

after the FALL

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The relevance and the importance of myths in Jungian psychology hardly need to be stressed. Jung saw myth and man's myth making ability as major components of the human psyche. Part of the work done in an analysis has to do with discovering the myth under which the analysand lives. We exist surrounded by myths and contained by myths, though we are often without a conscious awareness of this phenomenon.

Some myths are universal: the myths of creation for instance exist in every society. Some are age related: the myths of our twenties are different from those of our fifties and, if life is kind to us, we evolve painlessly from one containing myth to the next. Things rarely work that way, and many of us have experienced being left bereft by the sudden shattering of a sustaining myth. Some myths are gender related and some belong to specific tribes or groups of people,

I venture to say that there is probably in America no myth more prevalent than the myth of finding the "right" place in which to live, the ideal spot to call one's home. I do not mean literally an Eden, but a place that suits ME and my needs, that gives me a chance to become established, to grow. Such a place is Eden enough for me!

Everyone of the millions who made their way to these shores--and I include myself among them--has done so following a vision, a promise of some better place where one could be oneself, where one could be safe, free and develop to one's utmost.

This myth, which has contained us all in this country, has engendered some powerful reactions among the population. It has brought about the huge exodus of the Pioneers traveling toward the West. Those people went across the country at incredible perils to themselves and their families. They endured incredible hardships, looking for the Frontier over the horizon, the place where grass would grow more lushly and life would be kinder

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and easier for each of them--where they would find their rightful place.

It is the same collective myth which caused so many of us to leave the cities and make our homes in the suburbs where space and calm could be ours, and again, where life could be kinder and easier and more as we hoped for it to be.

Of course it never really worked out quite that way. There were always glitches in one's life. The West was not a paradise, neither were the suburbs the answer to every wish. But the myth survived and continues to contain us all. Somewhere was the answer to our longing. Somewhere there was peace and safety for us.

That myth of place and home has been a living reality in our psyches, though one about which we were rarely conscious. Rooted as we might have been in the place where we had started, there was always the unspoken, often even unnoticed, knowledge that we could always "move on" to use a favorite contemporary expression. The perfect place could be ours, somewhere, sometime, somehow.

It is the myth that has permitted so much flexibility in this country--the myth that has contributed so much to the dynamic, optimistic attitude of Americans. If it is possible to find one's dreams over the horizon, then there is always hope. And the hope in turn creates the "can do, can be, can go" attitude which the myth nurtured.

But the myth has been ripped away from us. We are only beginning to become conscious of an enormous void that has been left in us now that the myth is gone and we know not what will

replace it for us.

Because now we have been forced to experience first hand that there will be no truly secure places to which we can flee. We have had to experience first hand a loss of innocence, a loss of the embedded belief of security that was so much a part of the American psyche.

We have seen solid, proud towers melt before our eyes; we see everyday the images of people brought low by minute particles that have floated through the air and that can reach anywhere around this land, robbing us of our safety. And we know that there may be more that we will have to see.

The deeply held values of America will not disappear. That we all trust. But the myth of safe spaces that symbolized for everyone the promises of change, of renewal, of multiple possibilities, of better lives, that myth is no longer there to contain us and protect us from the harsh limitations of our lives.

I, for one, do not have any idea what the effect of losing this myth will be on the American psyche, but I can already feel its loss deeply in my own soul. I can only fathom how much it will be felt by all of us in the years to come.

September 11 took away from us far more than thousands of lives or man made buildings. It robbed us of a deeply held myth, one that contributed so much to the greatness of this country. What will replace it? We do not know. Jung, optimistically, tells us that "If all the world's traditions were cut off at a single blow, the whole mythology . . . would start all over again with the next generation." (vol.5. p.25) Indeed new myths will spring from the American collective, but right now we are, as it were, between myths and it feels cold and a quite a bit scary ■