

**The Desert-Mountain Experience:
The Two Faces of Encounter with God**

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Having been engaged in the ministry of retreat and spiritual direction during the past seven years, I have encountered numerous persons whose prayer experiences were vibrant with archetypal images, which, in turn, often triggered interior symbolic action-responses during the prayer experiences. The constellation of these elemental symbolisms is so powerful a force within the psyche of the person experiencing them that oftentimes the immediate understanding and interpretation of what has occurred becomes blurred or confused. Often feelings of embarrassment and/or bewilderment accompany the first sharing of these kinds of prayer experiences with a director or friend. However, statements such as "I really do not understand what's going on . . ." reveal the challenge of both the director and directee: to discern together where the Lord is calling this person to grow in Christian identity and service. Discernment in this area of interior experience, however, first requires an accurate understanding of how these images and symbols can mediate the presence and action of grace (or resistance to grace). Secondly, this inner experience must be properly interpreted in the light of sound principles of both human development (psychology) and Christian spiritual transformation (theology), before one can use the interpretation as one of the factors needed for decision.

I have found Father Robert Doran's insights on "Jungian Psychology and Christian Spirituality: I, II, III"¹ to be of immense value in providing a conceptual framework for understanding the important function of symbols in human and religious development. He likewise shows how imperative it is that these symbols or images which emerge from the unconscious be negotiated. This is to be done by distancing oneself from their immediate power and fascination in order to use them as materials for insight, judgment and decision.² I think that this applies also to those images that arise out of the unconscious in prayer or other forms of inner religious experiences: those spontaneous images that emerge when least expected in contradistinction to those images specifically chosen to dwell upon. Learning how to apply the "operations of that existential level of consciousness whose task it is to evaluate, deliberate, discern, decide and act"³ to the elemental images arising in inner religious experiences is essential, on the one hand, if one is not to become totally identified with the inner drama just experienced. If this immediate identification does occur, however, one feels compelled to live out concretely the meaning of the symbol rather than trying to consciously understand the symbol, to interpret, evaluate and discern its meaning for one's unique Christian existence. The self-knowledge gained from this conscious negotiation of the symbol will

¹ Robert Doran, S. J., "Jungian Psychology and Christian Spirituality: I, II, III," Review For Religious, 1979, Vol. 38, Nos. 4, 5, 6.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 743-744.

³ *Ibid.*

then help one to move toward "existential self-determination in free decision."⁴ In this light it becomes apparent that those individuals who have identified too closely with the symbolic images which have arisen in their religious experience can be led to an undiscriminated "imitation of Christ" which makes them all too readily susceptible to messiah or victim complexes. These complexes are manifestations of an inflated ego in its positive and negative expressions respectively.

On the other hand, these symbolic images can transmit healing and integrating energies that often give profound meaning to the individual's life and connect him or her to a greater mystery. Thus, symbolic images act as a releaser and transformer of psychic energy. This life energy, consciously or unconsciously, supports, guides and motivates the individual. Hence, applying the operations of the existential level of consciousness is crucial if the individual is to consciously appropriate the knowledge and energy offered to him or her in the symbolic images. Frequently, this objectifying, evaluating, discerning process is greatly enhanced in a dialogic relationship of pastoral counselling or spiritual direction. It is, therefore, desirable that those engaged in such ministries possess not only a sound theoretical background of psychological principles and theological insights, but, also, the practical skills whereby the integration of that knowledge can be offered in the dialogic process.

How then can this be done? A method that I have found helpful for myself, as well as with others, is to first describe the experience as if it is presently happening. Next, I apply sound psychological principles as tools for interpreting this experience psychologically. Thirdly, I seek to understand and interpret the religious dimension of the experience in the light of biblical images and events, especially its relationship to the Christ-event. Lastly, in the light of the insights offered by psychology and biblical spirituality, I re-interpret the elemental symbolism described in the experience. In the process of this method, the religious experience can be more readily appropriated and integrated into the individual's self-identity as a Christian and provide more clarity for his or her decisions and actions in Christian service.

The remainder of this article presents the application of this method to two religious experiences which occurred on two consecutive days of an eight day directed retreat. Because they were so striking in their elemental symbolism, I asked the retreatant if I may use them in order to illustrate the above method. While the description of the experience is written by the retreatant herself, the psychological interpretation based upon Jungian concepts and the biblical reflections are my own. I would bring this background, albeit in a less formal way, into the dialogic process of discernment with the retreatant.

Desert Experience

"I am alone in the desert sitting on a huge rock. It is nearing nightfall and becoming very cold. As night lowers its black cloak around me, I hear the cry of wolves in the background. They begin to circle around me, closing in with each circle. I am

⁴ Ibid.

very frightened, cold, alone. I scream out: 'God where are you?' and hear the echoing response: 'I am here with you.' The wolves close in. I scream out again: 'What am I supposed to do? How do I meet you here?' From the blackness of the desert-sand merged with desert-sky the cry returns to me: 'Embrace your fear and your death!' I knew that I must but I did not know how. I sit a little longer on the rock, aware that death is encroaching with every new circle of the wolves. I feel the fear clutching in my throat and in the pit of my stomach. It is nauseating. Tension increases in my facial muscles and a weight upon my shoulders begins to oppress me exceedingly.

"I must obey . . . so I get up from the rock upon which I am sitting, and start walking out into the black night. Then absolute terror grips me pressing me down so that I actually stumble. As I fall to the ground, I think within myself: 'I can't anymore . . . take it, it's yours . . .'

"Immediately the physical weight and tensions are released. I feel drawn into a peace beyond and deeper than the terror which had clutched me before. I enter into the movement of Christ's YES as He handed over His Spirit in death to the Father . . . and was received into His embrace."

Mountain Experience

"The Lord and I are climbing up a mountain. He is leading the way. When he comes to a certain point, he walks over to the edge of the mountain and proceeds to move out over the abyss, walking on air. I stop short, gasping at the abyss below where no bottom could be seen. I look up as he continues walking into the distance . . . and discover more mountain peaks in the far distance. At one point, realizing that I am not behind him, he turns around, beckons me to come as he calls out: 'What's wrong? Come on!' I look at him protestingly, 'I can't do that!' He looks, smiles and in a rather frustrated tone replies: 'Do you not yet believe in my power at work in you?' 'Of course I do . . . but I'm not ready and I know that you have to empower me.'

"I sit down on the edge of the cliff, and continue to stare at him . . . waiting. As I stare, his form becomes like white light in the center with rays streaming out in circular motion from the center. The rays of glory continue to move out towards me and I am drawn into their magnetic field of force. Awestruck, yet compelled by such beauty, I begin to walk over the abyss towards him. When I reach him in the white lightness of His Glory, I fall on my knees but he lifts me to himself and embraces me. After this indescribable embrace, he moves me away from him and with authority commands: 'Go, be My Glory in the midst of a foreign land.' The rays emanating from his body begin to move into me and in the end he too disappears into me. I feel my whole body pulsating with the dynamic energy of the rays which could not be wholly contained within, as I continue walking toward the distant mountain peaks on the other side of the abyss."

Jungian Interpretation of the Desert Experience

In the beginning of the desert experience, it can be deduced that the person's felt recognition of her alienated condition (sitting on the rock, alone) results in the consequent struggle to regain contact with deeper life sources. That she is surrounded on all sides by the desert indicates that the flow from the well-spring of the Self is impaired, and hence all appears dried up. In this condition, threatening forces (wolves) begin to close in around her. Their very circular motion suggests that the nature of the person may be as a magnetic field that distorts reality into its pattern.⁵ Fear and terror shake the very structure of ego-consciousness, for the "integrity and stability of the ego depend in all stages of development on a living connection with the Self."⁶ Thus, the wolves represent the dark side of the Self claiming its right to be-in-relation-to the ego, asserting that the break up of the psychological status quo (the threat of death to an inflated ego) is essential if life is to be regained in the process of individuation. Indeed, these very death-dealing forces impel the person to call out for help. "God where are you?" The person recognizes that her ego-self axis needs realignment. "I am here with you" is the response from the Self that suggests to the ego the locus of the struggle: the shadow forces of evil and destruction are to be encountered within. Tension mounts, fear increases, resistance manifests itself in the paralysis of the person sitting on the rock in the coldness of the night. "So as soon as we feel ourselves slipping, we begin to combat this (sunset) tendency and erect barriers against the dark, rising flood of the unconscious . . ."⁷

The intensity of the resistance felt in such a situation measures the degree of energy that can be made available to the person – energy used in resisting and that energy that is contained in the object resisted. The experience of resistance, therefore, is a clue that if the process of reconciliation with that which is resisted is to be productive it requires the alert, active participation of consciousness which leads one into real dialogue with and not a passive acceptance of the dark forces at work.⁸

Precisely at this point, the subject of the story, led by the self regulating system of the psyche, consciously enters into dialogue: "What am I supposed to do? How do I meet you here?" Resounding from the dark side of the self the answer echoes as a strong invitation, even a command: "Embrace your fear and your death." Thus, the person needs to be directed by the self "to turn about and face the chaos and far more than this – to recognize that the chaos has a name, a form of its own, a force . . ."⁹ Fear and death, then, are no longer to be obstacles but the very medium in which the self will re-establish its proper alignment with the alienated ego.

⁵ Sebastian Moore, The Crucified Jesus Is No Stranger, (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1977), p. 39.

⁶ Edward Edinger, Ego and Archetype, (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, Inc., 1972), P. 37.

⁷ C. G. Jung, Symbols of Transformation, Trans., R. F. C. Hull, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 356.

⁸ Edinger, Ego and Archetype, p. 84.

⁹ Moore, The Crucified Jesus Is No Stranger, p. 39.

As the dread mounts in bodily tension, that energy that was used to resist is now consciously appropriated in an act of obedience to the voice of the inner Self; for that voice contained a *Mysterium* that not only awed, but carried the force of convicting the ego. In the depths of her being, the subject is "conscious of an intrinsic value IN the incomprehensible – a value inexpressible, positive, and fascinating."¹⁰ Otherwise, how could she have walked into the darkness of the night to wrestle with the dark face of fear until it reveals its name?

She was obedient to that "autonomous inner directiveness separate from the ego and often antagonistic to it. Such an awareness is sometimes releasing and sometimes exceedingly burdensome."¹¹ In this case, it is obviously burdensome; for as she walked into the darkness, the weight of the burden grew to unbearable proportions. Remaining in the struggle, the primordial face of fear is encountered as "absolute terror grips (her)." The force of this encounter pressed the ego to its uttermost limits until it stumbled to the ground, acknowledging its insidious inflation of trying to order the world around it: "I can't anymore . . ." and surrendered the unlawful ownership of the energies transmitted by the Self to its rightful owner: "Take it, it's yours." This is the sacrificial death par excellence – one requiring a moral courage that can only come from the energies given by the Self. The face of fear is recognized and owned. Its name is Self, that deep Self that calls the person to "Some unbearable personhood, identity, freedom whose demands beat on our comfortable anonymity and choice of death."¹²

Thus it can be concluded that what is really occurring, in analytical terms, is that the ego is being relativized in order that its life-axis may be re-established with the Self. The process of this relativization occurs as the person recognizes, accepts and names her very alienation in its source and embraces the death (sacrifice of the ego) that is required to re-center herself. The crucial point in this process, however, lies in the very movement toward and into that which seems destructive to the conscious personality. The ego is re-aligned precisely by embracing fear and death, by moving into "the unbearable place"¹³ where the ego experiences its denouement and surrenders. In this moment of surrender, the Self embraces the ego in forgiveness and whole-making acceptance from which a new identity emerges. "It is only by a total surrender that we come into our identity, a surrender whose dimension embraces the deep mystery of our refusal . . ."¹⁴ This reconciliation of the ego with the shadow brings about an openness to the numinous power of the Self to give its own directives and assert its superior wisdom.

What then? The person said there was profound peace, "a peace beyond and deeper than the terror which had clutched me before." Centered, she is now able to receive the transpersonal energies flowing from the Self into her conscious personality and return them to their source as we see these energies mediated through the archetypal symbol of the Crucified Christ suggested at the very end of the experience: "I enter into

¹⁰ Rudolf Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, p. 78 as quoted in Edinger, *Ego and Archetype*, p. 95.

¹¹ Edinger, *Ego and Archetype*, p. 97.

¹² Moore, *The Crucified Jesus Is No Stranger*, p. x.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

the movement of Christ's YES as He handed over His Spirit in death to the Father . . . and was received into His embrace."

Jungian Interpretation of the Mountain Experience

Upon first glance, these two experiences, occurring on two consecutive days, suggest that they may be progressive in their essence. Thus, we may ask on the one hand, if this experience is a continuation of the process of the transformation of the Self, one that presupposes the previous experience of the desert? Or, it may be questioned on the other hand, if this experience is just the expression of the bright side of the desert experience, which, we have seen, was the relativization of the ego due to the "all encompassing nature of the Self which is both *brighter* and *darker* than the ego."¹⁵ Both experiences have similarities as to the elements contained within them. What is more striking, however, is that the common generic elements are depicted in their polarity in the second experience. As it is important to observe these opposites more thoroughly so as to be in a position to address the above questions, I'll begin the discussion with the elaboration of the obvious. The first word or series of words in the pair refer to the desert experience and the second refer to the mountain experience.

PLACE:	desert/mountain; rock/cliff; ground/abyss
PERSONS:	alone/with another
ATMOSPHERE:	coldness/warmth; darkness/brightness
FEELINGS:	fear, terror, repulsion/awe, love, attraction
ACTIONS:	encircling wolves/circular emanating rays; sitting on rock/sitting on cliff; walking into darkness/walking into light; falling on ground/falling on knees; implicit embrace/explicit embrace; _ /walking toward distant land
WORDS:	"I can't anymore."/"I can't do that" "Embrace your fear and your death"/ "Go by my Glory . . ." "How do I meet you here?"/"You have to empower me . . ."

¹⁵ C. G. Jung, "Mysterium Coniunctionis," Collected Works, Vol. 14, par. 778.

As the desert called the person into the depth of darkness to wrestle with the face of fear, so now the mountain calls the person into the heights of brightness to discover the face of glory. But this height is not without its own perils; there is the threat of falling into the abyss if one should cross the threshold of the cliff. Thus, there is danger, risk, struggle on the mountain as well; the *quality* is different.

The differentiation of the struggle can already be glimpsed as we see the person with another (the Lord) who *is leading* the way. This would suggest that the ego indeed has maintained its relativized position. The energy released in the desert struggle and reconciliation is now preparing the person to see more of her wholeness so that she can serve it. The climb is upwards towards the sun, which is, "the father-god from whom all living things draw life; he is the fructifier and creator, the source of energy for our world."¹⁶ Clearly, animus archetypes are dominant in this scene: mountain, sun, man leading the way as guide to the Self. Until the man crosses over the cliff (threshold of consciousness), he remains guide as an animus figure. As he stands over the abyss, however, his appearance changes: the transfiguration reveals Him as the supreme archetype of the SELF in its fullest possibility of humanity, beauty, glory. His appearance is white light (like the sun) with emanating rays of warmth moving out in circular motion, creating a force-field of energy. "The psychic life-force, the libido, symbolizes itself in the sun or personifies itself in figures or heroes with solar attributes."¹⁷

What affect/effect does this have on the person following? She stops short at the edge of the cliff (edge of her limits) aware of the perilous next step. The hesitation triggers conscious reflection upon the contradictory feelings of desirability and impossibility evoked within her. It is in this moment of reflection that the anima phenomena constellates: "The fascination plus danger, the awe plus desire, the submission to her fate plus suspicion, the intense awareness that in this way lies both (her) life and (her) death."¹⁸

The dialogue which ensues between the Self and the ego-personality at this point is quite different from the dialogue in the desert. The ego-personality recognizes that its consciousness is limited, and is, therefore, more open to be directed and empowered by the wisdom and transpersonal energies of the Self. What do these transpersonal energies do? They stretch the walls of the ego-personality's ordinary perspective to embrace the sublime vision of totality. It is a movement from the "narrower embrace of (her) empirical human world and its personal concerns towards archetypal events that put (her) empirical, personal world in a more significant frame."¹⁹ This is soul-making in the broadest sense and permits the person to heed the call: "Come on."

¹⁶ Jung, *Symbols Of Transformation*, p. 121.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

¹⁸ James Hillman, "Anima," *Spring*, (New York, NY: Spring Publications, 1973), p. 104.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

The stepping off of the cliff out into the abyss is no small step; one requiring as much as, if not more, courage than that step off the immobile rock into the dark desert night. The conscious act is spirit-making in its broadest sense. We dread the sublime more than we fear the dark side of our personalities. Consequently, to take this step requires an influx of energy heretofore unknown, unreceived. Thus, the rays emanating from the transfigured Self move out to gather the person into its force-field. This is an awesome moment to be entered into with profound reverence.

The description of the person being embraced and penetrated by the rays (in the center of the white light) unmistakably reveals that there is a transformation taking place by a masculine entity of creative power. Edinger points out that often when a woman encounters the Self, it is usually expressed as celestial impregnating power.²⁰ This embrace IS the union of opposites wherein instinctive energy is transformed into symbolical activity. "The real meaning of the CONIUNCTIO is that it brings to birth something that is one and united. It restores the vanished 'man of light' who is identical with the Logos in Christian symbolism and who was there before the creation . . ." ²¹

This reconciliation not only creates a new wholeness within the individual, but also releases a newfound creativity. The solar energy is, therefore, now inwardly perceived. Henceforward, the person can "descend into the depths of her own being and find 'in the heart' the image of the sun – her own life-force."²² That creativity is to be expended in the service of life, for life. Consequently, the command: "Go by my glory amidst a foreign land," revealing the transpersonal meaning of her life, becomes a mission.

As the person walks toward the distant mountain peaks, alone and yet obviously different, a further meaning of the CONIUNCTIO experience is revealed: the reconciliation of the ego and the self. The ego, having been freed of ego-centered preoccupations and having negotiated the Self's higher authority (without identification with it), now must actualize in time and space that which has been experienced over the abyss outside the categories of time, space and causality.

If we think of the experience of individuality as having two centers, the ego and the Self, these contradictions fall into place. The ego is an incarnation, an entity, which participates in the vicissitudes of time, space, causality. The Self, as the center of the archetypal psyche, is in another world beyond consciousness and its particularizing modes of experience. The ego is the center of subjective identity; the Self, the center of

²⁰ Edinger, *Ego and Archetype*, p. 70.

²¹ C. G. Jung, "Psychology of Transference," *Collected Works*, Vol. 16, Trans., R. F. C. Hull, (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 1954), p. 86.

²² Jung, *Symbols Of Transformation*, p. 121.

objective identity. The ego lives on earth but the name of the Self is written in Heaven.²³

Thus, the ego recognizes that while it is not the center of the psyche, it is responsible to use the energies received from the Self (totality of psyche) to incarnate something of what it perceives and experiences. In order to do this, another sacrifice is required: that of self-emptying or dismemberment. It is impossible to actualize all psychic possibilities contained in the totality of the Self, thus making palpable the temptation to remain on the mountain to revel in the vision. The vision is necessary, however, for it beckons us to "own" our full humanity, to glimpse our glory as that towards which we are constantly growing. Our dread of the sublime is rooted in our dread of being that individual one is called to be; one, who not only appropriates oneself, but who disposes of that self in freedom. It is only in, through and by that self-disposition that one can participate in the fullness of reality (as we shall later discuss in the theological reflections); for only in this self-disposition does the ego-self axis remain open for Life's energies to flow through the person as a vessel to the external (foreign) world.

In one sense the paradoxical feelings evoked in the mountain experience lead me to believe that it is the bright side of the desert experience. The two must be held together in consciousness; for it one moves into a foreign land deprived of the consciousness afforded by each of these experiences – that is, the consciousnesses of the dark and sublime face of one's humanity – the individual would lose contact with her wholeness. The vision of wholeness needs to be grounded in reality; spirit must be united with matter to express itself.

That these two experiences usually occur as stages in the individuation process, likewise, cannot be denied. In this sense, the desert experience must precede the mountain experience; for it is in the relativizing of the ego that a reconciliation with the person's shadow occurred. In the mountain experience, the ego, already aware of its dependence upon the energies supplied by the Self, progresses in the integration with its contrasexual counterpart. The *CONIUNCTIO* attained here explicitly releases creative forces of energy that are to be used in the service of the totality of the Self. Hence, this psychological androgyny is to be further transformed as the individual is led out of her personal preoccupations into a more significant destiny. Consequently, she is given a mission; indeed, one that manifests the deeper reconciliation of the ego with the Self.

It is also imperative to add that while I think the consciousness attained in the mountain experience supercedes that of the desert experience, it does not abolish the consciousness attained in the desert. Rather, it integrates and carries to a higher level that which is experienced in the desert; for the experience of the numinous Self reveals the very nature of the desert dread in its deepest roots: self-hatred, self-negation. Nowhere are these polarities of affirmation-negation

²³ Edinger, *Ego and Archetype*, p. 149.

stretched to their ultimate depth, height, length and breadth than on the desert-mountain of the cross.

In the crucified Jesus, we are directly confronted with our deepest fear and our wildest hope; our darkest negation and our brightest affirmation; our death and our glory. This symbol, operative in the end of the desert experience, becomes the bridge to the mountain experience. "I enter into the movement of Christ's YES as He hands over His Spirit in death to the Father . . ." This is *The* pivotal symbol that holds both the desert and mountain experiences together as they revolve in cyclic stages of growth, bringing to consciousness ever greater depths of darkness and heights of glory inherent in our individual and common humanity. The ego's individuation from the shadow and its integration with the animus leading toward mission both continue to be needed in the process of growth and linked together in Christ's YES.

Theological and Biblical Reflections

The interpretation of the religious dimension and significance of the desert and mountain experiences requires the understanding of faith; of seeing how God's grace is operative in and through these images and symbols as they appear in history as well as in the individual's psyche. In the context of faith, then, Christian growth cannot be just the result of the individuation of the Self, but must be the result of a continual process of conversion towards self-transcendence. This process of conversion, while radically transforming the individual's understanding, values, choices and actions, leads the individual to an ever deeper union with Christ and commitment to participation in His mission. Furthermore, personal transformation, especially in the biblical view, cannot occur in isolation. Rather, it unfolds and is realized within the context of human interrelatedness in and through one's community-of-faith with the world. This process of individual and communal conversion towards self-transcendence also entails a growth in conscious self-appropriation. This dynamic can be seen in several episodes of God relating to God's People and to God's Son in the desert and on the mountain. These biblical images and events likewise portray the desert-mountain experience both in a progressive manner and as two sides of a single experience.

For the purposes of this discussion, I will highlight some aspects of Moses' encounter with God's glory and the call and mission of Isaiah. Next, the reversal of the pattern of "desert to mountain" will be explored in Jesus' baptism and temptations. Lastly, the transfiguration scene will be reflected upon, hopefully to elucidate that supreme desert-mountain experience: Christ's death and glorification.

Moses' Encounter With Yahweh's Glory On The Mountain

Moses was already in the desert when he came to Mount Horeb where God became manifest in the "shape of a flame of fire" emanating from the

burning bush (Ex. 3:2). This encounter with the numinous presence of Yahweh, followed by the revelation of God's name, I AM WHO I AM, seared into the core of Moses' being, effecting a radical conversion in the reorganization of his personality in harmony with his Life-Source. Furthermore, this revelation had consequences, not only for Moses' relationship with himself (intrapersonally), but also for his relationship with others (interpersonally). It entailed a mission; a mission in which he was to be an agent in liberating his own people, which paradoxically, is concomitant with the task of his own liberation.

That Moses grew in this self-understanding and commitment can be seen as he journeyed through the wilderness actualizing the task given to him. This desert was not only to be a place of trial where Yahweh would humble and test God's own people "so that (they) may know (their) inmost hearts . . . whether they would keep God's commands or not" (Deut. 8:2), but also a place of schooling wherein the consciousness of Moses and the people was constantly being formed as a covenanted-people. At this stage of their development, God's covenant with them must necessarily be conditional, that is, in the keeping of the laws.

This consciousness is further developed when Moses re-ascends the mountain and asks to see God's Glory (Ex. 33:18-23). Yahweh grants his request upon the condition that Moses hide in the cleft of the rock when God's splendour passes before him. Indeed, the sight of Yahweh's face would be too unbearable and thus unmerciful; for Moses had to live among a stiff-necked people who themselves could not bear to even look upon the radiant face of Moses when he descended from the mountain. God takes us where we are and leads us into the next step of growth always in the context of our community and environmental conditions.

It can likewise be said that our culture mediates our experiences of God because our notions of God and the self are first given to us by our family, church, teachers, and so forth. In the earlier stages of growth, we relate to God as we do to authority. It is rare that a person reaches a stage of human and religious development that far exceeds his or her primary community's stage of development. While some of our primary relationships nourish the stage we are in, others challenge further growth. Growth in relationship to God, self, others, world, while it may not be simultaneously appropriated, is simultaneously interconnected. When a breakthrough in our consciousness occurs, as it did for Moses on this mountain, we indeed enter into a new level of relationships with its appropriate responsibility and mission.

In the event of God's renewal of God's covenant with Moses on this mountain, and through him, with his people, Moses was made a servant of Yahweh's glory amidst a foreign people in the process of becoming a special people. The energy released in this limited coniunctio experience entered his person so that the very skin on his face was radiant. He once again descended into the desert to actualize and integrate further the knowledge and love received on the mountain.

Isaiah's Mountain-Desert Experience

While the journey of the Israelites through the wilderness can be seen as a progressive liberation from the bonds of familial consciousness, which affirmed an affiliative faith nourished by the community's religious ideologies, the call of Isaiah and consequent missions can be seen as a single experience revealing the two faces of encounter with God. The desert and mountain experiences are held together in the consciousness of Isaiah, both emptying and filling him for mission. The experience of the numinous – the wholly and Holy otherness of God is concomitant with his experience of his own darkness of heart and his identification with that darkness within his own community (people). "I saw the Lord Yahweh seated on a high throne; his train filled the sanctuary . . . crying out . . . 'holy, holy, holy is Yahweh Sabaoth. His glory fills the whole earth' (Is. 6:1-3). As Isaiah experiences this glory and holiness of Yahweh, he exclaims: "What a wretched state I am in. I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips . . ." (Is. 6:5).

What seems to be the most important aspect of this experience, however, is that something moves out of the Holy One into Isaiah, thus purifying him of his radical darkness. The live coal brought to him from the altar is holy because Yahweh has sanctified the altar from which it is taken. In one sense, one could interpret this as a quality or energy emanating from the glory of Yahweh entering into Isaiah and effecting the union of opposites. The reality of being acted upon is unmistakable; so that Isaiah would realize that what is given to him does not come from his own power, but is the gift of Another, purifying and empowering him for service. His readiness to be sent contrasts to the hesitation of Moses. The consequent suffering he will experience as he both embodies and speaks the word of Yahweh amidst a "people of unclean lips" will itself be witness of his movement into a more individuating faith, and, thus, be his way of leading Israel (and himself) into fuller responsibility for their personhood and nationhood. Isaiah's admonitions of a people who have betrayed the covenant-relationship with their God (and deepest selves) force Isaiah himself into a deeper self-aware adherence to chosen values and beliefs. This will require a continual death as he continues to reflect upon and appropriate his own desert darkness as it is illuminated, purified, transformed by his vision of Glory manifested on the high throne (mountain) of God.

Jesus' Baptism And Temptation in The Desert

The baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:13-17) is Jesus' own experience of the numinous; the experience of His Life-Source whom He names "Father." I AM WHO I AM is now expressed in intimately personal terms. Jesus is confirmed in his own identity as "Beloved Son" only after he comes up out of the waters. This implies that he first had to descend into the darkness of the waters which may be interpreted as a profound activation of the collective unconscious in which Jesus undergoes Israel's history. As Jesus emerges from these waters, there is a readiness for a breakthrough in his consciousness: "This is my Son, the Beloved,

my favour rests on him" makes explicit the heretofore implicit awareness of the mission of the Suffering Servant (Cf. Is. 42:1ff). Before Jesus can fully appropriate this as his identity and mission, however, he must experience it as a gift and as the essential demand of being true to his own being, which, because there is no radical darkness in him, is the same as being true to the Father, his very Life-Source. Because his ego-self axis is always open, Jesus himself can experience the transpersonal energies of his Life-Source, symbolized in the descent of the dove, as his very own energy. It both affirms and empowers him for his mission – to bring the Isaian description of the Suffering Servant to its fullest expression and reality. Truly, then, it is fitting that Jesus should enter into the waters so that, in this way, he might do all that righteousness demands (Matt. 3:15).

And what does righteousness demand? It demands the Jesus assume the full consequences of having entered into and embraced his humanity; to thus become identified with the darkness of our human condition. In order to become himself the Covenant of the People, he had to enter into that which prevented the people from receiving from their Life-Source; that is, he had to confront the radical darkness of the human heart which rejects the light and consequently, life itself. He has to enter our desert darkness; it is *the way* in which righteousness is to be brought about.

And so it follows that Jesus must be led by the Spirit into the desert "to be humbled and tested so that he may know his inmost heart . . . whether he would keep his Father's commands or not" (Deut. 8:2). For *the way* in which righteousness is to be effected is brought to conscious expression by Jesus in these desert temptations. The effects of humanity's alienated ego, which are already present in Jesus as an Israelite, confront him with the choice of that way in which he would use the transpersonal energies given to him for his mission. To remain faithful to his identity and to his mission of Suffering Servant, he could not use power for his own personal gratification (change stones into bread); nor to transcend the human limitations that he had embraced in being one with humanity (throw himself down from the parapet); nor to achieve his purpose (redemption of all the kingdoms of the world) by constellating the transpersonal energies given to him into personal power drives.²⁴ The desert focuses the locus of temptation. It is not in *what* he was to do; but in *how* he was to do it.

Each time that Jesus was tempted to be Covenant of the People in any other way than by embracing the full consequences of accepting his own humanity, he turned to the sources of wisdom found in the Scriptures to affirm his total acceptance. These kept him centered so that the very temptations themselves served to deepen the consciousness of his unique identity and to affirm that only a radical YES to his Life-Source, the Father, in each moment and event would be the essence of his mission. Jesus' identity and mission are, thus, inextricably interwoven.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 135.

The consequent suffering entailed in being who he was in a world hostile to such authenticity and goodness would be his glory; for ultimately crucifixion alone would manifest the nature of the Father's love as the ground of his being and thus of all being.

The Revelation Of Glory On Mount Thabor

The moment in which Jesus' openness to the transpersonal source of his being was permitted to be glimpsed in its radiant beauty occurred when Jesus ascended Mount Thabor to pray (Lk 9:23-36). There as he communed with his Life-Source, the Father, and spoke with Moses and Elijah about his coming Passover to be accomplished in Jerusalem (the ultimate desert), he was transfigured. Peter, James and John saw his glory and witnessed the Father's affirmation of his Chosen One, ". . . the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14). That glory is the manifestation of God's power and presence piercing through the humanity of Jesus. It brings to a new level of consciousness the grace (love and faithfulness) of God's self-revelation to Moses. It is the same glory which Isaiah saw, the manifestation of the Logos as archetypal light. Here the disciples glimpse the true nature, character and power of the Eternal Logos, the Son of the Father, who must manifest this same nature, character and power in time, in his humanity through his words, works and ultimately in his very death and resurrection. Consequently, the light seen on this mountain will have to contend with the darkness of the desert if it is to manifest its true nature and power.

Now, however, we are concerned with the revelation of the Glory piercing through the humanity of Jesus. The force of this numinous experience convicts the hearts of his disciples. They behold the man – transfigured – and the thunderbolt of recognition of what they are called to share in crashes into consciousness: "There is my life, my beauty, my possibility, my full humanness."²⁵ For a moment they glimpse something of the fullness of glory that all humanity is to share in, and, later, will acknowledge that "Indeed, from his fullness we have, all of us, received" (Jn 1:16).

²⁵ Moore, *The Crucified Jesus Is No Stranger*, p. 26.

The cloud covers Jesus and the two men with him. "A voice came from the cloud, saying: 'This is my Beloved, Listen to Him'" (Lk 9:35). Again, something comes out of the middle of the numinous to touch those who are experiencing it, this time in the form of word and command. The disciples are commanded to "listen to him" – to receive into their own beings His words, life, even His very Life-Source just as Jesus listened to His Father from whom he received all that he was and had. "For the Father who is the source of life, has made the Son the source of life" (Jn 5:26); "Whoever listens to my words and believes in the one who sent me, has eternal life" (Jn 5:24).

Listening is that act whereby the one speaking becomes vitally connected to the one spoken to. The word spoken and the word received (faith as active listening) is like the live coal coming from the altar of the Most High touching the lips of Isaiah, which both purifies and empowers. More so here, the Word communicates Himself, and those who receive Him will be empowered to become "the true images of His Son" (Rom 8:28).

Because of humanity's radical darkness, this process of transformation into His image will necessarily involve suffering. "If anyone wishes to be a follower of mine, he must renounce himself, take up his cross and follow me" (Lk 9:23). Listening also becomes the key which unlocks the transpersonal sources of energy required for renouncing oneself and embracing the suffering that is inevitable in being true to one's deepest Self. "To take up one's own cross would mean to accept and consciously realize one's own particular pattern of wholeness."²⁶ In the light of Thabor, then, we are to consciously assume responsibility to live our own proper lives as authentically and passionately as Christ lived his in its individual uniqueness.

If this is understood and lived radically, then active listening will likewise bridge the gap between our being and doing, our identity and mission. We would not only receive and become carriers of a profound mystery but also live out in concrete actions the consequences of what we participate in. We would, furthermore, become servants of that very mystery. The light we see and the word we hear flows into us in the act of listening, which is brought to its fullest completion only when it again flows out of us in service. Thus, listening is more than a bridge; it empowers us to become servants – vessels, manifesting "a way of being in the world and giving back soul to the world."²⁷ It connects us to the well-spring of life and makes us a well-spring for life (Jn 7:37).

²⁶ Edinger, *Ego and Archetype*, p. 135.

²⁷ Hillman, "Anima", p. 123.

However, this is made possible only through the presence and power of the Spirit, which is given in the supreme manifestation of the glory of God on the desert-mountain of the cross. This lifting up of Jesus, his mounting of the cross is, paradoxically, his descent into the utter darkness of the desert. In the crucifixion of Jesus we see the acting out of what took place in the depths of the heart of Jesus in the Garden of Olives. There, "Night had fallen" (Jn 13:30) and the powers of darkness closed in upon him as she experienced the radical truth of our common humanity: refusal of the very Life-Source that He himself lived by. He who is always "YES" (2 Cor 1:19), he who moved, lived and had his very being in radical openness to the Father, now experiences the terrible dread of his total identification with humanity in our radical "NO", refusal of the Father's love and life. Agony is the consequence of the utter contradiction experienced in the depths of the being of the God-Man. "My soul is sorrowful to the point of death" (Matt. 26:26-46). Walking further into the darkness, "he fell on his face" pleading to be released from this agony, but only in submission to his Life-Source: "Father, if this cup cannot pass by without my drinking it, your will be done."

Jesus is thus tested in this desert-agony so that *we may know His inmost heart*: his radical obedience to his Father – even when the powers of darkness clutch him in their hands, driving their full vengeance of hatred and violence as nails into the hands and feet of goodness itself. Away with him, "crucify him, crucify him" (Mk 15:14). Indeed, he could only be servant by obeying; he learned to obey by suffering (Heb 5:8). This required that he freely choose to undergo in his own body the hostile forces at work; that is, that he allow the power of darkness and evil to meet the power of light and goodness in his own person (Eph. 2:16).

In the final act of death, Jesus gathers all the energies of his being and ours in his, in one great cry of absolute trust and abandon in His Father: "Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit" (Lk 23:46). That supreme YES broke the chains of bondage of our NO. The very force of that YES was sufficient to rip open the body of Jesus to lay bare the inner core of his heart:

This is the secret that is finally revealed to the saints: God loved them before the creation. He loves them despite their sins and death. He loves them notwithstanding the former division of Jews and Gentiles. He loves them with the intention that they praise his glory. Man did not know this love; the powers did not. But God did. It was God's secret because it was hidden in his heart, identified with his being, his whole self. Now it has been laid bare. The whole, true God is no longer hidden and unknown. His very heart is opened.²⁸

²⁸ Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, (New York, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974), p. 127.

Consequently, the Spirit that filled the heart of Christ is released in His death to flow out in blood and water (Jn 19:35) onto the earth, creating a new heart, forming a new body, and transforming the whole of creation. It is through the presence of the Spirit poured forth into our hearts that we can in truth call God, "Abba, Father" (Rom 8:16) and are empowered to become servants who use the transpersonal energies (gifts of that Spirit) given to us to build up the whole Body of Christ. Indeed, as God himself works in and through oneself and one's community to "bring everything together under Christ as head"(Eph. 1:10), we rejoice in the suffering entailed in this process of transformation so as to be able to share in the glorious revelation of the sons and daughters of God. For when Christ is revealed, and he is our life, we too will be revealed in all our glory with him (Col 3:4).

The Desert and Mountain Revisited

In the light of these theological reflections we can now re-vision what is going on in the first two experiences described at the beginning of this article. The person, in the desert experience, is being gifted with a deep awareness of her own sinfulness and her utter powerlessness to save herself . . . from herself. We can also see in this experience that God does not accept her "in spite of" her sinfulness; rather, God's acceptance and love embraces her precisely in the sin. She, therefore, "meets God's love not by turning away from the hatred of herself to another motive, but as a climax of her self-hatred, its crisis and resolution. God does not just give her a reason for not hating herself. God transforms her self-hatred into love."²⁹

This has psychological repercussions. The ego, seen at first in its alienation from the Self, can only come to its fullest potential as it submits to the higher wisdom of the Self. But this integration only comes after being humbled again and again. In this struggle, the ego will crucify the Self repeatedly. Without the additional insights proffered by the theological reflections, this could lead one to despair. The ultimate mystery of good and evil, meeting in the heart of Christ himself, reveals to us that the power of the Spirit given to us in that meeting place, empowers our "I-am-ness" to triumph over our "I-am-not-ness." Christ's death and resurrection is, therefore, the basis of our radical hope.

²⁹ Moore, *The Crucified Jesus Is No Stranger*, p. 37.

In the mountain experience, the person is gifted with the perception of the extent of the power of the Spirit at work in those who believe, and, consequently, sees what hope His call holds for her, and what rich glories He has promised that the believers will inherit (Eph. 1:19). To glimpse one's share in the glory of Christ and to be touched by that emanating power of the Spirit, transforms one's understanding of reality and thus alters one's values, judgments, decisions and actions. One now seeks to labor with Christ and in Him, gladly embracing the suffering that will be inevitable in building up the Body of the whole Christ. For this purpose she becomes a servant, a suffering servant. It becomes her mission: for, wherever she goes (foreign land), whatever she does, she must be a vessel, remaining open to let the flow of Life pass into her and through her in personal presence to others – to let His Glory be seen.

Psychologically speaking, the Self experiences a crucifixion of another kind in this experience. "The Self suffers nailing and suspension (a kind of dismemberment) in order to achieve temporal realization . . . or incarnation in the finite."³⁰ Due to the additional insights of theological reflection, especially seen in the *Kenosis* of Christ, this crucifixion is glorification. The Self, therefore, embraces the self-emptying process in order to share the plight and destiny of all humanity; while the ego gives conscious direction as to the concrete possibilities of labouring to serve the whole. "It makes me happy to suffer for you and in my own body to do what I can to make up all that has still to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church" (Col 1:24).

In conclusion, then, it can be said that it is necessary to see the Crucified Christ in its historical reality, as other, before one can appropriate it symbolically in one's own experience of the desert-mountain. For, "At every stage of my personally entry into the mystery, the Christ I have not yet become is a man who somehow IS, and not a platonic anthropos-image." Furthermore, Christ is not only the archetypal image of who the individual person is to become, but also the prototypical source of all creation's becoming, and especially of humanity's becoming within that creation. Consequently, one's personal entry into the Christ-event, as symbolically mediated in one's consciousness, must lead in the direction of self-transcendence, so that, "by accepting God's offer of both salvation and vocation, one becomes ever more God-centered and Christ-centered" in one's understanding, judgments, choices and actions. Finally, it can be said that Christian transformation, as a process led by the Holy Spirit and ever more consciously entered into by the person, entails the mission of servanthood. Indeed, we are to bring ourselves and others, with whom we are bonded in our common humanity both in the desert and on the mountain, into God's presence as mature individuals in union with Christ (Col 1:29).

³⁰ Edinger, *Ego and Archetype*, p. 152.