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## Jung, Taoism, the Sound of a Saxophone and I

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I have gone happily to draw water from the brook and have sung as I walked under a load of firewood . . . . As spring gave way to autumn, I have busied myself in the garden . . . I have rejoiced in my books and have been soothed by my zither. Winters I have warmed myself in the sun, summers I have bathed in the brook. Men fear to waste their lives, concerned that they may fail to succeed. They cling to the days and lament passing time. Aware of my destined end, of which one cannot be ignorant, I find no cause for regret in this present transformation. (T'ao Yuan-ming in Wilhelm, 1979: xxiii)

In a few beautiful lines T'ao Yuan-ming celebrates the simple and happy life of a man of the Tao who responds and adjusts to nature's rhythms. Detached from failure and success, from life and death, he willingly follows the natural flow, fully content with the moment. He radiates an attitude of deep respect and trust toward nature, knowing that he and nature are one and the same process, which is the Tao. He has become a clean whistle for the spirit to sing its song for the benefit of the world. It is the spirit that speaks through the quiet center of his self, which has become an image of the world, free of personal concerns and self interest.

In my experience, life is not always easy, let alone a celebration of happiness and joy. Instead of welcoming and happily following my experi-

ences, I find myself easily turning against them, warding them off or fighting them. Whether I feel depressed or driven, in pain over a body symptom or stirred up by relationship difficulties and terrifying world events, I often experience the unpredictable as a disturbance. The following article focuses on finding meaning in disturbances. It is inspired by the awareness that swimming with the current and giving in to the river may make life richer and more interesting.

The other morning I woke up feeling tired and slow, but soon began to feel compelled to hurry myself along and get to work. As I headed to the library, the many young and professional people walking the streets of Zurich caught my attention and amplified my need to get it together and overcome my exhaustion. However, not even a cup of Italian espresso could speed me up and rescue me from my sense of weakness. I started to feel increasingly old, drained, and like a failure.

I began to focus on the tension between my conscious attitude as a professional and ambitious man striving for success and recognition and this feeling of being old and worn out. As I let myself experience my body sensations more deeply, I started to feel like an elderly streetperson who had lost his youth and his worldly career. As I appreciated and studied the image of the streetperson internally, visualized him, felt him in my body, and began to move like him, a heavy weight seemed to fall off my shoulders. My exhaustion lifted as my focus shifted to my

inner state. The more deeply I penetrated into my experience, the more unconcerned, free and easy I felt. Dancing through the streets impersonating my inner streetperson nature, I felt free and in touch with a deep part of myself. I felt momentarily detached from the pressure to succeed and experienced a sense of well-being and love for myself and the world around me.

Although I never made it to the library that morning, I decided to write an article about my inner work with the hope of demonstrating that often the most painful and challenging aspects of life can initiate important change and development. The intention of this article is to illustrate that process work, in the spirit of Taoism and Jung, takes us in a meaningful direction toward our spiritual development precisely because it teaches us to welcome and invite all of our unknown parts into awareness. It believes meaning may emerge from an experience of totality we may have in moments when we transcend the poles of existence. When we let go of our conceptions and images of who we think we are or should be and embrace our total nature, we may realize ourselves as pieces of nature, one within ourselves and with the world.

The article also explores the concept of the dreaming body, which is defined as a field-like pattern that manifests in both physical and psychological events and in the acausal symmetrical couplings between them (Mindell, 1989). I will try to show how this field, or Tao, is a possible connecting factor between a body feeling, a physical symptom, an *I Ching* hexagram drawn the same day, a dream, and a near-death experience. Inner work over a couple of days illustrates the hypothesis that various dreaming processes seem to mirror the same pattern and content.

In these times of increased social tension and injustice, however, focus on one's inner life is a privilege and luxury that many of us cannot afford or consider. This was also true in imperial China during the Chou dynasty when philosophical Taoism had its beginning, first, with Lao-tzu, and later, with Chuang-tzu. At the time, the mainstream philosophy was Confucian. Its ethical code, which emphasized traditional family values and conventional gender roles, supported

the inequalities inherent in the feudal system. In contrast to the Confucian attempt to reform society and adapt to the feudal lords, the Taoist answer to oppression was to withdraw into the wilderness and follow nature rather than society. This can be seen as naive or as an escape from the desolation that arises from cultural and social inequities. However, the Taoist's refusal to participate in the feudal system appealed to the people and led to a revolutionary grassroots movement that supported the ideal of equality in a collectivist society (Needham, 1956). The suffering that comes with lack of social rank in a hierarchical society can devastate people or turn them to revolt and revolution. It also has the potential, at times, to initiate in those who are oppressed the development of deep inner resources and insight, which Mindell calls spiritual rank (1995).

Although the focus of this article is individual development, I believe it is equally important to engage in the world, since there is no self in isolation. Our selves are not alone but "embraced in culture, embodied in nature, and embedded in social institutions" (Wilber, 1996: 317).

### The world as self

The idea of a pattern that connects not only dream and body phenomena but inner and outer events is conceivable only within the framework of a unitary view of the world. Both Taoist philosophy and Jungian psychology advocate such a unitary world view, in which the idea of a mysterious whole or the notion of spirit exists. Moreover, both philosophies assume that an unconscious sense of purpose seems to guide us to develop in accord with our nature. As we move toward the experience of wholeness within ourselves, we also realize our oneness with the spirit. In other words, if the universe has a self-transcending tendency, a direction "from matter to life to mind to Spirit" (Wilber, 1996: 36), we human beings participate in this emergent evolution of consciousness.

### Tao

The Tao is the universal process or flow, the constant change or movement of nature. It is

something like a field, everywhere present, eternal, invisible yet manifest in heaven, earth and humankind. The dragon lines in Taoist paintings picture the world as a huge web connected by invisible threads in which change and transformation on one end influence all other parts of the field.

In the Taoist worldview the universe is inseparable from ourselves: "Heaven and earth grow together with me, and the ten thousand things and I are one" (Chuang-tzu, 1974: 35). Thus, when the *I Ching* pictures the unfolding process in its 64 hexagrams, or archetypal situations, it implies that inner and outer life events in any given moment are bound up with the entire universal situation. Evolution is a co-creative process in which the universe and human beings are vehicles for the Tao to unfold.

The *Tao Te Ching* recommends that you "see the world as your self" (Mitchell, 1988: 13.4) and "treasure the body as the world" (Chen, 1989: 13.4). The way to adjust to the Tao is to identify the personal self or the personal body with the infinite and thus to become one with the world. Through this identification the Taoist gains ultimate freedom: she cannot lose anything since the world cannot be lost. Chuang-tzu illustrates this message in the following story:

You hide your boat in the ravine and your fish net in the swamp and tell yourself that they will be safe. But in the middle of the night a strong man shoulders them and carries them off, and you don't know why it happened. You think you do right hiding little things in big ones, and yet they get away from you. But if you were to hide the world in the world, so that nothing could get away, this would be the final reality of the constancy of things. (Chen 1989: 88)

The Tao, in this sense, is that from which we cannot deviate. The world for the Taoist is sacred and perfect. Being in the Tao means recognizing the universe as a creative dance and dancing with it, being open to the Tao, which is here, now, infinite and one.

### Unus mundus

Jung's theories had much in common with Taoist thought. He postulated that the individual and the world are connected by an invisible totality, which he called the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious is something like a global field, in which structural elements act as ordering factors. Inner and outer, psychological and material processes all manifest around these structural elements. From a process-oriented perspective the dreambody conforms to this underlying order. It sends the same message in different channels, such as a dream image, a symptom, an outer event, and an *I Ching* hexagram. This coherence of the message, or "process logic," is perceived as meaningful coincidence (Mindell, 1985: 60). The concept of synchronicity, the simultaneous occurrence of two events connected by meaning, shows clearly the intimate relationship between the inner and outer worlds. The archetypes are attractors in the unitary collective field. They not only evoke certain images, feelings and patterns of behavior in individuals, but order outer events as well, in accordance with the individual's process. "The world is part of us and behaves as if it were one of our senses" (Mindell, 1989: 28).

For example, I once worked with a young woman on her dream of a powerful and fiery amazon. She kept saying that the image left her cold and that she could not relate to this female power. As she was moving and stretching her arms as if to shoot an arrow, she insisted again that the dream was not really touching her. In that very moment a light bulb exploded and flew like a rocket—propelled by a huge energy—across the room. It was an awesome moment and evoked very strong emotional reactions in the woman.

Jung also calls this field of nonlocal causality the "unus mundus," in reference to the original undifferentiated oneness of the world in which psyche and matter, individual and world, are identical. Not unlike the Tao, the unus mundus is the "level of existence from which the manifest world is created" (Mindell, 1985: 63). What for the Taoist is the return to the womb, to a state of nonbeing, is for Jung the ultimate step in

the lifelong process of individuation, of growing older, wiser and more mature. Jung spoke of the "mysterium coniunctionis," in which the human being, unified in mind, body and spirit, reunites with the world and becomes one with the creative process.

With his notion of the *unus mundus*, Jung speculates on the unknowable unitary ground, out of which spirit and matter, psyche and body arise. He concludes that his studies parallel what perennial philosophies have found all along—namely, the identical nature of the individual and the global self, or the individual and the universal Tao (Jung, 1963). Whether we call it Self, God or Tao, the experience of a common ground of self, nature and world is the thread that connects various worldviews and spiritual traditions, which all express the belief that human nature, the physical environment and the realm of the spirit are one.

#### The world as other *same*

Given the postulate of oneness, why is it that many of us often feel separate and cut off from other living beings, from our environment, and from the mysterious Tao? It appears that the highly individual Western mind has lost its once intimate contact with the mysteries of nature and community and, instead, is caught in a dualistic frame of reference. The I and the world "out there" are set up as irreconcilable opposites. This division between spirit and matter, mind and body, between individuals and the world, culminated in Cartesian dualism and a materialism which assumes that matter is the fundamental reality.

In a universe that functions like a huge mechanical clock, there is little room for meaning. Consciousness is random, a mere side product of the deterministic processes of matter. Such a view of the natural world goes hand in hand with the Western attitude of controlling nature. On the brink of modern industrial science, the English philosopher Francis Bacon stated that:

the secret workings of nature do not reveal themselves to one that simply contemplates the natural flow of events. It is when man

interferes with nature, vexes nature, tries to make her do what he wants, not what she wants, that he begins to understand how she works and may hope to learn to control her. (Farrington, 1949: 109)

This attitude has prevailed throughout the industrial age and is at the base of a great number of ecological, political and social problems that threaten the survival of the earth. While our industries pollute and poison the earth's ecosystems, our interpersonal attitudes perpetuate many forms of oppression and exploitation. Within ourselves we often feel torn and conflicted, because we, too, may try to control our own lives and natures rather than following and respecting our experiences. Instead of going with the flow of life, we try to repress experiences coming from our bodies, from dreams, relationship, or outer events. We treat our bodies and the dream world the same way we treat our environment: as separate entities whose messages we can ignore.

Human survival on this planet necessitates a psycho-ecological perspective, a perspective that blends the best of psychology with a worldview that helps to understand the connection between human beings and the planet as a whole. A new understanding of our intimate and symbiotic bond with the planet will change our relationship to things—which need respect and love—since the way we treat objects reflects the way we treat each other and ourselves (Roszak, 1995). The belief and the feeling that our existence has meaning and a purpose can lead to an attitude of treating the planet respectfully and form an important step in sustaining this earth. I believe that the psychology of Jung and the philosophy of Taoism provide us with models that can guide our interactions with nature in a way that will assist the future coexistence of humankind and the planet.

#### Radical trust in nature

Process work is an approach to bridging the gap between the individual and the world and holds, like Taoism, that the spiritual and the mundane are inseparably one.

Our knowledge of the Tao comes from observation of nature. Everything spiritual we learn from the natural world; its beauty and its perpetual youth require only that we open our eyes and look. (Chen, 1989: 42)

Like Taoism, with its radical trust in nature, process work observes and appreciates nature. It teaches the use of our senses to observe the simple, ordinary and inconspicuous. One of process work's central tools is using awareness to observe and contemplate the patterns and rhythms of nature. Experiences are categorized according to their distance from individual (and collective) awareness and according to the sensory channels in which they manifest. Primary processes are intentional messages and signals people are usually aware of and with which they identify. Secondary processes are unintentional messages or events to which people have little relationship. They are further from awareness and happen outside of one's control. The edge is the boundary that divides these experiences.

Accordingly, attention can be divided into two aspects, the first and second attentions. The first attention focuses on matters of identity and consensus reality, on our mundane goals, our daily work. The second attention is the "key to the world of dreaming" (Mindell, 1993a: 25) that reveals the mysterious signals from the dreaming body. These signals reach our awareness as visual, auditory, proprioceptive, kinesthetic, relationship, or environmental clues. In addition, to observe accurately we need to have the ability to communicate about what it is that we perceive. Having a fair observer is a prerequisite to following whatever is happening from moment to moment in the different sensory channels.

### Following the Tao

A process-oriented attitude respects and loves the unfolding and recoiling movements of nature and follows them at their own pace. Any course of action or intervention adapts to these natural trends and moves along with what is naturally occurring so that it becomes a seamless response in a given situation.

A plant grows at its own pace. One must not help the growth of the corn stalks by

pulling them up. In the same way the Taoist allows events to unfold according to their inner rhythms; he acts by non-action (*wu-wei*), which is acting with, not against, the inner rhythms of things. (Chen, 1989: 41)

While Taoism does not interfere with the processes of nature, process work supports the disavowed aspects of self and helps people discover the unknown. By simply focusing on and supporting the secondary signals in their respective channels, we discover what wants to happen next. Nature becomes our teacher. "If we want to ski, the mountain itself becomes the teacher" (Mindell, 1992: 51). Similar to the principle of Aikido, interventions are closely joined to and in accord with the organization of the experiential pattern, that is, the primary and secondary processes. Therapeutic change does not arise as much from intervention itself as from the structure of the client's process, of which the intervention is a mere amplification. Interventions support and go with what is already happening and "create change through appreciating what is happening" (Mindell, 1988: xiii).

The process-oriented approach to bridging the division between the me and the not-me is to make use of all our perceptions for the benefit of ourselves, others and the world (Mindell, 1990: 15). Therefore inner work, or the process of self-discovery, begins with noticing whatever we see, hear or feel in a given moment and with paying close attention to the mysterious and the unknown, which emerge on the fringe of awareness. Our visual images in fantasies and dreams, proprioceptive sensations in symptoms and body feelings, movement impulses, auditory messages in voices and inner dialogue, information about ourselves via relationship encounters and environmental impressions—all of these perceptions are potentially meaningful. "The stuff of your visions, voices and body pains is not *maya*, not an illusion, but an express train to yourself" (Mindell, 1990: 40).

Process work is a step toward psycho-ecology in that it helps us to pick up and recycle unintentional messages and disturbing experiences that we usually throw out into the atmosphere for someone else to clean up. Whether we reject

inner parts, turn away from threatening outer events or discard our garbage, the result is an ecological crisis. If, however, disturbing parts are able to consciously express themselves and be integrated, the result is increased awareness and growth. The following story illustrates a process-oriented inner work approach to disturbance.

### **Back pain**

On my walk through downtown Zurich, I followed the spirit that emerged from my inner work. I felt peaceful and happy until I got home and found that an upcoming seminar might be canceled. Instantaneously my ambition went into overdrive and I spent the next several hours making phone calls and doing my best to make sure the seminar would happen. I succeeded, and my normal, striving self felt satisfied. That night, however, I awoke with a massive pain in my back. Nothing alleviated it. Every move hurt. My back muscles felt tight and cramped in one spot that felt like a huge knot. Feeling victimized, I wailed, moaned, and lamented the absence of a helping God. Stubbornly I indulged in my pain. I forgot that for the Taoist the answer lies in the very experiences I try to disavow. My body hurt. I had encountered an edge, a barrier to feeling what was actually happening.

With body problems it is difficult to stay with the stream of experience because illness and symptoms threaten to overthrow our body integrity and our sense of self. Thus a severe body symptom becomes a battle, "a war zone between who you thought you were and infinity" (Mindell, 1993b: lecture). This is precisely why body problems can also be the source of spiritual inspiration: they bring us in touch with the eternal. Body problems arise first as distant secondary processes, far away from awareness. As they come closer, "they scare us and force us to adjust to them" (Mindell, 1993b: lecture). With a minor body problem it is easy to describe the conflict zone. When we are in the midst of a severe illness, however, it may take a huge leap of faith into the unknown to follow one's experience with an open attitude.

Mindell says:

The difference between this agony and Tao

is how you approach the pain. With an attitude of "Oh! how interesting!" we have an opportunity to interact and work with the pain. At a certain moment also saying, "This is the Tao, this is just how it is" can make the pain less, can make the symptom go away. (1993b: lecture)

The Taoist holds her attention close to experience and thus avoids the traps of dualism. From the perspective of consensus reality, understandably, we want to get rid of the pain. Nature, however, may produce the pain to draw our attention to it. Nature does not attach a label to the experience that we call pain. She heals because no one is sick. The healing might simply come with letting the experience be. In the original state of non-being there is no judgment, no duality. There is only the Tao, the experience of the process.

### **Close the gate**

The next morning, still suffering, I had a strong need to understand my experience. I sat down and focused on the knot in my back. The pain was excruciating. I accessed the figure creating the pain by grabbing a pillow case. Imagining it as my back, I made a tight knot in it. As I started to identify with the pain maker, passionate words came out with an urgency that took me by surprise: "Close the gate, stop giving yourself away to the world!"

While symptoms and illness, or any form of pain, can be understood as an inner conflict with at least two parts, I had been completely identified with suffering from the back pain and was convinced that this was my whole self. Approaching the total experience, I remembered that there is another, more distant figure hidden in the pain—the creator of this body dream. Accessing the symptom maker and getting to know the relationship between the parts opened something up in me and freed a creative energy that had previously felt stuck. The clear message from the symptom maker helped me to focus inwardly and to feel more awake and alive again.

The symptom maker demanded a turn inward, a focus on inner life that came quite naturally, since the pain forced me to sit, meditate and

focus on the knot. I moved, experimented with different yoga positions, stretched, amplified the pain. After a while, my awareness sank through my hips, legs and feet into the ground. As I sat for many hours feeling and following the pain in my back, and as my proprioceptive awareness deepened, the physical pain brought up lots of difficult childhood memories and images.

After many hours of focusing on the painful spot, my feet and hips started to vibrate, and a slow movement took over my whole body. Ecstatic energy seemed to flow from the ground through my feet and up into my body as heat waves. The energy transformed into a creative impulse. The movement led into a liberating dance. I picked up my saxophone and the clear sounds woke me to be completely present in the here and now. Sitting in the heat of my own process, moving, dancing, playing—holding on to the center in the midst of the turbulence of the world—I said yes to the creative process!

### The hexagram speaks

Later that same morning I asked the *I Ching* about the Tao of my momentary situation. It responded with hexagram 34 (Great Power). The central message was to turn to my inner development and to let go of an attachment to my longing for the “world-out-there.” In the second hexagram, number 17, (Adapting), the *I Ching* advised me to follow the rhythms of nature: “When autumn approaches all of life that continues to survive begins an adaptation to the season. The pelts of animals begin to thicken . . .” (Wing, 1982: 17). It reminded me not to waste my energies struggling against the forces, but instead to rid myself of beliefs that are holding me back.

Reflections on my inner work led me to think of my ambitious striving as that part of my identity which clings to the outer world, to youth and success. My societal conditioning and personal history resulted in certain ideas about how to be a man. This made it difficult to follow the rhythms of my own nature. Working on myself supported my going inside when it is time to go inside and going out when it is time to go out.

### Night dream

That night I dreamt that I stood in line in a doctor’s office. When it was finally my turn, I told him all about my childhood experiences, of my travels to Africa and of terrifying illnesses, including a near-death experience. It took the whole night to relate and recount my ailments and pains up to the present. My life review, retelling and reliving my childhood experiences and symptoms, had a very positive effect.

The pain brought me in contact with a healing power whose attention cured some old wounds. Mindell suggests that healing may be an intrinsic part in all illness.

Sickness is the healing. What consensus reality calls sickness, from the altered state is actually dreaming trying to unfold something else. The process itself will cure itself. (1996: lecture)

My dreaming process reacted to the pain with the emergence of an inner dream doctor whose magical medicine was to listen and value all of my experiences. His compassionate focus on my symptoms, on illnesses and even on death gave me a new awareness in the light of which my bruises seemed to spontaneously heal. In the morning, after a short night’s sleep, I woke up refreshed, and my pain was completely gone.

### Near-death experience

As I began to think about my journey in Africa and the near-death experience that shook me up at the time, I saw that this experience was, in a deeper sense, reflecting what I was wrestling with at the moment. Giving up was part of my long-term process, or life myth.

In my near-death experience, strong currents pulled me underwater. There was a moment of terror when I could not help but let go. Consciousness of myself, my body and reality vanished and an altered state took over. In this other world there was no “me” anymore, just powerful and luminous experiences of color, sound, music and movement, a state of perfect well-being. Going with the flow, my body was finally released to the water’s surface and I was back.

What an incredible joy to be alive! I now realize the truth in the words of Don Juan, the



Yaqui shaman, who calls death the only wise advisor that we have:

Whenever you feel, as you always do, that everything is going wrong and you're about to be annihilated, turn to your death and ask if this is so. Your death will tell you that you're wrong; that nothing really matters outside of his touch. (Castaneda, 1972: 5)

By awakening me to my mortality, death becomes an ally that pushes me to gain more awareness for my whole self. Death seems to create all kinds of trouble to further my awareness. It teaches me to let go of who I think I am, of my identity and cultural concepts and instead, to follow my altered states to freedom.

### Conclusion

Reviewing and erasing my personal history, and with it some of the toxic individual and cultural conditioning, may be an ongoing liberation process. Growing up in a middle class family in Switzerland, I unconsciously associated with their values. Achieving and striving for outer success and material possessions created an inner standard that at times tyrannizes me. While I think it is important to respect the need to reach out for the goals the culture provides, it has become equally important for me to follow my total nature and embrace that which disturbs me, my body feelings, my symptoms and even my sense of failure, all of which have been teachers on my path to freedom and a more creative life. In the mythic battle with the critical tyrant who evaluates success and failure, I am speaking out against inner and outer abuse.

Following nature, or honoring death, teaches me to look beyond conditioning and to overcome the traps of a dualistic perspective of inner and outer, illness and health, success and failure. This reminds me of a Taoist story. When Nan-jung Chu went to visit Lao-tzu to find a solution to his worries, Lao-tzu immediately asked him why he had come with a big crowd of people. Taken by surprise, the man whirled around to see who was there. Of course, there was nobody. The crowd of people that Lao-tzu pointed at was the man's baggage of conventional values, his personal history (Chuang-tzu, 1964).

One goal on the spiritual path is to be a clean whistle, to let life express its songs through us. It is the voice of the glacier man in Mindell's vision quest who tells him that the meaning of human life is to become a channel for the cosmic process (Mindell 1990: 51). The old streetperson is a nature spirit like the wind, the sound of the ocean, a voice ultimately free insofar as he is a reflection of spirit: radiant and happy, welcoming each day.

The body feeling, the symptom, the *I Ching*, the dream and even the near-death experience with its more long-term or mythic dimension seem to conform to an underlying pattern. This pattern creates the process logic that gives coherence to all of my various experiences. If there is a message in my inner work, it is to let go of my attachment to success and instead, shift the focus to my inner life. The advice is to follow my total nature rather than any preconceived ideas about what is right, to grow less attached to mainstream values, to follow the rhythms of nature.

The people in the streets of Zurich helped me with my exploration and led to the discovery of an inner figure who gave me tremendous support in clearing up my history. In reacting to the pressure of adapting to mainstream values, my own personal work can be seen as worldwork. It contributes to freeing me from the tyranny of cultural norms and gives me permission to enjoy my whole, wild and unpredictable self.

One of the most important messages for me is the realization that working on myself alone needs a warrior-like discipline that trusts and follows whatever is happening with curiosity, openness, and love. With a compassionate attitude toward myself I can note and express whatever I am feeling, help all sides to emerge and interact with one another and allow my altered states to guide me. This attitude in itself opens up a direct road to the inner healer and to freedom.

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