dreams, emotions, and reflexive responses. When we are blind to subconscious and unconscious contents, ignoring them because we fear the unknown, we move through our life in the dark. We do not see what is real, present, and active in the background of our known feelings, thoughts, and actions.

When we are aligned with God Within, our self-conscious awareness can differentiate reflexive, instinctive, biologically based impulses from the promptings of our soul. God Within speaks in our desires and feelings in ways that go beyond conditioned, predetermined responses. We see more clearly the whole of who we are, what we want, and how our life force wants to move. With the light of consciousness, we can respond to our emotions, feelings, and thoughts in different ways. With the Light of Christ, we can look to see the roots of habits and moods; we can effectively move toward different ways of being. We find the “light of the world” through God Within.

Inner Reflection

Where do you desire Light in your life? Take a few minutes to identify where you feel stuck, lost, or in the dark. Ask God Within to open your eyes to see what is present consciously and subconsciously, without blame or judgment. Track the progression of affect, thought, feeling, and action that happens internally in this place. Be open to God Within bringing Light that shows a new, more life-giving path.

Self Analysis

by J. Pittman McGehee

Living in the rent house, not knowing we were poor, Dad traveled; he was a territory man. He leased what were known as “service stations.” Mother suffered. In those days in small-town Oklahoma they didn't diagnose or treat depression.

The last of seven children, she was separated from her mom. Her dad was a clergyman, who died when she was three. Idealized. Dad gone, at five, I was her surrogate. Only brother withdrew. No TV. radio off, nighttime. I put my head in her lap. She stroked my hair, “I hope when you grow up you'll help people with their sadness.”

I am a priest. I am a psychoanalyst. Jung says, “The greatest burden of the child is the un-lived life of the parent.” Of course, it is more complicated than that. No thing is one thing. For every effect there are many causes. Sometimes God calls through our neurosis.

“Self Analysis” is from *Growing Down*, © 2013, J. Pittman McGehee and Ink Brush Press. Reprinted by permission of author.

J. Pittman McGehee is an Episcopal priest and Jungian analyst in private practice in Houston, Texas. He is widely known as a lecturer and educator in the field of psychology and religion, as well as a published poet and essayist. He will be our November presenter.