

Fear and Primordial Trust

From Becoming an Ego to Becoming Whole

Monika Renz

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Chapter 3

On the threshold (Stage A of conscious development during transition)

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On the threshold (Stage A of conscious development during transition)

Abstract

How does eternity begin to move? Through a big bang, by sheer coincidence, or by an act of creation? How the ego and ego-bound consciousness came about and continue to come about remains a mystery. I assume that *a force inherent in the Whole* is at work behind all becoming. Becoming an ego involves leaving the non-dual world. On the threshold, when any dynamics are initiated, we gain some sense of the non-dual world that we are leaving behind (e.g., paradise). On the threshold lie our deepest *personal* experiences (e.g., being in order, being at peace, being utterly and completely happy). Primordial trust is rooted in experiencing a state outside the ego and beyond fear. In a spiritual perspective, we are all part of and connected with the Whole. No one is without primordial trust. I illustrate such deep sensations and experiences with two examples from clinical practice. However, the sensations and experiences on the threshold also include longing for what we have lost. This chapter also considers the phylogenetic perspective and mentions symbols, experiences of music, and images of God/the divine that are typical of threshold experiences.

3.1 Initiating the dynamics

How does eternity begin to move? What initiates what? How is a process set in motion? Through a big bang, by accident, by sheer coincidence, by an act of creation, or simply by procreation?

How the ego and ego-bound consciousness come about and continue to come about remains a mystery. One Indian myth says that the god Shiva appeared as Nataraja (“lord of dance”) and sent a pulsating sound (!) through inanimate matter, thus bringing it to life. He both created and destroyed the world through his dancing, only to re-create it (Spintge & Droh, 1992, p. 3). In this book, I assume that *a force inherent in the Whole* is at work behind all becoming. We can experience this force not only as a life impulse that comes from within, as a motivation that urges toward individual life, but also as a force that irrupts from the outside. It is *dynamis* (Greek), energy. Thus, inside and outside seem to be united.

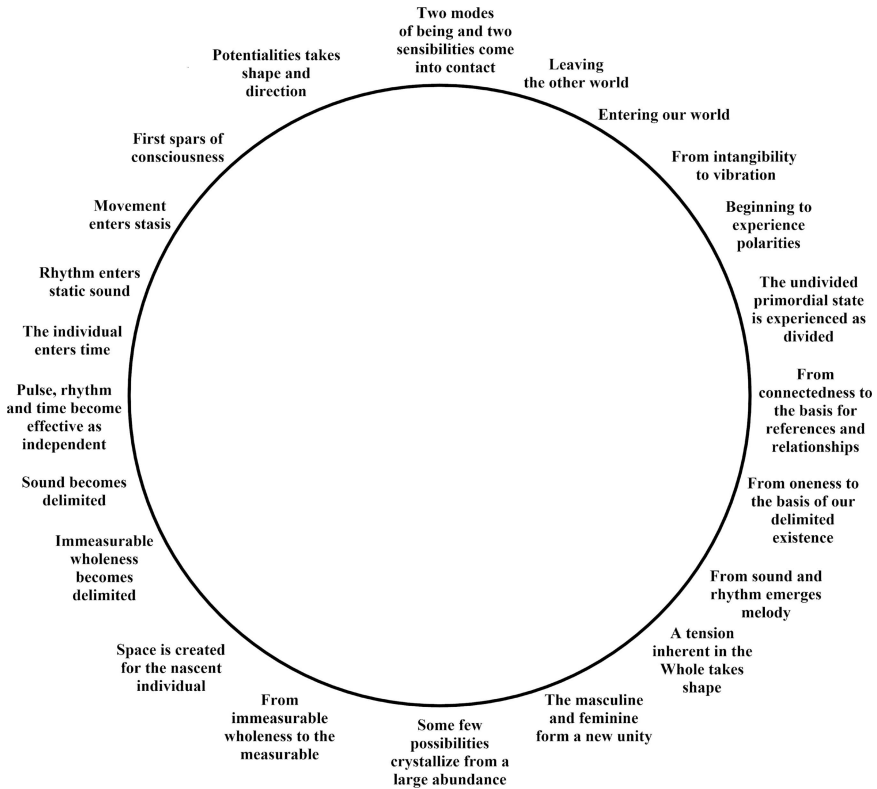


Figure 3.1 Dynamics of Roundness

In outermost dream images, this force is sometimes glimpsed for a few seconds, for instance, as a breath, a flash of lightning, a ray of light, as falling tongues of fire, or as a process-inducing snake. One man saw a fire snake in a dream. The following morning, he knew instantly what he needed to do that day and was bubbling with energy. The primordial force is sometimes heard like “a shot,” “a voice,” or a “primordial word.” Today’s dream images even choose technological motifs, such as an ultra-fast red subway train.

One of my patients dreamed that a high-speed elevator was propelling her upward in the world’s tallest skyscraper and through its roof into space. The force inherent in the Whole manifested itself in this dream in the lightning speed, whose immediate impact “provides a new lease on life,” as well as in the motif of larger-than-life dimensions (tallest skyscraper). We are most likely to recognize this force or spirit in terms of its effect: all of a sudden, something has started becoming. Energy becomes kinetic. Something completely new is

triggered. All of a sudden, something makes sense. The invigorating and inspiring have broken into life, unconditionally.

We are unable to fathom how, at the beginning of a new life, something individual (“our very own”) comes into being. Nor are we able to grasp how outer impulses connect with inner events. This is precisely why we need symbols, images, and metaphors to approach the individual aspects of this mystery. As the chart below suggests, I understand the incomprehensible beginning of new life as a *dynamics of roundness* (Figure 3.1).

This representation does not claim to be exhaustive. The aspects juxtaposed here, and which I consider one after the other, may occur simultaneously. Various aspects are mutually dependent. Hence, we will never know what came first (as with the chicken and the egg). The dynamics of roundness are self-contained and may be depicted as a uroboros—as a snake biting its own tail. In the image of the uroboros, forces later appearing separately are still undivided. The uroboros, therefore, is not only represented as a snake, but occasionally also as one or two dragons, as one or even as two long-necked birds (see Herder *Lexikon Symbole*, 1978). The uroboros is a symbol of infinity, of eternal return, of the descent of the spirit into the physical world and its return. According to Neumann (2015), it is the symbol of the initial psychic state.

And yet, the dynamics of roundness not only thematize self-containment, but also opening. Time and the future start becoming. An urge toward life that is inherent in all development begins to take effect. Is it a masculine spiritual force? One of my assumptions is that feminine and masculine primordial forces are at work from the very beginning, even if the latter at first remain invisible, as they seem to be contained in the feminine.

Finally, the image of a dynamics of roundness suggests that the beginning of individuality (“our very own”) amounts to complete transformation. As if the path, symbolically speaking, leads through seven gates or themes, which separate the underworld from the upper world. The Sumerian myth of Inanna and Ereshkigal (section 1.5) speaks of seven gates or portals (Brinton Perera, 1981). The number Seven is not chosen by coincidence. Neumann (2015) speaks of seven aspects or manifestations of the Great Mother (German: Great Feminine) and the corresponding ancient ideas of the underworld. The number Seven (or 21) refers to matriarchal lunar mythology (the underworld of Osiris has seven halls; in the Ishtar text the number Seven is multiplied). The number Twelve, on the other hand, characterizes the later, patriarchal mythology of the sun, where everyday consciousness is assigned to the masculine (Neumann, 2015). Seven gates or seven manifestations must be regarded at least as seven aspects of the same event, here of the nascent transition. Among others, Seven is the number of fullness, perfection, and completeness. Seven gates separating the upper and lower world, ego-bound consciousness and non-dual being, suggest that at this boundary we are subject to “sevenfold = total transformation,” that is, to a dynamics of roundness. Roundness means that everything begins simultaneously and is undivided. We

are only ever able to grasp this when one aspect follows the other. Round, yet dynamic, because something of the eternal Whole begins to become itself, and begins to live. Roundness now becomes linear. Time begins to take effect. We may therefore consider development to be a continuous process. What is triggered in the origin begins to develop.

3.2 Vanishing non-duality

Every beginning is also a farewell. Non-duality dissipates with the first sparks of ego-bound sensation and nascent self-awareness. As soon as individuality (“our very own”) constellates itself, it is as if the door to the Whole closes. The Whole is no longer whole whenever rudiments of the ego appear and whenever experience differentiates, however slightly. Eternal being ends as soon as our own life, our path into temporality, begins in deepest unconsciousness. On the one hand, the rudimentary ego makes experiencing (the Whole) possible for the first time, while on the other it makes the Whole become unbearable.

We first enter the liminal sphere when we start becoming conscious,¹ ontogenetically mostly in the mother’s womb. On the threshold, the force of the Whole, or at least part of it, flows into us and becomes effective. Bidding farewell, we take a notion of absolute undividedness with us into our own future. What was once a state now becomes experience, even if deeply unconsciously. Then, as in Mirjam’s experience of paradise (chapter 1), part of disappearing non-duality is simply “there,” as the content of our oldest, deeply unconscious psychic layer (on the experience of wholeness A, see Table, section 1.9).

Memory traces from such an outermost liminal sphere later manifest themselves in dreams, bodily sensations (e.g., hot and cold), and symbols (section 3.4).

3.3 Mr Fehr: “I looked across the threshold—and many of my fears have since gone”

Mr Fehr spent a longer period in hospital for acute leukemia and to receive the required high-dose chemotherapy. One night, he had a dream whose effect resembled a near-death experience. He saw death as a threshold and behind it a wonderfully blue, sacred space. Nobody knew about the dream. Next morning, the nurses observed a strange thoughtfulness. But the doctor sounded the alarm, as Mr Fehr’s resting heart rate had dropped below the tolerance limit for no apparent reason. He needed an emergency examination (heart echo). Over the course of the day, his heart rate normalized, and Mr Fehr wished to speak to me. He wanted to understand his experience:

There was a strange threshold, which seemed to consist of ethereal air. I knew the threshold was death. At first, I only looked at it and felt as if I

were being pursued by all sorts of enemies. All my tormentors passed by again and struck me. All of a sudden, the threshold lowered, and I came into a wonderful sacred space. Amid its blue atmosphere stood a peculiar light. I fell silent, awe-struck, and looked toward this centre. The torment was over. Only this light mattered now. More and more, it manifested itself as a throne-like chair. I knew—without seeing anything—that this was the throne of God. God had called me to Himself. He told me that I had done well. Not a bad judgment. On the contrary, it was unspeakably beautiful, true. I knew immediately that I did not need to fear death. With that, I was already behind the threshold again and awoke.

Mr Fehr was so moved when he told me this that he cried. Would we ever understand this? I encouraged him to internalize his experience, to write it down, or to paint it. The liminal experience took effect: Mr Fehr hardly ever experienced any more fears, and certainly not of death. This anxious man, who was easily frightened, now emanated calmness and serenity. He did not respond well to high-dose chemotherapy, leaving him only a few months to live. He went home, where he was also free from his fears and compulsions. He lived the final stretch of his life consciously. He enjoyed eating, cycling, playing music, painting, and had meaningful conversations with his adult children. “I have been given the opportunity to be a father to them once again, and to tell them about life and death,” he remarked.

3.4 Psychic images and symbols of non-dualism, its disappearance, and the dynamics of roundness

The transitional stage has its specific images and symbols. Through these, the human and collective unconscious seeks to express the incomprehensible and indescribable in images, and thus also in words. These images address both the wonderful primordial state and often also the impulse of bidding this state farewell. Below are various recurring themes, as well as particularly impressive patient statements, that may help us understand our own dreams and visions.

- A *garden* with trees and fruit. An abundance of possibilities and delicacies. We may take as much as we wish, because no “having” exists here yet. What matters most is the atmosphere: it is peaceful, even sweet. It makes the garden a *paradise*. Creatures *are* simple.—*Farewell*: the fruits, especially the apples, tempt us to take a bite, which also announces our entry into (new) life. Also present is the symbol of the snake (see section 6.9) as the life force that shoots out of the dark earth.
- A *freshly made bed* in the remotest corner of a castle, in which one descends into deep sleep.² Timelessness!—*Farewell*: all of a sudden, a

clock strikes. It is just before 12, the hundred years are over. Time begins to take effect.

- Pure, undefined, shapeless *color*. Colors may also “lie waste,” so to speak. Frequent ones include blue, violet/purple, yellow, golden, silver, sometimes red or eggshell white. But a black light or a red force field may also appear. Violet is sometimes associated with a sacred, almost forbidden atmosphere. We are often impressed by the intensity of a particular color, for instance, “an incredibly bright, indescribable silver” or “a deep blue resembling the eternal cosmos.” Or: “The atmosphere is blue; blue as an aura shining in the darkness. The atmosphere surrounding the globe is blue, and so, too, is the candlelight, the entire atmosphere.” Or: “A blue altar surrounded by ethereal light.” This kind of blue (sometimes also violet) stands for the sacred, and triggers a “sacred timidity.” “A concentrated red” might represent energy: a potential of unshaped possibilities still waiting to be called upon in non-dualism.—*Farewell*: color transitions (a dormant violet is suddenly covered by spring green) and emerging polarities (yellow versus black, light versus dark). Ah, green: “A green apple falls into the picture.” Yet also: “The concentrated red starts gushing like a fountain.” “In the midst of the calm blue, it begins to flow.”
- *Extraordinary experiences of light or sound*. The light that is often described in near-death experiences. A ball of light. The image of a sea of lights replaces our sense of inner chaos, “as if the brain had split into 1,000 *sparks of light*.” A ladder of light or sound as a connection between heaven and earth (see Jacob’s ladder to heaven, Genesis 28:12–13). Light may also be sound, the sea of light a *static sound*. This refers to an unreal sound, as it were, which neither swells nor diminishes. Potential energy! Static sound, as yet unmoved by rhythm, is instead an unmoving and sounding mass of air. Static sound waves. Unexpanding vibrations. Under certain circumstances, we become the vibrations of a particular sound.—*Farewell*: Movement and rhythm are perceived. For instance, light begins to spray, optical flashes or illuminated snakes appear in the sea of light, or sound begins to swell and diminish. We feel the desire to move.
- *Spherical events*. “Drifting clouds that are nothing but static air.” “Being consisting of nothing but small particles of water or light.” We feel weightless, spherical. Rainbows appear in slow motion or our body dissolves. Movement can stand still.—*Farewell*: Movement or flowing sets in.
- In dreams, we see the *primordial order* as a wonderful (meaningful) order of stars, as a mosaic, as a mandala, as a labyrinth in a sacred space, as interwoven mantras. Behind the chaos, we suspect a profound order (ice crystals, flower petals, etc.) (chaos theory now begins to make sense). This experience, as well as the image of the ladder to heaven, is often triggered

by monochord sounds. Characteristically, the monochord enables us to hear overtones, which correspond to the same numerical proportions as planetary distances and body proportions.—*Farewell*: Something moves, and might turn into restlessness or chaos.

- Images of *perfect, good being*, also of as yet unopened *round being*. The eternal roundness to which everything belongs. “Roundness” may be either a feeling or an image in our imagination. Like the uroboric snake, which bites its own tail and thus remains round. Sometimes square rooms are round or persons spherical. A state of being, in which *opposites* (above and below, floor and ceiling, right and left, back and forth) have *dissolved*.—*Farewell*: roundness opens up; before and after, causality and normal physical boundaries, exist once again.
- *The serenity of deep peace*. Everything stands still, is contained in the existing order. Everything rests: matter, stone, sound. Heaviness and lightness are united.—The *farewell* manifests itself in various ways: in peace suddenly becoming uncanny or too sacred, in a wonderful quality “losing itself,” in sounds beginning to live, or in the stone beginning to breathe.
- *A warmth and softness* that simply are; physical well-being. Comatose patients are often carried by inner warmth and seem to be warmed by divine light also in the cool atmosphere of the intensive care unit (!). Even in deepest winter, some dying persons feel happiest naked. They are warm.—*Farewell*: as soon as the coma subsides, cold sets in (again).

These themes and statements point indirectly to the dynamics of roundness and its symbols. Taken together, they touch on seen forces and movements (e.g., lightning, bite, shot, fountain, or snake; see section 3.1). They also imply emerging limitation, difference (several colors), the earth’s gravity, and coldness. They concern vitality, but also our everyday laws of perception and consciousness. It is obvious that something numinous inheres in all of these images and body sensations. And yet, this is seldom immediately evident to dreamers. The narrative is quite simply foreign to us. We are even more astonished when the numinous addresses us directly.

3.5 Images of God for non-dualism and the dynamics of roundness

Deep psychic images such as those above are always also *images of God*, while such dreams are *religious experiences*. Sometimes, we are dealing with statements about a *wonderful state of being* and about a *specific quality of the divine*. Sometimes, the pain of disappearance is addressed. Then, however, flashes of light illumine the mysterious events, when being blends into becoming. This is what I call the dynamics of roundness.

The following statements, from biblical and apocryphal texts, describe the *state of being*:

- Silence: “For God alone my soul waits in silence” (Psalm 62). Death as sleep (Lazarus, John 11:11–13).
- Primordial order: “Look towards heaven and count the stars” (Genesis 15:5). “Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place” (Job 38:12).
- Truth: God as the ultimate point of reference, for truth (John 7:14–30) and as inherent law. Alpha and Omega.
- Fullness: God as life in abundance (John 10:10). The wedding to which we are all invited.
- Kingdom: The state of consciousness of an unfathomable unity that precedes any duality (Gospel of Thomas, Saying 22). Following the mystic Jakob Böhme, van Ruysbeek and Messing (1993) call the Kingdom the “ground without a ground” (*Ungrund*). This encompasses all and nothing, the ground without a ground, and the ground of all beings (p. 19).
- Jesus’s unitary reality with the Father (John 14:9–10; John 1:1–2), inasmuch as Being or the Wholly Other is emphasized (in contrast to the aspect of dual unity and security; see section 4.7).
- Jesus’s message about the Kingdom (Basileia) and its completely different non-dual workings and qualities of being.

The following formulations, from creation myths or prophetic visions, help us imagine and grasp the *dynamics of roundness*:

- On separation: “Let there be light...”; “Water shall part from land, (...) top from bottom.”
- Images of procreation, conception, fertilization, incubation under circumstances that do not obey the laws of causality (e.g., overshadowed by the Holy Spirit).
- As energetic events: “big bang,” dancing the world into being, *creatio continua* (Augustine), being “called” to life.
- As a spiritual act: “And the Word became flesh” (John 1:14), as the original word also in Isaiah 43:1 (“I have redeemed you; I have called you by name”).

3.6 Experiences of music on the threshold: beyond time and individuality

Which musical experiences lead us to the border to non-duality? In particular *experiences of sound*. In deep relaxation, we are able to let ourselves be touched so profoundly by sounds that our sense of containment and delimitation dissolves. Sounds then seem to be eternal, simple, and spherical. They are so intense and yet so calm that they are “neither full nor empty.” We no longer feel afraid, even if this experience of sound only occurs after we have endured extreme or intense fear. Sounds then feel like paradise,

even if they are chaotic from an objective standpoint: at this outermost threshold of consciousness, beyond time and ego, the interweaving, comingling, and even muddling of sounds is pleasant, peaceful, and spherical. We feel in *harmony* with music. Some people literally even feel that the world is also sound. Time and rhythm, even if objectively present, are no longer felt. In extreme cases, some people can neither count nor beat rhythms, but experience them instead as qualities: seven-beat rhythms (representing the matriarchal) arouse different feelings and images than 12-beat rhythms (representing the patriarchal order). We are able to experience eternity, momentarily, precisely because time seems to be switched off. Melodies and certain instruments, like other musical details, are also unimportant; everything is immersed in the basic sound of being.

The experience of this outermost border is called *sound – space – being – wholeness – non-duality*. In itself, it is bound neither to volume nor to silence, because in this state we have let go deep down. We perceive volume as intensity, silence as a space that is given to us. No commotion or ego-bound values exist here. So close to the Wholly Other, nothing is able to wrench us from peace and being.

Which instruments can trigger sensitivities beyond time and ego via music-assisted relaxation? They include the monochord, standing bells, sometimes a softly sounded gong, the didgeridoo, and electronically produced, seemingly spherical sounds. Sometimes, shamanic rituals involving drum music, rattling music, or special songs also lead into such depths (Ebersoll, 1985; Gerber, 1980, p. 34; Simon, 1983). These instruments and songs are salubrious because they reconnect us with our depths (non-dual reality A, wholesome containment B; see chapter 4).

G.K. Loos (1986) has linked the monochord to the first phase of pregnancy; the drum to the second phase, in which the mother's heartbeat is perceived; and the gong to the third and last phase, which also includes an unpleasant shift (oral information). The standing bell takes us into transpersonal spheres (Strobel, 1988). My observations tend to confirm this classification. Nevertheless, I find a thematic perspective more obvious than a temporal one: we experience transition individually, as we do periods of time, such as losing an inner paradise.

If music is going to guide us into dimensions beyond time and ego, it must be continuous, even monochromatic. It is precisely when it extends beyond the personal sphere that music grants us intuitions of something greater, something eternal. Therapists must also be able to engage with a greater Whole when they play music. Comfortingly, music has no necessary effect and therefore does not compare with medication or drugs. What is decisive, however, is our perception as listeners, as well as what lies deep "inside" us. If we are permeable, we might even experience birds chirping in the forest, the silence of a church or a meditation room, or immersion in deep sleep as all-embracing music.

3.7 Primordial trust, primordial intuitions of happiness

On the threshold, emotions become possible for the first time. We are now able to feel—deeply unconsciously—what simply *was* before. The permission to be, which is granted to us in the Whole, becomes our own emotional reality. Our initial participation in the Whole becomes our own internalized primordial trust. In essence, we now experience being inside the primordial order as being in order ourselves. Good and evil are not opposed in this utmost experience of the Whole because we do not differentiate at this stage of development. Consequently, we associate this primordial experience with feeling totally serene, wonderful, pleasant, and good. We are “neither related nor unrelated,” which is synonymous with “both related and unrelated.” Since we recognize no human counterpart, this stage is not yet about a personal quality of relationship and relatedness. The ego, which would be able to enter into a relationship, does not yet exist or no longer exists. And yet, existence is neither accidental nor chaotic. It is instead characterized by relatedness—perhaps of being related to an order that inheres in the Whole. We sense this order, which leaves behind a feeling of primordial trust: we are embedded in the threads of fate, and everything simply *is*. The order of the Whole also includes the meaning of our own becoming. It is in these depths that our sense of being meaningful and essential lies rooted.

Feeling at one with this deepest psychic layer opens up the order of nature and things, like Golden Mary in the folktale of Mother Hulda (Grimm & Grimm, 1884). We now understand the language of bread, apples, and animals. At one with ourselves, we are also at one with the Whole, the world, and our fellow creatures. We are satiated, nourished, happy, and active from within ourselves, because we are connected with the Whole. The great words that emerge from this stage of gaining consciousness are *order*, *peaceful atmosphere*, and *self-evident being*. Here, moreover, arise intuitions of our own place, and of our own meaning. Everything in the Whole has its task. And yet, the sheer premonition, that this happiness will disappear, and thus has already disappeared, is itself also painful. At the threshold, time bids farewell to eternity. In its place emerge first polarities and the two qualities of being (non-dual and ego-bound).

Premonitions of happiness are gifts from the gods that accompany us throughout our life. That formerly blissful state seems everlasting, and yet has long passed. Correspondingly, flashes of light from this primordial experience suddenly appear. Although incomprehensible and sometimes almost unreasonable, they are inner sources of contentment, confidence, and *joie de vivre*; inner experiences of “being at one with ourselves and with what is essential.” Unexpectedly, we simply feel good, beautiful, alright (“in order”). Laughter and crying are often closely related in therapy. Fleeting happiness, lasting a few seconds. Perhaps a moment of intense hope amid extreme tribulations. Our basic psychic states seldom have a causal

explanation. They are not produced. They *are*. Premonitions of happiness emerge amid certainties like:

- Feeling safe and secure.
- Gratitude.
- Holding the thread of our own development (figuratively speaking, the thread of the divine weaver).
- Being contained in a cosmic order and—in spite of our mistakes—being alright (German *in Ordnung sein*); being beautiful.
- Becoming whole and healed in spite of all splitting; being irrepressible in spite of all inner blemishes.
- Being grounded: feeling solid ground beneath us; existing for good reasons, that is, being neither accidental nor random.
- Being a precious part of the Whole; fulfilling an important task, however small, for the Whole.
- Simply being allowed to “be,” without having to legitimate our right to exist or having to earn that right based on achievement.
- Being connected to the deep forces; feeling a zest for life in spite of tribulations.
- Having confidence amid dying and becoming; feeling that nothing essential can be lost.
- Intuiting a great order, and thus meaning, amid apparent futility.

Dying persons once again come to this outermost threshold. Their final states compare with those mentioned above, and yet are terminal and often also have a transfigured or redeemed aspect: at some point, and time and again, the time of suffering, confusion, and fears is over (see “post-transition”; Renz, 2015). Many dying persons signal peace, being, celebration, and belonging. Moreover, they react impressively to a dignity that is either experienced inwardly or expressed by us. Others are simply serene.

We may have primordial intuitions of happiness also in the midst of life. Light comes into darkness in many ways: a sunny day, a beautiful natural landscape, a child’s laughter, an impressive dream, or when we look up into a wonderful treetop. Such intuitions come from within and cannot be conveyed by well-intended words or pious sayings. Our own trust and confidence are most likely to grant those of us seeking healing the space in which our own certainties may shine. During therapy, our sincere opinion, uttered at the right moment and from (our own) great depths, can work “miracles.”

Primordial intuitions of happiness are deeply religious, since they originate in that dimension toward which all *religio* strives: participation in God/in the Whole. Sometimes profound answers break into consciousness through dreams or during creative work. Then, the ego is moved, seized, shaken. Here are three dreams:

I am looking into a large room that is suffused in intense blue light. I feel the presence of a woman, who might be a priestess. The light is particularly bright in the middle of the room. It falls on a square. I sense my task: I must place a shrine that is sacred to me back where it belongs: in the middle of this room. I do so. Then, I step back a little and feel: It—everything—is good the way it is. An unspeakably blissful, peaceful atmosphere emanates from this room.

I am standing on a large, round church square. Large crowds have gathered for a penitential service that is dedicated to reversing environmental destruction. The organist is indisposed, and so there is no music. Should I, or indeed must I, perform this task in his place? A priest, whom I perceive merely as a shadow, tells me up on the gallery: “Do what you can do deep down, and be who you are deep inside yourself.” I know that I have been able to do this since my childhood, and so I do it. All of us take on those tasks of which we are capable. One woman decorates the square with flowers, another listens, everyone does exactly what they are able to. This creates a serene atmosphere, one in which those present simply are. The service—despite being about a hopeless matter—concludes with an Easter song: a sign of a new beginning.

I see Jesus. He has neither a face nor hands nor feet. He simply “is.” I put my head in his lap, where I am also safe and secure in my imminent death.

3.8 We are born with the gifts of wholeness

Primordial intuitions of happiness resemble the godparent gifts of the Whole. These gifts are the theme of the fairy tale about “Sleeping Beauty” (Grimm & Grimm, 1884).³ It is the story of several wise women who bestowed their blessings upon the king’s child. They wish that the child possesses virtue, beauty, and wealth, and that every other imaginable wish be fulfilled. Only one fairy godmother was not invited and therefore wished the child’s death. Who are these wise women?

Marie Louise von Franz (1993, pp. 28–29) has observed that the theme of the forgotten fairy or godmother is that of the forgotten goddess. The Swiss-German word for godparent (*Gotte, Götti*) also suggests this. Godparents have a protective function and assume responsibility if a child’s parents are unable to perform their duties, for whatever reason. This is how we might imagine the “godparent gifts of the Whole.” They include what parents are unable to give their children—be it primordial trust, the atmosphere of simple goodness, or a mission in life.

And yet, what becomes the child’s fateful predicament, that which causes its death, is also laid in its cradle. What has no place in the parental (patriarchal) order of 12, yet belongs to the Whole, is expressed in the

thirteenth fairy's curse. So, too, does what an ego-bound perspective can never accept: for instance, spinning or dying. In the moment of baptism—which may mean the transition from the nameless and incomprehensible to the nameable and recognizable—the thirteenth fairy is eliminated. It resists integration into the consciousness of the 12. The number 12 is associated with solar consciousness, 13 with lunar consciousness. The latter, as it were, is the incomprehensible, the excessive, the ego-transcending, and perhaps also the non-dual. This becomes evil, or at least ambivalent, through its differentiation into opposites and through the polarity that emerges during transition. Thirteen stands for the tabooed and uninvited. When the time is ripe (in the fairy tale, this is the fifteenth year of life), this force initiates development and once again leads the ego out of its limited, ego-bound thinking. The thirteenth drives us toward liminal experiences. In spite of promising death, it does not spell the absolute end, merely the relativization of ego-boundness. Against the background of non-dual primordial unity, there is no death. In “Sleeping Beauty,” the image of such a liminal experience, into timelessness, is a deep sleep that will last a hundred years.

Besides primordial premonitions of happiness and suffering, the legacy of the outermost liminal sphere includes an almost lost desire. Something inside us still yearns incessantly for non-dual existence. Many people rediscover their very own visions and hopes during therapy. Our core, which has never completely ceased believing, now comes to bear. It becomes conscious and even takes concrete shape.

Godparent gifts—the gifts of the Whole—form an entirety. Not only welcome traits are “good” gifts. Our very own secret and mission also lie in the Whole. We must therefore ask ourselves, time and again: What wishes to be realized, loved, or thrown overboard by me, or be induced in others? These reflections remind me of therapy sessions with desperate young people and social outcasts. Their existence, too, has its backgrounds and meaning. Accepting the Whole as the ultimate reality means believing that it includes all of us. It also means that gifts and graces, blows of fate and burdens, are given to us as divine godparent gifts.

3.9 Bettina (I): breaking through into confidence

Bettina, a young adult woman with learning disabilities, came to have therapy with me. I helped her walk a (figurative) tightrope, back to that point where, after many attempts and great anxiety, she touched “bottom” and found primordial trust. In the course of this book, I will keep returning to Bettina's impressive experiences during therapy. She repeatedly faced the abysses of her life, and how she had become what she was. Her inner experiences and archetypal images, which she described very aptly, are astonishing and help us understand, on a symbolic level, what is otherwise barely rationalizable.

Bettina came to music therapy with a severe learning disability. At first, she was unable to follow conversations, nor could she carry out simple instructions (e.g., “bring me that pencil”). She taught me to completely trust her inner forces and inner guides. Her preferences, body signals, and blocks determined her path. She enjoyed dancing from the first session. Her movements were so differentiated that I soon realized that her learning disability involved a tremendous fear of daring to live. Her initially distraught or shy facial expression seemed to change when she was playing music: then, she was present and approachable.

Bettina’s birth had been difficult. Her mother’s waters had broken far too early. Soon after birth, divergent developments became evident. At the age of six, Bettina had music therapy for the first time. As a 17-year-old she suffered from anorexia. Her therapy with me focused on overcoming her learning disability and on her desire to become a strong woman. She also developed a new sensitivity for her body. Musical vibrations enabled her to closely experience herself and her body:

“Now I am far away from myself.” She felt, physically, that these were two different states: one dull and learning-impaired; the other alert, yet also easily scared. The gong became her strong woman’s instrument, that part of her that “never had learning difficulties.”

For hours she sought to make contact with this strong being. She approached the gong, sensed her fear, and withdrew again. She gave her fear many names: the fear of not being alright, the fear of closeness, the fear of going to pieces, or of being at fault for her learning disability.

Bettina had a boyfriend at the time. He brought joy into her life, but also an omnipresent fear that she was pregnant. She should probably have been reassured a hundred times an hour that this was impossible: she had recently had a three-month contraceptive injection and had not slept with her boyfriend. I had to stay out of this game. Yet why did Bettina have *this* fear? And why so psychotically? I sensed a problem with her deepest possible boundary. Had her boundaries been severely violated as a little child? Or had her intrauterine distress and traumatic birth made it impossible for her to establish stable boundaries and feel protected by them? Bettina did not even know what trust was, neither in her doctor, nor in my verbal assurances, nor in anyone else.—Below are some excerpts from Bettina’s therapy:

In one session, I really let her be afraid and encouraged her to progress in her imagination:

“Imagine you were pregnant now. How does that feel? What is happening?” She said, falteringly: “Wet, cold... but now, suddenly, no longer wet. The baby in the belly feels uncomfortable.” Bettina interrupted herself, rolled around on the floor and added: “Now it keeps

hitting (pounding?). I am being beaten up.” She trembled, sneezed, and bent over double. She was sweating, but continued: “I’m afraid, I’m going to pieces. The baby in me is going to pieces. Everything seems to be dead.” When I told her that she was talking about herself, and about a baby, she realized: “I am also the baby.”

Bettina’s state worsened. She oscillated between suicidality and psychosis. She almost became unbearable for her surroundings. Even admission to a psychiatric hospital was considered. Although I felt suspended between fear and trust, I decided in favor of the future. But what was I hoping for?

Can primordial fear become primordial trust?

Bettina began the next session with body awareness exercises. Could she feel herself? Her stomach hurt, she said. “So am I pregnant after all?” Was she pregnant with herself? A little later: “Today I have no learning disability. I don’t feel numb. I’m afraid.” She hinted at the two different states and captured them in words:

- a. “A learning disability is when one is empty and feels nothing. Then one feels better.”
- b. “When the learning disability disappears, one feels afraid.”
- c. All of a sudden, I said: “There are not only two states, there are three. The third one is called: Trust is greater than fear.”

Bettina sat up and listened carefully. What did trust mean in her life? She said: “Trusting that what others are saying is true.” Cautiously, she added: “Trusting that I am loved.” I asked Bettina to locate her answers in her body. Where did she begin to feel trust? Bettina: “It’s filled up, closed; the pain is here—in my stomach.” “What color is your trust? Do you see anything inside you?” Bettina saw a yellow surface in front of her, far away, yet buried beneath a huge black mass of fear. She tried to draw closer, but could not. In between lay a wall, a “grey abdominal wall”(!) Bettina had another panic attack, accompanied by shivering, disgust, and nausea.

I am sitting behind Bettina touching her back (the place of reconnection). She describes what she sees: “The yellow trust is now approaching.” But the next panic attack follows and the “grey abdominal wall” reappeared. I work round the difficulty: “For me there is something like a rear umbilical cord in the back. It leads to something bigger, and also to life.” Bettina’s back muscles start loosening beneath my hands.

Silence. I ask: “Where are you now?” She replies: “I have gone through the wall and see the dear Lord.” “What does he look like?” “He is a man with a beard. Now I am in a garden with trees, humming insects, and many flowers. It is peaceful here.” I ask if anything is particularly important. “Yes, two trees; and the dear Lord is somehow in the air.”—Bettina cries. She is gasping for breath again and is afraid—as if she had no space. She sees the garden again: “I

feel as if I were in paradise with Adam and Eve..." (she stammers) "... has she—have I—bitten the apple?"

She cries even harder: "Since that moment everything is suddenly broken—rotten—learning disabilities—fear everywhere." Bettina wants to lie down and put up her legs. More convulsion. "Just let it happen," I encourage her and ask: "What do you see now?" "Still the apple, just the apple." More convulsion. It takes a while until she continues: "I can't, I can't bite the apple." Silence. I ask: "Would you like to know what the apple means to me?" "Yes." "It means: I want to live." Bettina: "My apple is also as green as spring." I continue: "If you bite it, it means: I want to live." Bettina is blocked. I begin stroking her feet. She sees a small golden snake coming out of the apple and curling up. She oscillates between fear, pain, and fascination. She does not understand, and yet she does: "*The snake wants me to fight and be a strong woman.*" We let things settle and sound the gong together.

I was also overwhelmed by this session (which lasted an hour and a half). It gave Bettina and me insight into her paradise and into the life force within the symbolism of the apple and the snake. Still, I was worried whether Bettina could cope with such breakthroughs. The next day, her carers told me that she had slept better and was now more present and calmer.

3.10 We do not always manage to bid farewell to non-dualism

The apple of life is sour, and reality is harsh, not only for Bettina. She is not alone in longing for the Wholly Other, for a non-dual state. The fact that entering this world also means bidding farewell to our first home helps to explain, in a new way, that not all of us really find our way into life. Some leave the world already in the womb, others after birth, unexpectedly, and yet others are constantly longing for it as adults (see also my interpretation of regression and depression, sections 1.5, section 1.6, 7.4).

When children return to their former home, we speak of early infant death. Arno Gruen (1987) has interpreted this as the child's "premature farewell." Infant death, according to Gruen, results from the interaction of neurophysiological, psychological, and social factors. Parental behavior, for instance, unperceived anger, splitting-off tendencies, unconsciously rejecting the child: all of these forces may make a child die suddenly. Parents who have suffered such a loss have refuted this theory, because it risks blaming parents. The model that I am presenting in this book offers a similar, yet different explanation to Gruen's: not so much arriving in this world may become the problem as bidding farewell to the non-dual world. While environmental circumstances may complicate matters, this step is also difficult *in itself*. As we know, some of us find farewells more difficult than others. This is particularly true for the subject of this book: bidding farewell to the primordial unity in non-duality.

Notes

- 1 See also the formulation “began to think” in the Indian creation myth, as explained in section 1.3
- 2 See “The Water of Life” (Grimm & Grimm, 1884), “Sleeping Beauty” (Grimm & Grimm, 1884), and the legend of the Holy Grail (Jung & von Franz, 1998, p. 70).
- 3 See also the Slavic fairy tale “The three golden hairs of the old man who knew everything,” as recounted by Sirovatka and Luzik (1977).

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