**Jungian Twelve Steps**

This web page is dedicated to the ever-broadening path of recovery through the 12 step tradition.  While it is, as Bill Wilson, co-founder of A.A., wrote, "a broad, roomy, all inclusive" realm, many newcomers to it feel excluded by much of the spiritual language, especially the words *God* or *Higher Power*.  "I hated the 12-step literature," "I had trouble with the idea of God," and "I thought the Big Book should be re-written" all are common expressions of the initial reaction many people have in early recovery, many of whom later become active members of 12 step communities.  The narrative of drastic, if not always sudden, change is expressed symbolically in  Christian psychology as the story of Saul, a persecutor of Christians, who, on the road to Damascus, encounters Christ,  and experiences a rebirth so profound that, now as a disciple, he changes his name, becoming the disciple Paul.  The process of recovery is often much like walking a maze, or labyrinth;  what appears to be a wall ahead may in fact be a turn so sudden the new view cannot yet be seen.  The complexity of the psyche, like the folding lobes of the labyrinth, makes it impossible to receive and integrate all of experience at once, which is why the first-person narrative of the 12-step tradition, the story of *I've been there,* helps to suggest to the newcomer the possibility of a new orientation to experience.

At the heart of Jungian psychology is the notion of *individuation*, of becoming a distinct entity with sufficient gravity to attract others, meaning that only an *I* can speak to a *you*.

            All of the punishments imagined in Hades entail the agony of a meaningless repetition--only something miraculous could release Sisyphus from pushing his rock, or finally offer Tantalus the nourishment eternally just out of reach.  This is why recovered addicts often speak of the everyday "miracles of this program:"  from the narrow circuit of self-punishing behavior, a vision is needed "of something greater than myself" for the faith of creative living to be restored.  As Jung wrote in a well-known letter to Bill Wilson,  alcoholism represents "a craving...on a low level of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in mediaeval language: the union with God."   Such a union, as Wilson wrote later in the *Big Book*,  suggests more than following *"*a mere code of morals," more than the literal, externally sanctioned rules of conventional religion.  The mystical knowledge of *gnosis*  (in contrast with *a*gnosticism, or not knowing) implies a deep and direct, intuitive access to the *Self*--an idea Jung derived from Indian philosophy.

*Atman*, soul, Self or Higher Power all express a sense of who we are beyond the limits of the ego's daily experiences.   Jungian psychology concerns itself less with God as an extrinsically defined entity, as it does with the image (or *imago*) of God as it exists in the Psyche, or, in the words of Twelve Step spirituality, *God as you understand God*.   Whether or not a deity exists cannot be proven or demonstrated, but that people throughout history have believed in one can be--the belief in God, then, is a measure of what Jung called *psychic reality*.  The invisible topography of the Psyche can only be inferred, glimpsed as if in mirrors or watery reflections, by our beliefs,  by the characters and myths we create, by our poetry and song.

             When Nietzche declared God's death at the end of the nineteenth century, he spoke an attitude that has characterized modern life, one that Wilson addresses in *We Agnostics*.  But the philosopher could have added that, as water becomes vapor, becomes cloud, becomes rain, becomes new water, so we live in cycles of death, transformation and rebirth.   Just as in childhood, we often reject the toys we loved, only later to reclaim them, so, often, a period of alienation is necessary for a new connection to be made, at a higher level,  *in consciousness*.

The story of God's death and rebirth is not a new one; it is simply that for the first time we are no longer living solely within the story's dream, nor forgetting its symbolic message, but are awakening, and awakening into the capacity for remembrance.

This death and rebirth occurs within the individual Psyche in recovery; it is the recovery of one's original potency, the "Divine Child" incarnated, not replicated as it would have been without the advent of suffering, but with the benefit of adult experience, and an adult's capacity to create meaning from what has been lost.

**The Twelve Steps**

Addiction follows the ancient psychic pattern described by Jung of the Old Testament God who, as unconscious trickster, wreaks havoc on mankind, creating the necessity of a loving savior in the New Testament. Following instinctively the unconscious knowledge that order often arises out of chaos, the trickster figure, in world-wide mythology, is the one whose actions are disruptive yet ultimately lead to salvation--in Navajo lore, it is Coyote who, though a buffoon and thief, brings fire to the people. In addiction, the trickster latent in the psyche forces the addict into recovery by exacerbating "the wreckage" such that the individual becomes able to transform and utilize the power of this negative effectiveness for a conscious good.

In Jungian psychology, this transformation can be understood with regards to what Jung called *the transcendent function* , the bridging dialogue between the ego and the more expansive parameters of the Self, a concept he borrowed from Indian philosophy. While the ego's strength allows us to interface with the world, its powers are also limited. Julian Jaynes has made the useful analogy that the ego is like a flashlight pointing into a dark room; while it illuminates what it focuses on, its specialization in directed "awareness" is also its weakness. "The Self," then, is the entirety of the space of this room, holding in inclusion both the conscious and the unconscious.

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| http://www.helenmehlgallery.com/japan/bridge_kyoto.htm |

Jung's first insight into the distinction between the ego and the Self came in childhood, when he realized he was "two different persons;" one a timid and insecure schoolboy, the ego that appeared and spoke to others, while the other was a man "of great authority," from an earlier century, "who rode in a carriage," and who was affronted at being treated like a child. The work of recovery is to adjust what Jung called the *Ego/Self Axis*; as he conceptualized it, life begins in a state of inflation, with the ego submerged in the Self. In healthy development, the ego and the Self separate, such that the ego is able to differentiate reality from fantasy, but is also able to transform the enchanted energies of the Self into actualization in the world. While addicts are often said to have "big egos," it can also be said that the ego has not developed at all, so risks, on the one hand, becoming trapped in defenses meant to protect its inner frailty, or attempts to inflate its identity on the royalty of the timeless Self. This results in a vacillation between alienation and inflation, in which the missing link is re-acceptance after a fall from grandiosity.

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| http://www.linkstolearning.com/high_school_geometry_preview.htm |

In the inflated state, with the bewitchment of the unconscious amplified through the use of alcohol or drugs, the personality becomes a fractured pantheon of the demi-gods, or archetypes, of addiction: the tragic Artist, the Hero, the Scholar, the Rebel, the divine Victim. By identifying God or the Higher Power as *other* than the ego, the personality becomes "right sized," and learns to live "life on life's terms," bounded by space and temporality, by the body and the limitations of reality. At the same time, through daily prayer and meditation, the *connection* to this other remains, such that reality is neither the barren desert of alienation, nor the engulfing allure of the siren's song, but is both connected to, and separate from, the *Other* of the Self.

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| http://www.lawbuzz.com/movies/space_cowboys/space_cowboys_ch2.htm |

The problem of the addict's denial is somewhat akin to what Ernest Becker named in his book *The Denial of Death*, a denial which is chosen as the means to cope with the paradox of living with both a symbolic and a physical identity, or, as he summarizes, "*Man is a god who shits*." In the addict, the over-identification with the symbolic self, with its freedom and endless possibility, prevents an examination of the physical evidence that previous attempts at control have failed, that, as the *First Step* summarizes, he is powerless over the substance. The orientation required to achieve this understanding is one which essentially means the beginnings of ego consciousness, the "little light" that is able to live in a world of limitation and facticity. Consider an example from popular culture: the 1970's television classic *Bewitched*. Samantha is forever vowing to abstain from the easy accomplishment of her magic, of her immortal Self, and live the more limited life of the mortal housewife, or ego, in the world, but is always, under stress, using her spells "one last time." What Bill Wilson called "ego collapse at depth" can also be described as the ego's temporary disidentification with the magic of Jung's Self, or Becker's symbolic self, such that a new connection can be made. Whereas, in the past, the defeat of the symbolic self has led to an alienation of the ego so profound that it has been followed by the deceptive "recovery" offered by inflation, with the intervention offered by a Twelve Step group, the cycle of inflation and alienation can be both soothed and smoothed out by the groups' modelling of re-acceptance into the fold, with welcoming applause and a phone list, such that eventually, sometimes after many relapses, an equilibrium can be achieved. The state of alienation becomes, instead, a necessary emptiness, what in Catholic mysticism was consciously cultivated as the *via negativa*, the surrender of all pre-conception as a means to make space for God to fill. In the Buddhist *Oxherding Pictures*, this is the white air of the first etching, in which the Oxherder stands alone, in what Suzuki Roshi called *beginner's mind*, emptied of presumed knowledge, before the first inky marks of the Ox appear--a re-appearance of the wild, untamed Self as separate *other*. This is Dante's wilderness, Elijah's seclusion in the desert, or the addict's acknowledgment, through "hitting bottom," that recovery cannot happen alone.

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| http://www.mro.org/zmm/zenarts/largeimagepages/oxherding/oxherding02.html |

Just as it is often in the contemplation of our own death, or the experience of other's, that we sense a more expansive undercurrent running through our lives, so it is sometimes the suffering of profound defeat that opens the archetypal healing powers of the psyche. For Bill Wilson, after having "gagged on" a notion of a power greater than himself, the experience of profound defeat and depression created enough desperation that he made a plea to God, upon which "the room lit up with a great white light." For others, the beginnings of trust are more of the "educational variety," in which one gradually comes to trust "G.O.D." as an acronym for "Group Of Drunks." "Came, came to, and came to believe" is how the full spectrum of this phase is often described, in which the first traces of hope are felt through a reliance on intimacy rather than substances.

Hope then becomes the fuller faith of the *Third Step*, in which the individual vows to "turn the will over" to a higher power. The ego, at this point, extends its limited capacities toward the fuller Self, or God, an "archetype in our being of wholeness" that, when focussed on, manages in return to focus and synthesize the fractures of smaller gods within the personality. For the bridging dialogue of the transcendent function to operate, two distinct entities must exist, with the ego developing its superior effectiveness at managing the tedium of "mortal" life, of doing the "next right thing," while maintaining a relationship to the enchantment, rather than the bewitchment, of the archetypal psyche through practices of prayer, listening to dreams and the symbols of daily life. The third step prayer consistently emphasizes the "I/thou" of this relationship: "God, I offer myself to thee, to build with me and to do with me as thou will..." *Turning the will over to God* is, at its heart, a decision to commit to the process of what Jung called *individuation*, a sense of being "a child of God," with an intrinsic identity as unstrainingly distinct and unique as the fingerprint. This requires a deep, attentive listening, since, as part of the ego's adaptation to circumstances, false identities can usurp the individual's true nature, or, in Taoism, what is known as the *Tao*, or *The Way* of all things. Individuation means making central what has heretofore been marginal; the story of how Theodore Geisl, later to be known as Dr. Seuss, *came to be* known as Dr. Seuss illustrates this better perhaps than any other. As a student at Oxford, bored by lectures, he habitually doodled in the margins instead of taking notes; a young woman sitting near him, whom he would later marry, pointed out to him that he was clearly not an academic--clearly what he preferred doing was drawing these quirky creatures. For him, as for many, "God's will" was his own highest will that the preconceptions determined by his upbringing had literally left to the margins of his existence--or, as Jung said, the ego and the Self often have opposing aims.

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| http://phoenixlearninggroup.com/specials/drseuss.htm |

A path dedicated to living in wholeness, rather than "purity" or "perfection," means an honest reckoning with repressed material, what Jung called "the shadow" and 12-step literature refers to as "defects of character." For Jung, those who are least aware of their shadow are those most likely to act on it, and to project onto others its many faces. Consider, for example, the physical space of a traditional Catholic confessional: a booth with a wall between the priest and the confessor, and in the wall, a tiny window through which "the shadow" side can be heard by the light of consciousness, represented by the priest. Just as a seed pod constitutes a whole yet may contain a membranous "wall" separating individual seeds, the entirety of the Self contains both the light and dark of the confessional, with both sides transformed by the interaction. In integrating, rather than eliminating, the shadow, addiction can become devotion, laziness can become relaxation, and a tendency to blame others can create an opportunity for the self-ironic humor of 12-step meetings, in which the Gemini face splits in half and acknowledges its other side. When we withdraw our projections from the world, we are released from fear, victimization, and self-sentimentality.The former Poet Laureate Robert Hass once related a story about his grand-daughter who, at the age of two or three, was afraid of the monsters in *Where the Wild Things Are*, until her older sister encouraged her to imitate the monsters by gnashing her little teeth. Such that: "If you know the monster is inside you you aren't afraid of it anymore."

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| http://www.bow.k12.nh.us/spangler/wild%20things.htm |

In recognizing this monster within ourselves, we become more genuinely able to connect, to relate to, and forgive, the shadow elements of others; the process of individuation, Jung wrote, is always one that draws others in, and, in recovery from addiction, this initially means repairing those connections that have been broken. Only through the making of amends can a true *enantiodromia*, or conversion into the opposite, occur, from a state of disconnection to connection, from unconsciousness to conscious mastery. In terms of the Ego/Self axis, this new relationship to *Other* shifts the center of the personality from ego to Self; the recovering addict becomes other-oriented rather than ego oriented. The potential danger in this step can be in the tendency to idealize this other-oriented behavior, and, acting out of shame for one's self-centeredness, attempt through self-will to evolve prematurely. As Edward Edinger has noted, to be "effectively self-centered" means a conscious acknowledgment that life is inevitably self-centered; with an effective center of the self, one is *centered* , the ego is in equilibrium, and a surplus of energy then exists for others. In a "selfish program," amends are made to oneself first; giving oneself what one has lacked strengthens the ego, assuring that the making of amends is not itself done toward this aim, threatening the relationship with further damage.

In making amends, we reconnect not only with others but with the corresponding parts of ourselves that we rejected in evicting those others from our lives. As we withdraw our projections, we realize that the list of resentments made in the Fourth Step often become the source for our amends later in the Ninth; this is because, while it is possible to percieve accurately the limitations of others, disproportionate irritation is a sign of projection, that we are attempting to expel unwanted traits from ourselves by identifying them unduly in others. This is when our own house becomes full, with our own angels and monsters both. An ancient icon of such wholeness is the mandala, which in AA is the easily identifiable triangle within the circle, the circle in ancient traditions representing the undifferentiated, original One of the Self, and the triangle being a trinitarian symbol representing the dialectic of development, the either/or of opposites and of black and white thinking giving birth to a third possibility.

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| http://www.azothgallery.com/dialectics.html |

From the point of view of what is known as the "Stages of Change Model," the first step corresponds to the "Contemplation Stage," in which the key decision is made, the second through the ninth are the "Action Stage," and the tenth, eleventh and twelfth steps are the "Maintenance Stage." This accomplishes in consciousness the ultimate unconscious aim of the Trickster, a restoration of ancient ritual at a new level,  
in which the image of God evolves, through the proclaimed "death" of the personified deity, into a consciousness of our own wholeness and volume within an interconnected matrix, a sense of an existence both ephemeral and eternal. Such daily practices include the saying of thanks upon awakening, the surrender of worries with a note stored in the "God box," daily journalling and self-witnessing (the "inventory"), the expansion of empathy through regular attendance at meetings, and daily meditation and prayer. All such practices decelerate the usual pattern of hurry characteristic of the modern world, enhancing, in a moment of stillness, an awareness of simply being, of simply existing within one life, right now. Only in such states of stillness can we live through our deeper intention, in which the crossroads between the mortal and the immortal, actualization and intent, can be found *through the act itself*. It is not in the seeking of a result provided by an external deity that the purpose of prayer is found, but in its process, in its physical posture, within the quiet of the dark skull, eyes closed, that the individual finds the precise words appropriate with which to address the Self beyond the self, small s. Religious traditions have always stressed the gravity of intentional speech, while modern psychology has discovered the effects our language has on our cognition and our moods. This is why it is in the finding and alligning ourselves with the words of our greater intention that we sense an undertow to our lives, or, as Jung wrote, that a rhizome exists below the blossoms, that pass in "a single summer...Yet," he adds, "I have never lost a sense of something that lives and endures underneath the eternal flux. What we see is the blossom, which passes. The rhizome remains..."

The number twelve typically, as in the calendar year or the Zodiac, signifies the completion of a cycle, and it is no wonder that Bill Wilson intuitively knew there were to be twelve steps before he even wrote them. The service work suggested by this step is less *pre*scriptive than it is *de*scriptive of the gravity of soul gained by the process of individuation. We have all been in the presence of such people, who, simply by being their most fully faceted selves, inspire others to accept what has been born, not made. This sense of discovering the innate, of channelling rather than controlling, is an experience great artists have always spoken of. For Michelangelo, the sculpture already existed within the block of marble; his work was to remove what was extra. If the *gnosis*, or direct, inner knowing, has been true, what follows happens as if by recollection, more by *spirit* of the law than by letter or prescription. Fundamentally, this is because the steps themselves are a map, at least an approximate one, of psychic reality; its archetypal pattern can be prescribed but also observed, unfolding, always distinct, and never exactly the same.

**TRADITION**

**ANONYMITY AND THRESHOLD**

*anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all of our traditions…*”

In church basements, now throughout the world, coffee is poured, chairs are arranged, laughter and conviviality kindled. In coffee shops and taverns nearby, the words *God* or *Higher Power* may never be mentioned, but here, in this underground mantle where full names are withheld, the subject of spirit is primary. In the realm humanity has often referred to as *heaven*, the names and identities given us in this life may become sloughed off, no longer useful. Other animals and plants undergo similar cycles; the rabbit gives birth in the privacy of its den, the penguin guards its egg against arctic winds with the skirt of its skin, and the caterpillar retreats into its cocoon. The living world knows that that which is vulnerable and new requires sanctuary.

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All change involves a turning point, a nexus or crossroads, in which identity must be suspended for the sake of cultivating an openness to new experience. That which has been rigid must soften, identity become ambiguous. This is that twilight or dawn region known as the *liminal*, in which one is neither *either* nor *or*, not dark, not light, but “betwixt & between.” The anthropologist Arnold van Gennep identified three stages to all rites of passage: the novice is first separated from the community, next enters the margin—the *limen* or threshold—and lastly, re-enters community life with a new identity. Essentially, this is the story of *the* *Journey*; simply said, one must go away in order to come home anew. In the liminal phase, the novice often will fast or endure a period of silence; identity disappears or becomes paradoxical, gender lines confused. Ascetic practices pursue the annihilation of the previous personality, and often, the birth name is forsaken. One is considered neither living nor dead.

In this middle region, ego identity dissolves; interest in “money, property and prestige,” (*Tradition Six*) becomes subordinated to “our group purpose.” In the subtle shifts at twilight, the individual joins the community at large at a deeper level, the underground strata where all roots and rhizomes grow in darkness. Even in health, change requires distance from what one has previously known; in the rigid, repeating patterns of addiction, this is all the more true. In a culture lacking initiatory experiences, addiction may be both symptom and compensation, poison and promise for cure.

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| Hermes |
| In Greek mythology, Hermes is the god of crossroads and boundaries, a trickster and puer*, and is able to veil himself in a cloak of invisibility.* |

“To descend into Hell alive, confront its monsters and demons, is to undergo an initiatory ordeal....”  
     Mircea Eliade, *Rites & Symbols of Initiation*

"….life itself means to separate and to be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and be reborn. It is to act and to cease, to wait and rest and then to begin acting again, but in a different way. And there are always thresholds to cross..."  
     Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*

Other reading:

*The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, AA World Services, Inc.   
Thresholds of Initiation*, Joseph Henderson  
*Betwixt & Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage, Victor Turner  
The Ritual Process*, Victor Turner