



Robert Johnson's Slender Threads

Throws Us a Rope to Lower Us
into the Inner World of Psyche
and Introversion

by
Van Waddy

Robert Johnson, at 81, resonates with the Old-Hermit-Who-Lives-In-the-Forest archetype when reflecting on himself and his contribution to the Jungian world. In a delicious new three hour DVD interview by Pittman McGehee called "Slender Threads," the viewer does indeed feel as if he or she has stepped into the eternal forest and encountered the wise old wizard in suspended time.

Robert tells his story -- his first encounter with *the Golden World* with his near death experience at 11, his analysis with Fritz Kunkel, Jolanda Jacobi and Emma Jung, his life-altering exchanges with Jung himself who interprets his dream and weds Robert to his inner life, his experience with the Jungian world in Zurich, and his own dance with the pairs of opposites

that carved out his remarkable life. Robert exudes humility, authenticity, simplicity and resiliency in the finest sense.

He understands the struggle of maintaining balance: "My problem has never been with the inner world but with the outer world," he confesses. "Neurosis is the language of God. Don't get rid of it, just mature it." Understand when the Golden World comes and knocks you off your feet that it is an inner reality and not meant to function as an outer reality.

Much of the dialogue between Robert and Pittman spirals around this theme of the Golden World and how this plays out in our Western infatuation with falling in love. "To fall in love is to fall into the religious dimension of the psyche," he says. "It's very powerful. If we project this archetypal energy on to another human being, it can only end in disillusion. We can't ask another human to carry that expectation for us." One must grow past the projection of this archetype one puts on to another -- "We confuse this interior vision of God with some young man/woman who sets it off in us" -- and relate to that person as a human being, not as the physical container of our projection.

The sadness, of course, is that the Church cannot contain for us this "high voltage" religious function, he says, so we are left to project it on to another human, into romantic love. "The projection is true, but not on the level one is trying to make it true. It's true *where* it is true, in the timeless archetypal realm." Historically the Church, says Robert, "could sell protection better than it could conduction." How we deal with this religious function will determine our connection to our inner life, as well as our ability to carve out a realistic, satisfying life in the outer world. Otherwise, we confuse the outer world of marriage with the inner mystical image of God.

Robert borrowed the term *Golden World* from Mircea Eliade, as that fit his experience. Like the Beatific Vision or the Kingdom of Heaven, the Golden World is a state of consciousness, an experience open to any one any time any place, yet cannot be given an outer meaning. "We have to be able to embrace the earthly mundane world to be able to really embrace the power of it," he says. Some can be "blinded" by this inner world experience. "Nothing else after that works for them, is worth it for them. . . . That's the stuff of suicide and addiction. Addiction tries to drown out that which is too good to stand."

This Golden World is not all light, Robert explains. "It contains as much darkness as it does light." Black adds dimension, body. "Experience has to have its dark side or there is no completeness." This invites Robert's exquisite understanding of the importance of the play of opposites.

When something goes amiss in our lives or rises up to take us by complete surprise, ask ourselves: "What pairs of opposites are at work in me in this instance? What has gotten too highly charged on one side of the teeter totter?" He suggests we invite the pairs of opposites (we can identify) to dialogue, to see where the imbalance in our life has erupted. I invite my feelings of emptiness to dialogue with my experience of fullness, my feelings of being small and helpless with my awareness of my wholeness, my willful output with my playfulness, my attention to my inner life with

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from our inner life? Pittman asks Robert. “Revelations have to come in some kind of coherent order or psyche can’t take it, can’t absorb it. . . . People don’t want to hear that there’s something in the world bigger than their ego. There’s no language for the telling of it.”

This notion of “language for the telling of it” caught my attention as a therapist. Robert relates how Jung “contained his own personality to meet me (Robert) in mine,” that Jung spoke in and to Robert’s “Introverted Feeling typology” even though it was not Jung’s typology. This was healing for Robert. Jung spoke to each individual patient in their own typology, making them think Jung spoke to and dealt with all his patients in the same way he did with them. I carry Robert’s words in my own

work now: “Access your own type and function to fit the person psyche brings to you.”

When Jung told Robert in 1948 to personally “put his whole attention on the inner world” and that this would “take care of him,” Jung was also taking care of us, way down the line. Jung apparently told Robert what he was good for, what he wasn’t good for, and Robert listened, much to our advantage. Robert’s precise, careful choice of words and images to convey the “level” of experience from which he is speaking at the moment, throws us immediately into it, even if we cannot communicate to someone else what we just experienced as true.

Our thanks to Pittman McGehee for capturing Robert in old age just before he fades into the introverted kingdom of his inner world. Robert tells us he is “saving his energy, making more time for introversion, enjoying his last encounter with the Golden World, losing all interest in words.” “I’m getting tired of words,” he tells McGehee. “They’re too inexact.”

There’s more on this new DVD than I have put forth here. Even seeing Robert’s “altar” with all his precious images or icons of sacred energy he collected from around the world is a moving experience. Let this be a tease, an appetizer for anyone with three hours open to bask in the luxury of Robert Johnson’s introverted kingdom. The DVD is a new addition to our tape library and a gem of an experience!

my attention to my outer life, and vice-versa.

“What imbalance of opposites required 9-11?” Robert asks of the bringing down of the Twin Towers in New York City. If everything that happens is the interplay of opposites, then perhaps something “went too tall and needed to come down,” be brought low, to regain balance. “There was too much ‘up’ in our society – too excessive, too fast, too fat, too arrogant perhaps. What went too far in one direction and constellated/precipitated its opposite?”

“The direction of human consciousness has changed in human history,” Robert points out. “Good things are ‘up’ now (heaven, success, happiness) because things were so ‘down’ when scriptures and history were written. People needed to have a vision of themselves being lifted out of the mud of the troubled times in which they lived, to realize they were “spirit” too. “Now we’ve gotten too ‘up’ – too busy, too fat, too rich. These were all in deficits before. ‘Down’ is good now for our ‘up’ society. Fate is trying to inform us we need to be humbled down to the mid-point. Not in to the mud again, but more in balance.”

This is borne out in contemporary Western dreams that portray “down” as good, says Robert. A dream is “information you should have but don’t, or it wouldn’t involve you in it.” Why is it so hard for us to hear what comes

