(An  Interview with Murray Stein, Ph.D by Rev. Dr. Robert S Henderson)

**RH:** We have entered a strange time. Covid 19 has turned the world upside down.  In the many interviews you and I have done, we have always had a lot to say. Is there something about this pandemic that has left us speechless?

**MS:** Yes, it has left almost everyone speechless. It is such a surprising development in the global community that “black swan” is almost not sufficient to name it. But even if left speechless for a moment, we can think about it. It has been called a “pandemic,” which means it affects everyone on the planet.

The sense of “pan” (“all,” across the board!) is strong, and it underscores the connectedness of everyone. Usually we think of  the “anima mundi” as a loving presence, like a mother, that connects people, but in this case it is the shadow that is connecting  us. This is a big surprise!

Still, the pandemic is bringing a sense of community to many people, and they are feeling, in addition to anxiety, a sense of mutuality and responsibility for one another. What I do has an effect on my neighbor, and so we must become more conscious of our everyday decisions and actions. All the individuals on earth are being called to responsibility.

**RH:** If you feel “black swan” is not sufficient, has another image come to you?

**MS:** The image that comes to my mind is an Umbra Mundi, a “world shadow” hovering over us and infecting our psychic lives. I see this shadow spreading over the globe like a solar eclipse. The alchemical term for it is nigredo. The sun is covered by the shadow of death. It is the familiar stage that signifies the beginning of significant transformation. We are being asked to walk through the valley of the shadow of death. It is biblical. The question is: will we be able to use this experience for individuation? Or will it just pass like a bad dream of the night that when we awake we are happy to be free from?

**RH:**  What is the first step like of this walk?

**MS:** Typically the first step means to enter fully into a state of “confusion,” with the intention  to explore the question, “where am I?” Individual finds themselves in something like a dark wood  like Dante at the beginning of his journey into the Inferno. They are searching  for a way back or out, for something solid, for something they can count on to give them light and hope and a sense of direction. There  is anxiety here in this dark place, sometimes bordering on  panic, and there is often a sense of impending catastrophe if the way back is not found, and quickly. This  is our time.

People are wondering: Is  this the end  of the world as we have known it? Is this the Apocalypse? No one knows the answer. We are all in  the dark, groping, searching. But the important thing is to  look around within this space. There are no answers “out there.” No one knows the future. Perhaps a guide will appear, someone like Virgil or Philemon.
We might ask, too: What does the unconscious say? what is its response to this crisis situation? I have seen a number of dreams that indicate “death.” Death means the end of the story as it has been told. So we step into the valley of the shadow of death and proceed from there. There is no other way out.

**RH:** We are asked to stay at home which can be a huge challenge for many people, especially with so many cancellations of work, school, concerts, sporting events. What are we to do with so much time at home?

**MS:** Usually people have complained about not having enough time to record their dreams, to do active imagination, to read Jung’s Red Book, and so on. Now with time at our disposal, why not make good use of the opportunity? This crisis will pass sooner or later. 18 months is the outside guess right now until a vaccine can be developed and distributed. Then the pace of activity will quickly accelerate and return to high speed. Put this period of time into perspective and use it creatively.

The challenge will to learn from this experience and to carry the learning forward afterwards. What can we extract from this slowdown and enforced period of isolation that will help us to find a wiser pace and balance in life for when the doors are opened and we can walk and run freely again? I suggest we consider this time a precious moment in our lives for looking inward, for introversion, and for practicing centroversion, the mindful circumambulation of the greater self.

**RH:** What is Umbra Mundi and what are we learning from it?

**MS:** Umbra Mundi is a companion to Anima Mundi. Anima Mundi is the soul of the world, the divine within material cosmos. Umbra Mundi is its shadow. You could say it is the dark side of God, as Jung and many of his students have written about this unpleasant topic. Because it is archetypal it infects everyone.

Its most essential features are invisibility, universality, and numinosity. Because Coronavirus moves among us invisibly, is found on all continents, and strikes us as awesome and powerful, it represents the Umbra Mundi. We don’t know who has it or if we have it ourselves. It is everywhere, in all parts of the world, and it instills fear in the collective psyche, which we all feel. Moreover, as Rudolf Otto says about the numinous experience, it is awesome. The perception of Umbra Mundi makes us shudder. It is a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, and it infects us with a mysterious terror and sense of vulnerability. We are not in control, and it is cold and relentless.

We are living in what seems like a sci-fi world at the moment, and the challenge is to accept this as a reality and not brush it aside and dismiss it as fantasy. It has happened so fast. The Umbra Mundi invaded our unstable world unannounced and silently, and it threatens to undo the delicate fabric of our collective life on a global level.

What are we learning from it? This remains to be seen. I have no doubt that we have been handed an opportunity for a vast transformation of consciousness on a general collective level. Many people are talking about that possibility. On a deeper level, there may be a transformation afoot in the collective unconscious. I take this appearance of Umbra Mundi as synchronistic. It was predicted by astrologers. It is timely, and we have to discover it’s meaning. This will emerge over a long period of time.

Remember that we are at only the beginning of the Aquarian Age. Jung thought it would take 600 years for the new God image to come fully into view. This passage through the valley of the shadow of death is a transit and it will take time. We aren’t used to thinking in such a long term perspective. We want a fix and we want it now. Maybe the first lesson to learn is patience. A new humanity is being born. Its brain cells have not yet been fully formed and interconnected. It’s just barely creeping into sight.

**RH:** As you said, this is a time now for introversion. After all your years of clinical work, teaching, and study how do you understand introversion?

**MS:** Introversion is defined by Jung as libido (i.e., interest, attention) directed to the subject rather than to objects. It is self-reflection, looking in the mirror. When we reflect on our feelings, our thoughts, our presuppositions, in other words on our subjectivity, we are operating in the introverted mode. When we direct our attention to objects, people, events around us, we are in the extroverted mode. What isolation does to people generally is to get them to pay attention to how they are reacting to things, how they are feeling about what is going on around them, to become aware of what they are thinking  – their emotions, thoughts, fantasies – and by introverting they become more aware of themselves as subjects.

In Jungian style “inner work,” we use the mode of introversion also to gain access to the unconscious, which is a huge part of the inner world, in fact the larger part by far of the two domains, consciousness and the unconscious. Ego consciousness is small by comparison with the unconscious. In fact, the unconscious is immeasurable and includes personal, cultural and collective (i.e., universally human and perhaps even cosmic) dimensions.

Reflecting on our dreams as images of the unconscious and not as representations of the object world leads us to consider the factors underlying our conscious subjectivity, factors that we call complexes and archetypes. We also use active imagination to explore the “inner world” of the psyche.

The benefit of intensive introversion along these lines and using these methods is that we can establish a connection to the inner world of the  psyche that is as strong as our connection to the world of objects that are available to the senses. Extroversion leads to knowledge of the outer world, introversion to knowledge of the inner world. What we try to create is an equivalence, or a balance, between our relation to the inner world on the one hand and to the outer world on the other.

This achievement is highly unusual in our basically extroverted cultures today. People are much more trained and habituated to attending to the surrounding world – using all the media available to us especially in our presently isolated condition – and tend to fear and avoid taking a look inward at who and what they are. In fact, this is one of the causes of the panic that is running through the world today, especially in Western societies. The inner world is the unknown and the unexplored.

People from Asian cultures who have grown up with Buddhism are much more adept at introversion than most Western people are. Meditation is a form of introversion. It withdraws attention from the outer world and lets go of thoughts that tend in that direction (i.e., our daily obsessions and ruminations). The West is catching on, and meditation centers are quite popular nowadays.

Another form of introversion is prayer. If one prays to an invisible power like God or the Saints, one is for that period of time withdrawing attention from the sensate world of objects and directing it to an archetypal image or presence. In Jungian work we encourage our clients to work with their symbolic images in a similar way – to attend to them, to speak with them, to listen to them. Active imagination can be compared to meditation and to prayer even though there are some differences.

**RH:** Jung said “a man should be able to say he has done his best to form a conception of life after death, or to create some image of it— even if he must confess his failure.” During this crisis I imagine a lot of people are thinking about death. What is your view of death and life after?

**MS:** My view is that after death we continue to exist in the form of a subtle body, in a symbol realm. We become symbols, which are real in that realm and impact this one in certain ways. There is some interaction with the material realm, for instance in the form of dreams or visions and synchronistic events.

From this side we have glimpses and hints. From that side it seems there is something similar. The windows are somewhat open between these two dimensions. Both exist in the same unified reality.

This is ancient wisdom shared by humans in many cultures old and new. Only our standard modern world view does not include this other aspect of total reality. Jung of course knew very well of this reality, and that is why he could say he did not believe (in God), he knew – this is the total reality that he experienced personally and writes about in *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections* and other texts. We will experience it too if we pay attention to dreams and visions and take note of synchronicity, especially around death.

In times like these we are living through right now, people frequently experience revelations in their dreams that tell them about this reality, which extends beyond this life, and not only after but beyond in an encompassing sense.

A big dream, as Jung calls it, offers gnosis, knowledge of a symbolic world that underlies, surrounds, and is infused within the one we know in the physical body and with our senses. We are held and contained in this larger reality. That’s why the Psalm writer says what he does as he walks through the valley of the shadow of death. He knows that he is in secure hands.

My views are based on experiences I’ve had in my personal life and ones I’ve walked through with analysands.

**RH:**  It is near the end of March (2020) and the number of people infected by the coronavirus and who have died around the world have skyrocketed and we have not yet hit the worst. And yet about half of our country feel Covid 19 is a hoax. What is it about the shadow that invites such denial?

**MS:** Denial is a defence against painful thoughts and feelings and is a sign of underlying anxiety. The shadow of optimism is fear of imminent catastrophe.  Most of us want to look on the bright side, to look forward to growth and health and prosperity.

Americans are known for their optimism, which can be a strength and a virtue or a refusal to acknowledge the tragic aspects of life, which are repressed and then become shadow. The pandemic is a test of the collective ego’s capacity to accept reality and  to act accordingly.

To my limited knowledge, every country in the world has failed this test so far, with the  possible exception of Taiwan. I live in Switzerland, a country famous for its good order and effectiveness, but the authorities here failed to register the threat of coronavirus, which was in unobstructed view right across the border in Italy. They were slow to act in accordance with that available knowledge, so now this “safe country” has the highest percentage of infected residents in the world. America is on the verge of a tsunami of desperately ill patients flooding the hospitals, and the  president is promising it will all be over by Easter. This is immoral because he and everyone around him knows this is a false assurance.

But people will believe it because it plays into their defenses against overwhelming anxiety about the shadow of death hovering over the land. In addition, the shadow of a Great Depression looms and threatens the foundations of the country’s economic well being. Denial causes one to act too little and too  late. The virus doesn’t hesitate to exploit this psychological weakness.

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