Bud Harris, Ph.D.

"Bud Harris is a lantern on the path - clear eyed, big hearted, and illuminating"
—Julia Cameron, author, *The Artist's Way*

SACRED SELFISHNESS

A GUIDE TO LIVING A LIFE OF SUBSTANCE

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BY BUD HARRIS

Our Lost Manhood:
How to Reclaim the Deeper Dimensions of Your Masculinity

The Father Quest:
Rediscovering an Elemental Psychic Force

COAUTHORED WITH MASSIMILLA HARRIS

Like Gold Through Fire:
Understanding the Transforming Power of Suffering

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A LIFE OF SUBSTANCE

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This book is dedicated to Massimilla Harris.
Massimilla urged me to teach these ideas, then write them,
and has walked hand in hand with me through the book's
development, as she has lovingly since we first met.

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PREFACE

Our love of life is the motor, the force, the magic that overrides the things we fear—birth pains, growing pains, and loss; the random disappointments and other life difficulties we encounter in our personal journeys. This love is what enables us to persevere, like a footbridge, bringing most of us across to the other side where we experience creativity and joy.

A deep love of life doesn't come to us easily. It grows slowly as we learn to truly understand ourselves, our torrents of emotions, the forces that shaped who we are, the darker destructive sides of our personalities, our denied positive potentials, the knowledge that life is a process and that love and respect must go hand in hand. Self-knowledge brings us the power to live in a balanced, fulfilling way and the capacity to deal honestly, thoughtfully, and lovingly with other people. It enables us to recognize the emotional games we play with each other, to confront reality and to have compassion that is born out of the knowledge of our own torments. Without self-knowledge our notions of love often reflect needy psychological pursuits, idealistic fantasies, or sentimental hopes.

Becoming a person of psychological and spiritual substance is

a result of the committed pursuit of self-knowledge. This quest marks the timeworn path outlined by many of the great philosophers and religious figures of the past and present. In ancient Greece the philosopher Socrates enjoined us to know ourselves. One of the meanings of the word *Buddha* is "to awaken," to awaken our search for consciousness. In the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus informs us "whoever has not known himself knows nothing, but he who has known himself has already understood the depths of all things."

But in our times we have continually tried to banish this most important truth (the reminders and the very significant elaborations on this theme by Freud and his followers notwithstanding). We think we know ourselves and we do not. In spite of our best intentions, our busy, overpressured, overstimulated lives seem to make it practically impossible to find the time to learn to know ourselves. However, it's comforting to realize that we have always needed guides, prophets, teachers, and models to bring us out of our everyday selves. Religion, music, art, philosophy, and finally psychology have often directed us toward self-reflection and examination. Freud, Jung, Adler, Fromm, and other great psychoanalytic thinkers have sought to free us from the emotional shackles of our everyday lives. Jungian psychology in particular emphasizes that self-knowledge brings healing to the bruises we suffer from life's struggles, and will lead to the discovery of a truly satisfying existence. Bringing this quest to life and fruition is the aim of this book.

In the opening pages we'll consider the important aspects of growing into a fully mature person—one who has the capacity to live a life of self-realization, meaning, value, and love. From the context of this framework we'll examine the major issues in our societal character structure that affect, limit, and sometimes destroy our individuality without our knowing it.

What I present next is a program for bringing substance back into our lives. This substance depends upon our ability to learn to truly love ourselves, and it becomes the foundation for stepping onto the path toward our own lives. Living a life of substance is the heart of this book. Once we begin to realize this substance, three important aspects of how it affects our lives need to be explored: where it

may lead in our personal development; the impact it has in our close relationships; and the resulting relationships we will have to our culture. We mold society just as it shapes us, and we have the capacity to help heal the defects in our social consciousness in a dramatic manner.

I believe we are challenged by fate to relearn and renew our greatest values in the context of our threatening and chaotic times. In response to this challenge I hope my exploration will help you develop a clearer understanding of what it means to value and love yourself, to think for yourself, to have a life of your own, and to be able to love others without losing yourself. I also hope it will enable you to find comfort as a member of the human family, and a sense of purpose as you contribute to changing our culture.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is the product of many years of experience and reflection. A special thanks is due to the men, women, and children whom I've been privileged to know and work with in my professional life. I want to assure all of them, who have labored to understand themselves and to grow through life's challenges, that the stories in this book are fictionalized compositions. They have evolved from my thirty-plus years of experience and are typical of real-life situations without being based on the actual experiences of any particular person.

My debt to Gail Godwin is especially keen. She has supported my writing through its ups and downs for years. Julia Cameron deserves special mention as one of the first people to generously affirm my manuscript. I also want to thank Murray Stein for his important support. Susan Leon graciously and at times vigorously challenged me to stretch beyond my limits in almost every sentence that I wrote. From the beginning to the end of my writing process, Susan Gabriel was a treasure as she helped me bring the manuscript together. In addition, Susan Snowden made many valuable contributions as my work evolved.

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INTRODUCTION

So in order to be able to give something, one has to be something, one has to possess, one must consist of gold and not of hunger.
—C. G. Jung

There are two general kinds of selfishness in life. One is sickly, and we often refer to it as *egotism* or *individualism.* Its practitioners are emotionally hungry for power, starved for affirmation, and driven to use and impose on us for self-serving ends. They steal our energy and vitality. Our consumer-driven society fosters *sickly selfishness* because it thrives on teaching us that we always want or need more of some product to feel good about ourselves.

Sacred selfishness is the second kind of selfishness. It means making the commitment to valuing ourselves and our lives enough to pursue the decision to become people of *substance.* Becoming this is the process of attaining what American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson refers to as "character—a reserved force which acts directly by presence, and without means." While Martin Luther King or Mother Teresa may picture an ultimate model of such substance, Emerson carefully points out that it ". . . works with most energy in the smallest companies and in private relationships." Sacred selfishness teaches us to love life, and its practitioners give energy, vitality, and hope to the people around them.

Sacred selfishness causes us to step outside of the everyday

values of economics, busyness, goal-driven days, and pressures of getting life "right." There is nothing new about saying we are running through life like rats in a maze, that we feel like cogs in a machine, or numbers instead of individuals, that our religious institutions are empty and what we truly worship is what we can buy at the mall or buy even cheaper at the factory outlet. What is new is realizing that we can find a path with its own fork that allows us to have it both ways, authentic lives without abandoning the world.

The illusions I had to face and the pain and conflicts of my own life put me on this course. In my early thirties I was successful, yet discovered, like suddenly noticing thunderclouds on a summer day, I was depressed. I thought I had a good life but before I knew it, it seemed to turn dark and threatening. Although I didn't realize it at the time I wasn't alone in this condition, nor would I be alone today. Many people in our society have lives that seem to be working well yet find themselves strangely unhappy or suffering in some similar manner. This book has been inspired by my own struggles and informed by my work as a therapist and analyst for over twenty-five years with people who wanted, as I did, to find more in life than simply adjusting to what one's family or society describes as a "good life."

At age thirty-three I found myself restless, uneasy, and generally dissatisfied with how I was living. Everything around and ahead of me looked boring and lifeless. This feeling that I was somehow missing life had begun during my sophomore year in college when I couldn't decide on a major. The counseling center said my interests hadn't crystallized while my father's concern was that I prepare myself to get a good job. In frustration and despair I drank a great deal. I solved my increasing anxiety by getting married and starting a family. The pressure of these obligations compelled me to finish school, get a job with a major company, buy a house in the suburbs, and, in other words, seek success in a conventional 1950s manner.

But the more successful I became, seeking my reflection in images of nicer clothes, better homes, private schools for my children, and the apparent independence of owning my own business, the more my restlessness and secret fear seemed to increase. What fear? I was terrified by the idea of the rest of my life. Was I simply going to continue fulfilling my obligations for some thirty-odd years and retire—that is if a heart attack or cancer or some other stress-related disease didn't take me first? Was my life to consist of going to work, meetings, church, soccer games, and vacations? Activities I generally enjoyed and sometimes loved, but sensed I would grow to hate as the enjoyment I took from them became choked in the smoke of my increasing dissatisfaction.

By this time in my life it was the late 1960s. Psychotherapy had become "in" and my friends were flocking to it. I, however, had dismissed therapy and analysis. I looked down on the people in it. They were "weak" and I was "strong." I dealt with reality while they mucked around in their feelings. And while I kept myself ignorant of the powers of my unconscious, I steadfastly thought that as an entrepreneur I could create my own reality, shaping my life to my will and vision. I wanted to believe that if my life looked independent and successful, I was independent and successful.

The writings of Freud and Jung had seized my interest in college, but once I had stepped onto the practical path, their ideas faded from my awareness, overtaken by concerns of making money and having a family. The next decade flew by while I was lost in work, obligations, striving for advancement, caring for small children, and starting my own business. Activity—professional, social, and personal—made it easy to forget my former uneasiness, to hide from it, and to hide from the question of what was really driving my life.

On the outside I looked great. I jogged three miles a day and was working toward my black belt in karate. On the inside, well, I wasn't so sure. I thought I should feel great, but slowly began to realize the old uneasiness was gnawing at me again, and my increasing physical activities might be an effort to avoid my inner tension. But I didn't face these emotions nor did I have a clue as to what I was really feeling. I had done too good a job repressing and

denying my emotions for years to be able to simply figure them out. As I have now learned, such feelings do not magically go away. They become a hidden engine driving us into emotional and physical problems. In my case, it was a depression that began devouring my life—until it had brought both my business and my marriage into full-blown crises. My first formal meeting with a therapist soon followed.

This crises-induced meeting began my personal quest, and as this book develops, I will use the phrase *becoming a person of substance* to summarize the characteristics acquired during this quest—my own and those of whom you will read about. In mythology and legends, quest stories begin when something of value has been lost by a person, people, or kingdom. The *Star Wars* movies continue to hold the interest of young and old because they are about the themes of many of our quests. Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia must struggle to reject a political system that places an impersonal claim upon them as they search for maturity. Darth Vader depicts a father who has lost his humanity and Han Solo, a mercenary who learns the values of a hero.

I felt stagnant, impotent, and unauthentic in my depression. Nothing in my life was able to evoke spiritual meaning, passion, and unknown potentials. Entering into a therapist's office marked the transition from an everyday state of mind into an atmosphere where, with someone's help, I could search for my true nature and the source of my energy. I was fortunate he was the kind of therapist who understood that, psychologically, the healing quest I needed was for the self-awareness that leads us into a new state of wholeness, relatedness to life, and a profound experience of being alive emotionally and spiritually. These changes lead to new meanings and to a new spirit of being alive that grows into a state of fruitful completion as we approach death.

The oldest quest stories show the pattern of stepping out of the everyday world, even when we have been successful in it, to begin the journey toward a greater experience of life. In one of history's oldest epics, Gilgamesh, the king of ancient Sumer, leaves his throne and braves the wrath of angry goddesses and nature as he seeks the

secret of eternal life. Inanna, the Sumerian queen of heaven and one of our oldest heroines, likewise leaves her throne to search for wholeness in the underworld. Odysseus struggles through the haunted waters of the Mediterranean in search of home and leaves history with a name for one of our most fundamental journeys—the odyssey. Aeneas flees a burning Troy, deserting his wife, and carrying his father on his back. He begins a journey that betrays love and ends it with the founding of Rome. Our enduring stories remind us that our searches are driven by both disasters and visions. They are lonely and difficult outer quests that are also metaphors for our inner quests. The journeys are intrinsic to human nature—and they are timeless. They are reexperienced in every age and become available to any of us who want more than conventional lives or whose conventional lives fail us.

The religious aspects of the quest frequently appear in the different mystical traditions. The image of Buddha under the Bodhi Tree is one of awakening and a journey toward enlightenment. The Hindu ascetic sitting in deep contemplation symbolizes a similar inner journey. The Magi seeking the Christ child represents the reconciliation of man with the eternal worlds, which the mythologist Joseph Campbell said pours energy into our everyday world. The Hindu and the Christian mystics often call the quest a *search for the Self*, and the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung named it the *process of individuation.*

The quests of the religious mystics and the legendary heroes have many psychological parallels as both seek to renew our spirits and deepen our experiences of being alive. The Quest for the Holy Grail is a legend from the Middle Ages that still has popularity. Its symbolism is straightforward and shows how a place that was once green, fertile, and bountiful has dried up and become brown and withered. The fact that the kingdom has become a wasteland signifies the need for psychological and spiritual renewal. Joseph Campbell

describes the wasteland as a place where people are living unauthentically, living not their lives but the lives imposed on them by society with no courage for seeking to change the situation. In his poem "The Waste Land," T. S. Eliot brings this situation to life in another way and says:

I think we are in rats alley
Where the dead men lost their bones.

The Grail, the vessel that held the blood of Christ, represents the source of our lost personal and spiritual values. The remarkable thing about this search for renewal is how it guides us to realize that it is a *personal* quest. Each knight must begin the journey alone by entering the forest at a place where there is no previous path. Campbell felt the Grail symbolized the spiritual essence that energized an authentic life. Its purpose is to bring flowering and fulfillment to our beings in contrast to the more societal idea that a spiritual life is one that has supernatural virtues imposed upon it.

Like anyone embarking on such a quest, I was faced with the questions: What makes me feel and act as I do? What is my purpose here on Earth? What is my destiny? One of the biggest questions I faced was, How can I have achieved the American Dream and still be unhappy? Yet my fear and depression held firm against this question until the ancient Greek injunction "know thyself" became more than a pious platitude and more than the beginning of wisdom. Beginning to know myself was a lifeline pulling me free from pain, and transforming my desperation into a path toward a more rewarding life.

This book will outline and explain the pathway to individuation, the approach I found the most helpful in learning to know myself. It will include many of the significant mileposts on it that I experienced and that other people I've worked with have discovered. I will share some parts of these others' journeys and my own, to show how we may learn to understand and experience the individuation process—our quest for life and wholeness.

I believe that our need for renewal often reflects the pressures

of society on our spirits and how it has molded the way we see our lives. The Grail legend supports this viewpoint by having the entire kingdom become a wasteland. In other words we are as much a product of the attitudes of our society and cultural heritage as we are of our biological makeup and childhood experiences. While in some cases either one of these forces may have greater effect than the others, both combine to influence us throughout our lives. The emotional unrest and the turmoil I was caught up in at age thirty-three were deeply rooted in the societal attitudes into which I was born. If this weren't the case then I wouldn't have become so depressed when the American Dream of a good job, success, home, and family didn't provide enough meaning for my life. In the following pages we will also take a careful look at how society's attitudes affect our development, our experiences of life, and our values.

In his classic study, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* Joseph Campbell teaches us that there is a timeless symbolic path that pictures the process of growing beyond our current situations. Myths and legends outline the hero's or heroine's journey, which is a metaphor for developing the personal awareness that leads to a more enlightened personality. A personality that has *substance.* The stories that disclose this path show it begins with failure. In their examples we can see that whenever a culture (an interior personal culture as well as an exterior collective one) is collapsing, stagnating, fragmenting, and declining, the mythic hero or heroine is called to leave the conventional wisdom and practices of society to undergo the trials and tribulations of becoming a person of individual *substance.* Once this substance is attained he or she must return to everyday life with new courage, clarity of thought, and a fresh perspective on reality to help revitalize the collective situation.

From the psychological viewpoint this myth is a metaphor for the development of renewed personal consciousness. Which means

we must take strong action to go beyond our naive explanations for our experiences and seek out more substantive thoughts about the potentials and themes in our lives. The knowledge of this mythic pattern was comforting and challenging to me. From it I learned that what I perceived as a failing life could be a strong invitation to renewal, strength, and vitality on a level previously unknown to me. Most journeys begin with some sort of failure, threat, or feeling of vulnerability such as a job loss, marital crisis, loss of someone close, personal dissatisfaction, or deep disappointment. Odysseus, the conqueror of Troy, lost everything in his efforts to return home. Inanna, the queen of heaven, had to descend into hell before becoming her full self. And Aeneas was reduced from a powerful prince to a fugitive before he began the founding of Rome. These great stories illustrate the beauty and the utter humanity of our predicaments as well as their hidden potentials. And, they brought me hope. They gave me the knowledge that so many people in the past and present had or were having this experience in their own ways that it was part of being human. Hope, knowing I was not alone in my situation, and trusting that with work it could lead to a deeper experience of meaning and of life as well as a more substantial personality were all very helpful to me, and they continue to be.

As I've practiced over the years I've discovered that many people are afraid to look within themselves. Some fear they'll find things they won't like. Others feel that close self-examination might cause them to make radical changes that could hurt their self-images, the people they love, or their careers. This fear is primarily based on our society's idea that only concrete, outer changes in our lives can solve our problems. This idea is so entrenched in us that we aren't even aware of it. It helped me to learn that this attitude is a mistake. I discovered that taking the time and trouble to learn about myself brought about inner changes, lightened my moods, and cleared away many of my misunderstandings about how I thought life should be.

Personal renewals begin as inner journeys, and substance is built within ourselves before it begins to affect the outer world. The process of attaining self-knowledge both softens and strengthens us

and serves to help us love and appreciate life and other people. It often affirms and enriches our choice of partners, vocations, and lifestyles. The unhappy or dissatisfied ones among us who impulsively leave jobs and relationships are not doing so from self-knowledge. When the inner quest brings change we can be comforted by knowing it's authentic, has been carefully thought through, and values our pasts and other people.

The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus pointed out that "a man's character is his fate." In my terms I would say that the amount of substance we build into our personalities gives us a hand in effecting our personal destinies. "Substance" is an interesting word that has dual roots. It comes from the Latin word *substantia,* which means "being" or "essence," and from the word *substáre,* which means "to stand firm." To be a person of substance means to know and stand upon one's essential nature and to be aware that there is a nature in all things that underlies their outward manifestation. The forces unleashed by modern society require that we all become people of substance, able to know ourselves and stand firm upon our essential natures or risk living inauthentic, incomplete lives.

In Western history the men and women who took first steps down new roads had to begin their journeys by stepping outside of the social character of their times. Names like Martin Luther King, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Yitzhak Rabin, Golda Meir, Albert Einstein, Pablo Picasso, Robert Kennedy, Henry Ford, Sigmund Freud, and Betty Freidan remind us that our great thinkers, artists, scientists, inventors, and religious figures have often had to stand against the forces of their epochs. Yet they are the ones who have benefited us all with their vision and achievements. Their struggles have been admired throughout Western history, though we are often late in honoring them. But their lives show us that creative living and independent thinking bring hope and dignity to each of us, while following society's beaten path often leads to a loss of soul, a lust for power, and the destruction of human values.

Two thousand years ago the Christian faith enjoined us to love God with all of our heart, mind, and soul (Matthew 22:37–40). And to love our neighbor as ourselves. The Jewish tradition had an

earlier version of this teaching that actually went a step further and suggested we learn to love the stranger as well. Along with the sanctity of the individual, these instructions are foundation stones in our religious legacy. As we progressed into modern times, rationalism, scientism, and technology ushered in a mechanical approach to life that values only what's concrete and measurable. For instance our self-esteem depends upon how we measure our success and acquisitions. How we compare ourselves to other people and appearances. The anxious eyes that parents keep on school achievement, grades, popularity, IQ scores, and SAT scores undermine the self-confidence of our children and teach them to live anxiety-based lives. In relationships, the concern with how often we make love, argue, or don't argue and how we manage as couples to get everything organized and carried out often drains the passion and love out of those relationships. The emphasis that our religious institutions have put on proper behavior as a measure of spirituality has smothered much of the heart and soul out of these organizations. It's apparent that many people have turned away from religion in their hearts even though some of them have continued to observe its forms and trappings.

However, we are born with certain necessities and potentials latent in our personalities. Among these inborn characteristics is the need for a system of orientation and devotion that provides purpose, meaning, and support for our lives. We usually call such a system "a religion" whether it has to do with a concept of God or not. This system helps us face our problems, create a vision of the future, insure our individual spiritual development, and understand the nature of joy. Without such a framework for life rich and poor alike lose their ways, experience life as meaningless, threatening, and confusing, and disintegrate into emotional illnesses, crime, and even insanity.

The practice of sacred selfishness means that we must pay careful attention to every aspect of our lives. We must seek to discover our religious or spiritual values and how they are guiding the way we live. This means we must find out if we have developed a secret religion—one that guides our lives without our realizing it. In real-

ity the question we face isn't whether we'll have a religion or not. It's a question of what kind of a religion we'll have. As our society has lost touch with the transformational spiritual aspects of religion that lead to higher consciousness, we have left ourselves open to idolatry. By idolatry I mean having human-made secular values such as the search for satisfaction and arousal through having an enviable or powerful reputation, achievement, or material and sexual gratification, which possess us unconsciously and become our religion without our knowing it.

Whenever we discover that a child's self-esteem depends on having the latest computer game or wearing brand-name clothing seen in glossy catalogs or slick TV advertisements, we know we have lost our way and that consumerism has become our secret religion, the system that orients our lives and demands devotion. When our search for identity, self-confidence, and happiness is based primarily on what we have, our need for possessions has become our spiritual core. While capitalism is a very workable economic system, it can become very dangerous if we make it an unconscious religion. It then ceases to serve us as an economic system should and demands we serve it—and leaves us feeling overworked, overspent, and powerless. As we have become spiritually and psychologically impoverished, our search in life has degenerated into a search for thrills, indulgences, and satisfactions rather than for joy and meaning. The depression I felt and that many are feeling today has a major dimension that isn't due to childhood experience or biological heredity. It's due to the effects of a society that has lost its foundation in spirituality and the values of the heart.

The great teachings I've cited from our religious traditions are the most profound challenges to human development of which I know. To understand and live these instructions about love during the evolving period of a lifespan is a life's work in itself. This work is far more demanding than belonging to a "follow the rules" or a "feel good" religion. Without a deep understanding of human nature and our spiritual needs, religious institutions cannot possibly educate people to really figure what it means to love ourselves, our neighbor, God, and the stranger. Without the knowledge of our

inner lives, psychological as well as spiritual, all that religious institutions can offer us is a superficial social structure that can't touch our unhappiness, our depression, or our spiritual impoverishment. In other words it can't touch, heal, and fulfill our hearts. I've found that Jungian psychology, which relies on the development of self-knowledge, honors and realizes the importance of love in healing, life, and joy, and proves immensely helpful when we try to understand their part in our lives.

The depth of these spiritual instructions may be greater than the scope of this book. However, one of my major concerns is how we must relearn to love ourselves, not in a sentimental, self-indulgent, or sickly selfish way, but in a manner that's authentic and that brings substance to our beings. True self-love comes from understanding ourselves and realizing how we have created a culture that requires we destroy our self-love, our very substance. When we replace it with a standard of self-alienation and self-indulgence that's needed on the one hand to keep our society functioning, on the other hand it's simultaneously destroying our finest values—destroying, indeed, our very souls.

Many theorists such as Freud, Jung, Adler, Fromm, and others have clearly seen and written about the adverse effect our society is having on our physical and mental health. I'm extremely grateful to these thinkers, and they've been a source of strength for me. Unfortunately mainstream psychology and counseling have failed to grasp the importance of their discoveries and continue to try to help people adjust to, and remain functional in, a society whose characteristics are increasingly causing their pain and suffering.

What Freud, Jung, and their followers observed and learned came from their experiences of working with people. Because this knowledge isn't obtained through statistical studies, which can never consider the individual, the prevailing attitude in professional and academic circles tends to ignore the discoveries and theories of depth

psychology. Too often mainstream psychology and medicine are blinded by their own narrow points of view, and both individuals and society experience the suffering caused by this blindness.

The inner journey is exciting and rewarding and leads to the true capacity for loving life. I deeply regret the bias our society has developed against psychotherapy and the way therapists have picked up the jargon of treatments, disease, and dysfunction, which minimizes the fact that learning to live in a growthful way is healing. In my life and with most of the people I've worked with, I've found that while symptoms often spur us into the therapist's office or to read books like this one, seeking health once the process of self-discovery begins is exciting, interesting, and challenging. And the rewards of a more fulfilling, authentic, sacredly selfish life are treasures that can't be measured in ordinary terms.

PART I:
Breaking the Mold and Seeking a Path

Wherever a man goes, men will pursue him and paw him with their dirty institutions, and, if they can, constrain him to belong to their desperate oddfellow society.

—Henry David Thoreau

CHAPTER 1
Captives of Normalcy

For certain societies that people today like to call primitive, the dominating trait of life was not the economy—that is even true of the Middle Ages—but rather man's development.
—Erich Fromm

Whatever happiness is, it seems to wear many masks, and we have no objective way to tell whether we are happy or not. A few years ago this basic dilemma was captured in a *Calvin and Hobbes* cartoon. Calvin and his stuffed tiger and imaginary friend, Hobbes, were playing outdoors on a sunny day. Suddenly Calvin realized that it was late in the weekend and his free time was running out. As his awareness grew, his panic increased until in desperation he exclaimed, "Each moment I should be able to say, 'I'm having the time of my life, right now! Valuable minutes are disappearing forever, even as we speak! We've got to have more fun!'"

Lying serenely in their wagon, Hobbes ironically replied, "I didn't realize fun was so much work."

Calvin's creator Bill Waterson captured exactly how happiness has become an inaccessible experience for most of us. One of the most unconscious, and yet constant, of our ongoing activities is the pursuit of happiness. And, just when we think we've found it, it escapes us. Like an obsession-driven lover we discover that once our conquest is won, joy and satisfaction disappear and the fulfillment we hoped for remains an empty promise. The new car we were

so thrilled over, or the boat, motorcycle, RV, appliance, or the expensive new outfit, frequently become boring or forgotten about before they're even paid for. We have become prisoners of advertising's messages that relentlessly define and redefine how we should look, what clothes we should wear, what color hair we should have, and what cosmetics we should use in order for us to be admired and envied, in order to be happy. We are bombarded with images of affluent, young, slender women and muscular men to make us think that everything from the right underwear to the newest diet will make us attractive and lead us to love, success, and happiness. Movies, TV shows, and advertisements focus on youth, comfort, and having fun, and would have us believe pleasure and contentment lie in the products we purchase.

Ironically, we have built a society that uses our desire for happiness to fuel an economy based on continued dissatisfaction. The harder we try to find happiness and fail to do so, the more frustrated we become and the more we consume. How do we find happiness? we ask ourselves. Why is it that we think everyone else knows the answer, but it continually eludes us?

When we talk about ourselves we are usually, or often, talking about ourselves in connection to others. This is only human and here, too, any product that has to do with relationships seems to have a market. Relationships, the term that really covers our longing to be known and loved and to know and love, are one of our most vulnerable areas. When it comes to relationships we are filled with hope and cynicism. The dilemmas we are experiencing in this area remind me of a comment Prince Charles made when questioned about love by a reporter around the time of his fairy-tale engagement to Princess Diana. Instead of answering the question he quipped, "Whatever love is." This appalling remark reflects the cynicism beneath our hope. But even cynicism and failure can fuel a market. We have over sixty thousand books in print advising us how to make our relationships successful, overcome their problems, and survive their failures.

A woman who had been married for sixteen years came in to see me for an initial visit. She sat down and said, "I'm tired of strug-

gling. I just want to be normal and happy!" As she finished her statement she was quietly weeping. Lisa was attractive and well dressed in a manner that showed she put care into things.

"Can you tell me more?" I asked.

Her shoulders slumped and I could see the weariness in her body and around her eyes.

"I've been married for all of these years," she said. "I think I love my husband, or at least I used to. But we argue a lot, and he doesn't seem to desire me. I don't think he even really sees me anymore. We don't talk. But we have two children and he's not a bad father. . . . I'm just exhausted. We've been to counseling. I've read a stack of books. I said it already. I'm worn-out. I want to be happy."

We talked about her situation, and Lisa felt better as she realized she was being understood and that other people had shared her experience. *I just want to be normal and happy* is a statement I hear almost daily in my practice. I hear it from men as well as women, frequently through tears. And I hear it from concerned and loving parents as they make the same wish for their children, "I just want them to be normal and happy." Every time I hear this plaintive lament I am touched by it, for it is so very human.

Wanting to be happy and normal is the result of how our society conditions us. I doubt if people in the Western world were very concerned with "normalcy" or "happiness" before the modern age. The great thinkers and teachers over the centuries have never seemed very concerned with these either. The ones like Lao-tze, Buddha, Socrates, the Prophets, Jesus, Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart, Paracelsus, and Goethe were seeking more comprehensive visions of life. Their visions focused more on living a life that had meaning and purpose, one that could be fully experienced, including its sorrows. As different as their ideas often were, the Western teachers almost unanimously agreed that the development of our ability to understand and endure true suffering was necessary in order to open us to the experiences of joy and fulfillment. In general they considered happiness an incidental state, one that is sometimes here and sometimes not; they never considered it something to be sought or obsessed over.

In the modern world we have learned to emphasize practicality at the expense of much of the wisdom of the past. Focusing on science, technology, management, and the ability to learn a skill or profession to earn a living has left our system unbalanced. It is often the "non-practical" courses in classical literature, philosophy, drama, and the arts that teach us what it means to be human and what it's like to struggle with life's problems. If we really want our children to learn values we should have them seriously study these areas and the lessons they contain as a foundation for their academic journeys. Classical mythology, for instance, shows how we create our fate when we live with too much arrogance, act without self-awareness, and treat each other and the powers of life disrespectfully. Great art pictures these motifs and music expresses them. I love these studies and I'm convinced they have the capacity to teach us more than we would normally learn about what it means to be human and the values that support life rather than destroy it.

In the introduction to his best-selling book *Care of the Soul,* the former monk Thomas Moore says, "During the fifteen years I have been practicing psychotherapy I have been surprised how much of my studies in Renaissance psychology, philosophy and medicine have contributed to the work." Moore's writings grew out of the foundation begun by C. G. Jung. Jung was quick to see that the study of art, symbols, and literature led to insights in human nature and that developing a fulfilling life was art in itself.

Moore refers to Jung as "one of the most recent doctors of the soul." It was in this capacity in 1932, speaking before a convention of pastors, that Jung said, "Among all of my patients in the second half of life . . . there has not been one whose problems in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life."

If we stop and think about his statement for a moment and consider its implications, its audacity becomes clear. Imagine what it means to say our anxiety, depression, weight problems, addictions, relationship troubles, and other psychological difficulties come from the lack of a *religious orientation toward life,* instead of saying we're neurotic and dysfunctional!

Obviously Jung was a complex thinker who was not propos-

ing a simplistic solution to our problems. Merely going to church or temple every week and ascribing to a religion that doesn't challenge us to grow, or participating in some spiritual exercises prescribed by self-help gurus, whether religious or secular, isn't what he had in mind. In fact, by the time Jung made this statement, he had long since come to feel the traditional Western religious systems no longer made much sense. His patients told him their churches and temples were out of touch with their personal needs for an experience of God and the sacred dimensions of life. My own work as an analyst indicates that this experience is as true today as it was for Jung over seventy years ago.

Awakening to Our Stories

To understand what Jung meant by a religious attitude in the second half of life, and what this attitude has to do with our emotional problems, we need to become more familiar with what he calls the *individuation process,* his model for how our personalities grow. While each of us grows and ages physically, whether we like it or not, the same fact isn't true about our psychological growth. The individuation process recognizes that after we have grown to a certain point psychologically, we have to make an effort; we have to pursue self-knowledge, to mature as people and live in a satisfying manner in our relationships and culture.

When we talk about the way we attain individuation, we are really talking about how we discover and participate in the stories we are creating with our lives. Every life in retrospect is a story and, like a story, has a beginning, unfolding events, and an end. In a narrative the story is concerned with individuals, how they feel and how people feel about them, rather than what they do or what is done to them. As I presented myself as a young man in the introduction of this book, I quickly became a character in a story and you automatically began to wonder where this story was leading. Stories become absorbing. So do our lives when we begin to look at them this way. They become stories when we are

fully engaged in living them and begin to reflect on that experience.

Every life is full of tragedy and comedy, stops and starts, shaky beginnings, wanderings, wrong turns, and changes of direction. Frequently our years are marked by difficult loves, unfulfilled dreams and challenges, laughter, tears, separations, and reunions. Behind many of these events lie causes both within and outside of ourselves. For example, how our parents influenced us for better or worse and how we continue to live out our early conditioning affects our relationships today.

It may be helpful to look at some insights into stories offered by the novelist E. M. Forster. In his book *Aspects of the Novel,* he explains the difference between a simple story and a narrative that leads to meaning. In the latter we ask *why* to events. For example, "The king died and then the queen died" is a simple story. But if I say, "The king died and then the queen died of grief," we have a plot, a *pattern* that unfolds a deeper meaning within the sequence of events that happened as they did. As an analyst I would say that an unexamined life is, to a large extent, a simple story, while an examined life becomes a narrative that can lead us to understand a sense of purpose and completion in our lives and a feeling of satisfaction as we are living through them.

The process of individuation follows a pattern that gives every life a unique expression of meaning; I will discuss that pattern later in this book. Learning how to get in touch with the stories we are creating allows us to participate consciously in their development. We do this by reflecting on our lives, seeking insight into their events, and trying to understand how our feelings, bodies, and unconscious minds are participating in and responding to our stories. We will see some helpful techniques in this regard in part 2. But for now what's important to think about is this: that developing knowledge about our whole selves, expanding and deepening our self-awareness, is a key to learning about our individuation processes. And just as our stories go from beginning to end, our individuation, our psychological growth, must do the same.

By pursuing individuation with deliberation and honesty, Jung believed we could perceive the pattern or plot of the stories we are

living and through this perception arrive at an understanding of a place of grace or true center in our personalities that he termed the "Self." The Self includes the unique pattern, the potential person, who is within each of us and seeks throughout a lifetime to be recognized and expressed through our conscious personalities and their actions. Therefore the Self includes our conscious and unconscious minds and our potentials.

The basic outcome of this complicated process is a growth in consciousness. As we come to know ourselves more fully and become more alert to the aspects of our stories, in the past and present, we are naturally increasing our capacities for expressing the potential people we are meant to be. Simply put, the better we know ourselves the more personal and pure our actions become because they aren't hidden, curtailed, or contaminated by the forces that shaped our early lives. Authentic actions disclose who we are to other people. Without self-knowledge our behaviors basically reflect needs common to everyone or the training and wounds of our childhoods. I recall being visited by a young college professor who told me with considerable anger that he was in trouble with his department chairman and the dean. He felt they didn't understand what a creative teacher he was.

"They make me feel stupid," he said, "like an adolescent." Pausing, he then continued, "Like my father did."

And as you may imagine his friends were the other "misunderstood" rebels on the faculty who actually invited most of the trouble they were in. In another situation a woman who consulted with me had an angry, belittling father and found she would freeze when someone raised his or her voice. By learning to understand ourselves better we can discover the negative effects of our histories, work to change them, build on our strengths and potentials, and relate to people and events in a more straightforward, authentic manner. Every time we take a step toward becoming aware of and transforming one of these past influences, we become less of a prisoner of the forces in our histories and assure that our future actions will express more of who we really are.

Generally, it doesn't take much reflection to realize that most

of us haven't gotten out from under the early influences in our lives nearly as much as we like to think we have. It's difficult to fully separate or individuate from our families or from institutional and cultural influences, and for good reason. They affect us before our identities are secure; we actually use them for models; their values are the initial foundation of our values; they have power and we don't; and we're trained to make decisions and behave in a manner that meets their approval. We're taught to "color within the lines" or "pay attention," and trained to "hide our feelings." We're silenced with injunctions like, "Don't you dare talk back." Brushed off with comments like "Don't bother me I'm busy," and taught to be passive by being told to "turn the other cheek." "Forgive seventy times seven." "Honor your father and mother." In a similar vein we hear, "You're not living up to your potential"; "Men are strong"; "Women aren't good at math"—and other countless messages reflecting family and cultural influences that are structured into our personalities while we are too young to evaluate them. I remember a young woman, a physician with two children, who still felt compelled to scrub out the bathrooms the way her mother did. "The cleaning woman just never gets it done right," she would explain. In another situation a man forty years old and president of his own company couldn't tell his wife what he really wanted from her. "I think she'd actually prefer it if I did," he reported, "but every time I try to I remember how many times my mother told me to be gentle and thoughtful to women, not demanding like my father."

The expectations and values we grow up with are insidious, and even the negative ones are often seductive. How many of us try to chase away our restless dissatisfaction, despite our nice homes, jobs, and families, by asking ourselves, What have I got to complain about? How can I complain when so many other people are less fortunate? And, our ability to face dissatisfactions is complicated even further if we have reached a level of education and success beyond that of our families of origin. It's very scary for us to outgrow our families psychologically, and realizing we are doing so may leave us feeling terribly guilty and even ashamed of ourselves. It can also leave us feeling like exiles, without a home or

roots or people who care about us and understand us on a basic level.

I remember a thirty-one-year-old woman who told me, "I've just felt horrible about my parents since my wedding." She had been raised in a small southern town where her parents had been good but ordinary people. Once she was out of high school she moved to a large city, worked her way through college, and after a few years in the business world became a buyer in a well-known department store. When she was twenty-nine, she married a magazine writer in a small, lovely church in the city. During the rehearsal dinner, the service, and the reception she noticed her parents were uncomfortable and didn't fit in with her friends and colleagues. She said, "I could see the distress in their eyes. They didn't feel at home with our friends and they acted like I was someone they hardly knew. I feel so ashamed because I love them but I don't even want to go see them."

She isn't an isolated case. Conway had become a gifted minister and was embarrassed by his mother's loud, opinionated way of dominating a conversation. And Karen, a popular young woman who acted as the hostess in the restaurant she and her husband owned, was terrified of being around her parents. Their ethnic prejudices, which they made no effort to hide, embarrassed her in front of her husband, in-laws, and friends and made her want to keep her children away from their grandparents. Duncan had even stronger feelings. He came from a violent, abusive family and after years of therapy is doing well while his brother and sister continue to struggle with mental illness and addictions. Duncan says he has "survivor's guilt" and is in conflict with a society that bombards him with sentimental advertisements on Mother's Day and Father's Day while he despises his parents.

In another situation a friend of mine got stuck in a pattern of conflict with his parents that lasted for decades. He is a person I have always admired as having a truly brilliant mind. It was easy for him to excel in his classes and later win scholarships to universities and graduate schools that were beyond his parents' dreams. But early in his life he began to feel that his parents were expecting more

and more from him and were using his performance to bolster their own self-esteem and social status. The more they expected of him without trying to find out who he really was, the more he resented the pressure he felt from them. As a result he has spent a lifetime being a magnificent failure—making lots of money and losing it, having a lovely family and turning it into a disaster, pleasing and destroying, living in a cycle of success and defeat that carries on his early conflicts. It is easy, much too easy, to remain trapped in the expectations and values of our parents and follow the highways approved by our society, or to live our lives in rebellion against them, stuck in the swamps with other people trapped by their resentments. Yet, nature intends us to be more than the simple tales we've developed out of adaptation, fear, and compensation. We are attracted to becoming more conscious and we also fear it, because it means a journey out of our past illusions into personal responsibility for ourselves.

All of this complex psychological language is, of course, only a tool to help us examine our lives and find that "story." Our stories must be unraveled from our tangled personal histories and the pressures of our lives—and then lived as fully as possible. The individuation process guides us in living our stories with meaning, a sense of honesty and destiny that is unique and our own, while remaining part of life's greater story.

If we stop and think about this process it will make sense. We feel more secure once we realize that it isn't necessary to struggle to be like someone else or meet another's ideals. As we feel more complete, at home within ourselves, free to explore our creative abilities, developing our strength and authority, it becomes natural to seek the ways we resemble the human "family," and how we can relate, belong, and contribute without again losing ourselves.

It is our lot, the Jungian author Robert Johnson tells us, to live through the dualities and conflicts in our inner and outer lives until we become conscious of the underlying unity within us that is the source out of which our complexity and vitality flows. The Self is a metaphor for this unity. Whether we want to follow our mind or our heart, or are stuck between them, they both have the same source.

However you look at us—body, mind, spirit, conscious, and unconscious are all parts of the same whole. The Self is a kaleidoscope that recognizes all the aspects of our being and all the potentials within us that may develop and emerge into a unique pattern of life. The unity experienced by an illuminated person, one who has lived and attained a level of consciousness above the ordinary, is often thought of as a knowledge of the soul, of the image of God, the divine or transcendent within each human life. The path toward the Self, the individuation process, goes hand in hand with the development of consciousness.

Individuation: The Path to Growth and Authenticity

In understanding the individuation process and how it can work for us, it helps to know a few basic things about the levels of consciousness we can obtain. To begin with, our levels of consciousness or psychological maturity become increasingly based on self-awareness rather than age after we have reached adulthood. Unlike our physical growth, which is generally automatic, our growth in consciousness requires intentional effort, and is a process that takes us through four general stages:

- *Simple consciousness*
- *Complex consciousness*
- *Individual consciousness*
- *Illuminated consciousness*

Our development in the first two general stages of consciousness, first simple and then complex consciousness, relies heavily on the modeling done by our parents, families, and other people, and on training, education, and the development of skills. The two stages that follow, individual and illuminated consciousness, depend upon attaining a deep knowledge of ourselves and the transcendent aspects of life. For example you may have a Ph.D. in psychology, which means you are highly trained in the area of complex consciousness.

But it doesn't mean you automatically know very much about your inner life. The same thing can be said if you have a Ph.D. in theology. It doesn't necessarily mean you have had an experience of the divine. Higher consciousness requires more than education.

No one begins life as a "conscious" individual capable of making self-responsible decisions. That identity, known in technical terms as *ego-development,* comes much later, and develops in stages from childhood through adulthood. *Simple* consciousness covers the period of time that begins at birth and encompasses the years of our early lives when our ability to learn and act responsibly is a potential slowly being fulfilled. Our parents, families, schools, churches, places in society, and the media introduce us to life in the world. They teach us that the world is safe or threatening, abundant or impoverished, educated or ignorant, a place to give to or to take from. They also teach us their perceptions of reality—for instance, "This is a vicious dog-eat-dog world," as well as other basic attitudes covering a wide range of topics such as racial or ethnic groups, religions, and virtues.

The second stage, *complex* consciousness, develops as we grow through adolescence into adulthood. During this stage we become aware of and attempt to undertake the social and personal tasks that generally define adulthood. In my generation in the late 1950s, graduating from high school or college, getting married, and owning a home generally defined adulthood. My father told me, "When you get married or reach twenty-one, you're a man and on your own." In primitive societies, elaborate initiation ceremonies marked this transition from childhood to responsible adulthood. These ceremonies often culminated with the initiate receiving a new name and public recognition as an adult. As an official adult, the former initiate was no longer dependent upon or subservient to his or her parents and had to carry an adult share of tribal responsibilities.

Growing into adulthood includes forming and testing our identities in the temperamental forge of adolescence and young adulthood. It is a crucial period when we begin to more closely observe the world around us and the world immediately outside our parents' sphere of influence. As we pass from adolescence into adult-

hood we need to discover a sense of "who we are" that we can rely on. One that has some competencies, and can persevere enough to go through whatever has to be gone through. We need to become secure enough within ourselves to separate from our parents, become self-reliant, and develop our own personal and social relationships. Technically, we refer to developing our sense of identity as *ego-development* and developing our ability to get along with other people at work and in relationships as cultivating our *public face* or *persona.*

Trying to work out an identity begins with models because we have to have something to identify with to get us started. Hopefully, we will discover models that fit our abilities and strengths, but this process is never easy. When I was bogged down in my sophomore year in college and couldn't choose a major, I eventually became so desperate I chose the basic social model of getting married and thereby getting "serious" about life. Suddenly my friends and family became approving and supportive instead of worried and concerned about me. In other words I now had an identity that people could understand, not necessarily the right one, but one that could get me started and represented the "social clothes" most of us need to wear at this age.

As children we tried out grown-up identities by pretending to be doctors, teachers, nurses, and so on. We were alert to the effect the games had on the adults in our lives—whether they brought approval or disapproval. Interested uncles and aunts asked us what we wanted to be when we grew up. By age seven or eight, I learned to reply "a lawyer," which assured a favorable response. While I enjoyed the response I had little idea what lawyers really did. I only knew it brought me validation from "big" people, and I now realize how much power this process had in affecting how I saw careers, social graces, manners of dress, and other attitudes.

By the 1970s, life had become more complicated. Few adults were asking children what they wanted to be when they grew up because the adults were either dissatisfied with their own careers, frustrated with their relationships, or rethinking their own places in life. Parents often copped out on helping children seek adult identi-

ties by telling them they could be anything they wanted to be. Children are smart enough to know that's not true, and the lack of adult expectations and guidance often left the children floundering and unable to get on the track toward adult identities and a sense of responsibility.

Our parents' views of their unrealized opportunities also play a role in our identity formation. My father, for example, spent a rich career as an educator. As time went by, many of the people he taught became very wealthy. On the one hand, their success gave him a gratifying feeling of accomplishment in his work. On the other hand, however, part of him began to feel wistful that he could have been more successful in business—that he could have made more money, had a higher standard of living, enjoyed more respect in the eyes of society. Part of him felt fulfilled and part of him felt resentful. As a result of this conflict he urged me to go into business rather than academics, without considering what might be the most personally meaningful career for me. We are all shaped by these two models: family and society.

A few years ago I worked with a middle-aged physician. Fred was a highly skilled doctor who was board certified in three areas. But he was wondering if he should have been a writer. In exploring his past Fred felt he had been guided toward medical school by his mother, who was a nurse. Because he was so convinced that his mother was the dominant influence in his life, I wondered about the role of his father, a retired contractor, and his hidden effect on Fred. I shared my thoughts with Fred and suggested he ask his father what he thought had guided so much of Fred's early ambitions. A few days later Fred had a surprising conversation with his dad. He discovered his father had wanted to be a doctor but hadn't pursued his dream after he got out of the army at the end of World War II because his wife was pregnant. His dad said that it may have been his quiet endorsement that influenced Fred more than he imagined. And, of course, everyone in Fred's extended family and in the small community he had grown up in was thrilled with the choice. Once Fred understood the motives and circumstances that had molded his course, he felt a sense of freedom.

Instead of changing careers he set about figuring out how to transform his career into one based on his values and how he wanted to live them.

Fred discovered that he could practice in a manner that fulfilled his needs to find meaning in his work by becoming more concerned with people and less science oriented. He let his intuition and feelings become part of his work on a regular basis and soon left his prestigious, high-profile practice group to join a smaller group whose approach to medicine was more compatible with his new ideas. He also realized he could spend more time with his wife and family and still make a good living.

Stop and think about these situations for a moment. Who do you know that might have been guided to live their parents' unrealized ambitions? What about yourself? How many of your choices were influenced by this often subtle but sometimes not so subtle pressure?

Erich Fromm believed that character determined behavior. In his studies of how society affects our development, he concluded that every society shares a common character structure, meaning a common set of traits that motivate us to behave in ways that fulfill the goals and ideals of our culture. For example we are taught and conditioned to believe our self-worth depends upon our achievements, our financial value, the things we own, how productive we are, and how other people evaluate us. Fromm called this collection of traits our *social character.* Society from its largest institutional units down to its smallest, the family, endeavors to teach us these traits.

In many ways the social character of our culture operates like a tribal mind-set, a collection of basic beliefs to which every member subscribes. This "social character" continues its efforts to contain us as adults just as it attempted to mold our earlier growth, just as it has always. Even primitive people identified with their tribe's model for living and its values, beliefs, and customs. To be a member of the

tribe meant to have security, acceptance, and to be considered a human being. To violate a tribal value resulted in expulsion from the community, which in turn cost that person his (or her) identity in a real as well as a psychological sense; it turned him into a nonperson with little hope and little chance of surviving in a harsh world. Even today events that threaten our identities and self-images may touch this place of primal fear in our heritage, and cause us to dread feeling alienated and alone.

The feeling of belonging in our families, peer groups, and communities is a powerful sensation. To be with people or family with whom we feel spiritually, emotionally, and physically comfortable makes us feel secure and that life is manageable even if our circumstances could be a lot better. People stay in bad marriages and poor jobs to hold onto this security and because they are afraid of the loneliness and disapproval that change could bring. The power of fear, the implicit threat of denouncement or disappointment, makes many of us afraid of crossing the boundaries set by the conventional values and beliefs we have internalized and on which our self-images rest.

This fear blocks our development and makes it difficult to break free of beliefs that no longer serve our growth. It's difficult to shed the old skins made of familiar or hardened beliefs and attitudes. We can even get stuck in this process. In other words fear can block our growing past the stage of complex consciousness into that of individual consciousness. We fear the prospect of divorce, the embarrassment that may come with the loss of income, the criticism by our partners, families, or close friends. We even fear going to therapists and analysts because we want to feel we are OK and don't want other people to see us as needy, flawed, or crazy. That is when we feel stuck. Overwhelmed by the fear of what we might lose rather than inspired by what we might gain. The core of this book will revolve around the problems of this crucial transition point in our lives and the promise it offers.

When we approach the third stage, *individual* consciousness, it's as if a door were opening, inviting us into the experience of personal authenticity and of feeling truly at home within ourselves.

Individual consciousness moves us beyond the mind-set of social norms. During this stage we begin to become aware of our unique natures as something *separate* from the forces and values that have molded the roles we are living. In fact this may be the first point at which we realize we are actually living roles. This awareness, unless it is quickly repressed, will lead us into a swirl of conflicting emotions as we begin to question ourselves about who we are, and to ask ourselves if this is *all there is.*

If we are unable to confront our earlier choices at this point, we may be devoured by our disappointment and resentment. Sometimes these feelings bring some people into therapy while the fear and denial they stir up keep others away.

The "midlife crisis" that bruises or ensnares so many of us is a collision of just this: a point where we come into conflict with social norms and expectations. The values we have been living by begin to seem repressive, and being "responsible" feels dull and unsatisfying. We long to step off the never-ending treadmill of obligations.

At this time I want to pause and ask a question. What happens if we have reached age thirty-five or forty and *haven't* been able to fully form workable adult identities? The answer is that sooner or later we will also find our lives breaking down and coming to a stop. But this crisis won't be a midlife crisis, although they have many similarities. Rather it will be an *identity* crisis that too needs to be resolved in order for us to become actual adults, no matter how old we happen to be. This situation isn't unusual because starting in the 1960s our society has become complex and the guidelines for figuring out when we have become adults have broken down. At the same time society is doing less to foster self-responsibility. The following example portrays a grown-up who hasn't fully grown into adult consciousness.

I first met Sam at one of my workshops on dreams and creativity. He was quiet, but also jovial and warm, and gave the impression of being very sensitive. People were surprised to find out this quiet fellow with a ponytail was a lawyer. But they smiled knowingly when he disclosed he worked for the legal aid society. As he shared bits and pieces of himself, he mesmerized the other participants with

his enthusiasm for Tai Chi and other Eastern spiritual practices. Everyone pictured Sam as perceptive and caring.

One morning Sam phoned me for a private appointment. When we sat down together a few days later he said, "I've got to find a life." As Sam's story unfolded I found out he was forty-three. He had gone through adolescence in the 1960s and '70s. Sam had been married twice, had two daughters, and his current wife was threatening to leave him if he didn't quit smoking pot.

Sam said his wife felt like there was "just nobody at home" inside of him. His teenage daughters were embarrassed that their dad smoked pot and by their comparatively shabby standard of living. Sam's life was in crisis, but his was really a deferred crisis from his adolescence. At that time he took the path of going to law school to satisfy his parents. But inwardly he identified with many of the rebellious values of his adolescence. He has remained stuck in that quandary for almost twenty years, working for legal aid in order to defy his ambitious parents' values and using pot to medicate his feelings of self-alienation. Sam's self-analysis was correct. He needed to find a life, one based on an adult identity and a self-responsible place in the world of work and relationships.

After two months of analysis Sam recognized his addiction and began an outpatient drug treatment program in addition to analysis. His wife decided to stay with him as he began the quest to rediscover himself. In Sam's case, taking up the struggle for a stronger adult identity had to take place before he had a real foundation for seeking *individual consciousness*, and for seeking further self-knowledge.

Once we have achieved adult identities we must face another turning point that is just as significant as moving from childhood into adulthood. It is one of the most important periods in our lives, and when it is simply known as "midlife crisis," it may become one of the most misunderstood. It is misunderstood because we are so oriented toward practicality and toward our outer lives, that it is difficult for us to hear our inner spiritual events and understand them. The discontent with life that causes our midlife crises is a call to develop higher consciousness that we no longer know how

to recognize as an epiphany, an awakening. Families, friends, coworkers, and even our children often want us to get back to normal and keep soldiering down life's highway. Instead, we should *welcome* this call as a time to deepen our lives, as a spiritual turning point, and an opportunity to redirect our energies inward, to reclaim parts of ourselves that we lost or never found as we were growing up. This call, if we have the courage to answer it, demands that we look back and ask, At what point did I betray my own existence and begin turning my energy against myself?

Because of its paradoxical nature this is a perplexing time for us. It frequently comes at a time when we may think our lives are working the best they ever have. We are no longer young. Our identities seem secure. We have earned our way in life, have given up some illusions and fantasies, and feel grounded in reality. Little do we realize that instead of preparing a sure highway into the future, we have prepared the ground for our next transformation. Sometimes, our inability to recognize the spiritual turning points in our lives frequently forces them to appear covertly as illness, emotional problems, and other crises. Sometimes the restlessness and vague feelings of fear and unease we feel may reappear in external forms such as affairs, divorce, the loss of a job, the illness or death of a loved one—symptoms, and not the cause, of an emotional hemorrhage we are not ready to face. And sometimes there are small ailments like headaches, anxiety attacks, fatigue at work, and increased moodiness that, if left unattended to, may escalate into alcoholism, obesity, use of tranquilizers, sexual difficulties, heart attacks, and repeated changes in jobs and spouses.

Whatever the symptoms, something has happened to shake our values in the old systems. We may seem to have everything a person in the conventional world would want, but we are miserable. Our lives seem to lack meaning; we can't figure out what our partners want from us, or we can't control our teenagers, and everything we try to do seems to make matters worse.

When these events come along we have a choice.

We can listen to them or shut them out. We can choose to ignore them and go right on driving ourselves down the well-travelled

interstate of social convention, being good lawyers, doctors, businesspeople, ministers, homemakers, college professors—typical normal people. But the Self I discussed earlier (the whole personality including the inborn urge to grow) may not stand for this kind of stagnation. This Self is determined to create psychological growth and will continue to repeat certain calls and escalate predicaments and ailments until they get renewed attention. Of course, we have additional options: We can stiffen and rigidify our attitudes, cling to the highway, and perhaps even become pillars in the community—in effect pillars of the past. Or we can try to placate our restlessness by following the latest trends in self-help and health while others choose to become more rigid in their religious and political attitudes. These health-promoting activities may seem appealing, but we have to be careful we are not using them in the wrong way, to avoid facing our deeper selves. If we are going to confront our lives and grow into them, we must accept our emotions and begin to ask ourselves who we are and how we are living.

These kinds of questions open us to new ways of looking at life and the conflicts we experience when we try to live as individuals within a social group. They also compel us to examine the principles steering our lives and to look at the ways we have interpreted our religious teachings and to assess the degree to which our modern experiences of religion can restore our souls and guide our existence. Thinkers like Sir Laurens Van der Post, Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, James Hillman, and Paul Tillich have agreed that we have misunderstood our religious figures like Buddha, Moses, and Christ. They suggest that these figures exemplify the pattern of individuation—the journey to the true Self and how to live in an authentic manner that expresses our wholeness and fulfills our best potentials. They would emphasize, for example, that the great fallacy in theology is to take the life of a spiritual figure like Christ literally rather than in its full symbolic meaning. The results of this mistake lead us to advocate a blind imitation of his life and teachings and miss the real message, which is that we should live our lives to the fulfillment of our natures, gifts, potentials, and destinies, as truly as Christ lived to the end to which he had been born. The same

points can be made about the lives of other spiritual leaders such as Buddha and Moses.

The Jungian analyst Edward Edinger in his moving book *Ego and Archetype* uses the story of Christ as seen from a psychological perspective to amplify this point and to outline how we may grow in self-awareness. When we look at Christ's teachings in this manner, many of his seemingly paradoxical statements take on new meanings. One of his admonitions symbolizes part of the pattern our growth must follow: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace on earth: it is not peace I bring but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." (Matthew 10:35, 36). That is, if we are going to have our own lives, we must become self-responsible and independent from our parents and their influence. The paradox in this teaching is that psychological and spiritual development call for us to accept the contradictions and sufferings that occur when we break with conformity in a manner that ultimately leads to a higher level of fulfillment.

Our foes, in terms of our struggle to become individuals, are the members of our own households. It makes sense. They are the ones closest to us. The ones it was natural for us to have identified either with or against, whose approval and acceptance we sought and whose criticism we feared. Establishing our own individual lives is the very foundation for psychological development. Abraham had to leave the country of his father. Buddha had to leave his father's palace. The disciples of Christ had to leave home and vocations. The symbolic pattern is clear. Our growth depends upon our ability to muster the courage and awareness to separate ourselves from the group mind-set of our families and the conventional wisdom they embody. Which is not to say their values are wrong. We must disentangle ourselves from them and then decide how we want to relate to them from our own standpoints.

The symbolic image of the sword represents the power, the self-awareness we must develop to make these difficult discriminations. It also suggests the amount of strength we need and the pain that may result as we cut away our deepest ties in the service of

beginning a new journey in life. Many of us have fooled ourselves into believing we have made this step when we actually have not. In my own case, for instance, I thought I'd outgrown my father's aggressive sports mentality and felt superior to him, only to discover in my own inner search that I had a very strong, but hidden, competitive drive that everyone was aware of but me.

In many ways this passage into individual consciousness is the hardest of the four stages. This is because, in general, we have the social and emotional support of our families, friends, and communities as we struggle through the first two stages. The passage into the third stage is lonelier. Often we must work by ourselves on ourselves and seemingly against the values and popular attitudes promoted by our society. But the next stage, *illuminated* consciousness, makes the journey worthwhile. It is that place we reach when we have realized our individual personalities and recognized the existence of a greater Self, or the image of God or the divine, that is within us.

As children we often saw the path to illuminated consciousness illustrated in fairy tales, where a young man or woman begins in poor or humble surroundings, passes through a series of trials and adventures, and ultimately becomes a king or queen. Their adventures and close calls cause them to rise above their previous selves, and summon unknown and helpful potentials within their own personalities (often pictured as helpful animals, wise old men and women, brothers and sisters, and even villains) until their journeys culminate in their ability to unify their kingdoms. Translated into psychological terms, they've brought a sense of wholeness, prosperity, and uniqueness to their personalities.

It's a good idea for adults to read fairy tales as well. Once upon a time, in fact, they were indeed listened to by young and old alike, and helped many generations to learn about life. With the same complexity as myths, they refer to many different levels of experience at

once. In an Italian fairy tale, which I found in a collection by Italo Calvino, there's a story that shows the pattern of a woman's journey into fully becoming herself. The story is "Silent for Seven Years," and it begins as a tired, angry father returns home. When his sons run to him in excitement he impatiently curses them and they immediately end up as tormented prisoners of the Devil. While these events are happening the children's mother stands by passively, failing to help her offspring. Then the boys' sister leaves home in an effort to find and rescue her brothers. When she meets the Devil he tells her that to free them she must remain silent for seven years.

During these seven years she faces many trials and conflicts that tempt her to speak. In her first adventure a handsome prince discovers her in the forest and marries her. Later the jealous mother of the prince betrays her by accusing the poor girl of giving birth to a dog. Unable to speak for herself she has to flee for her life as the angry old mother of the prince wants to execute her. Next, she assumes a masculine role as a soldier. Finally she finds herself part of a band of outlaws and murderers. Even on the verge of her execution after being captured, she keeps silent and at the moment of her impending death, the seven years are up, a reprieve comes, her brothers are freed, and the king recognizes her and, having learned of her innocence, takes her back as his queen.

The tale is one many women who have successfully made the passage into individual consciousness can relate to as they consider their past experiences. Leaving home, redeeming lost aspects of ourselves, trying and sometimes failing at different roles, persevering until we find our strength and voice prepare us to face our true selves and live authentically. Becoming a king or queen means that we feel good about ourselves, competent, whole, and enthused about life, ready to discover more about where our stories are taking us. Isn't that a happy ending in itself?

The Individuation Process as Stages of the Development of Consciousness

Stage	Description
1. *Simple Consciousness*	The naive, developing consciousness of childhood
2. *Complex Consciousness*	The consciousness required to fulfill the societal tasks of adulthood
3. *Individual Consciousness*	The awareness of ourselves as separate from the forces that molded us
4. *Illuminated Consciousness*	The realization of our unique personalities and their relationship to our deeper selves and all life

Society's Illusion of Normalcy

Part of our task as we are growing is to develop personalities and identities that assure us we can take care of ourselves. We need the education and training that will enable us to make a living, along with the personal capacity to make friends and have other relationships. Our society is complicated, and we need the social skills that will enable us to interact with various institutions ranging from the grocery store and local schools to government agencies and medical facilities. We also need to develop a foundation of social ethics that will guide our relationships and minimize our conflicts. The way we experience the world and the shape our personalities or identities take as we grow up are informed by primary forces. They are: the effects of our biological characteristics; the wounds, traumas,

and inspirations we experienced during our childhoods; and the social character of our times.

Both our biology and our childhood experiences may present serious issues with which we have to learn to deal. For instance, biological concerns may range from such things as being born into a minority or having birth defects, physical handicaps, or other genetic problems. If our personality development was injured by traumatic experiences such as the serious illness or death of close family members, alcoholic or otherwise damaging parents, or harmful social situations, we may have to be willing to retrace our steps in psychotherapy or in some other manner to heal these old hurts before our growth can continue. Frequently we find these old wounds becoming more focused, more challenging, more insistent as we approach middle age. The poet Rainer Maria Rilke points out that we all leave childhood unprepared for adult life; that childhood is a helpless, complicated time whose struggles mark us all; and that we must continually come back to our histories to integrate them further into our destinies. Whatever our biological inheritances are or however we were wounded growing up, we also need to realize that the social character of our eras dramatically affect who we become, usually without our realizing it.

Every society develops a model for the character of its members. This model is made up of collective attitudes that are so common we have trouble naming them, and once we can name one it's terribly hard to get out from under its influence. They make up a cluster of social attitudes that inform the ways we evaluate ourselves. The adages that women should be thin, that eating soothes emotion and so does buying, that we judge ourselves in relationship to others and to advertising images, and that we can always be more efficient and get more accomplished are all particular and familiar mind-sets that continue to drive most of us. These attitudes strongly affect how we act, feel, and think—and how we believe we should act, feel, and think.

Society develops such mind-sets in order to keep its values and structures operating. Its institutions such as families, schools, churches, the media, and advertising attempt to mold our development so

we fit the model of the social character. This model is imprinted on us so thoroughly and so subtly that we generally take it for granted that its attitudes and values are our own. Erich Fromm points out that when we define ourselves by what we have—by the cars we drive, the neighborhoods we live in, the logos on the shirts we wear—we are actually increasing our feelings of powerlessness at a deeper level. By living in this way he says we are committing what the Old Testament claims is one of our greatest mistakes: living without joy in the midst of plenty (Deuteronomy 28:47).

Looking back over the last few hundred years can help us see how our social character has changed and how it now operates in a self-centered, sickly selfish manner. In the seventeenth century when goods were scarce, self-denial and thrift were central themes in our social character structure. As time progressed so did the importance of economics in society. By the nineteenth century the economic force driving society needed capital to fuel it and saving money became a widely recognized virtue. The money saved allowed the banks to fund the capitalization of our industrializing nation. During this period of our history it was considered irresponsible, even immoral, to spend money we didn't have. Today the opposite is true. We subscribe to the notion that spending money we don't have is the proper thing to do. Imagine what our lives would be like without credit card or bank debt. Even our government supports and sanctions indebtedness and consumer spending. Would home ownership, the foundation of the American Dream, be even possible without the tax incentives both political parties vow to protect?

We teach people to spend in order to create demand and employment, and to drive our economy. These imperatives have progressed so far that a marketing orientation governs our entire lives; we have to consider *ourselves* as commodities that should be sold or marketed—just think, for instance, of the free agents market. Think of the many things we do to enhance our credentials and resumes by creating a seemingly endless array of awards, honors, certificates, degrees, boards to serve on, continuing education requirements, publications, and professional associations. In addition we are taught to consume everything immediately, compulsively, or as our old

friend Calvin reminded us in the opening scene of this chapter, "Valuable minutes are disappearing . . . We've got to have more fun."

This pattern of accomplishment and frenzy, acquisition and emptiness has become one of our most insidious and unconscious driving forces. But when we lose the ability to pay careful and patient attention to our inner lives and the process of cultivating love with the people we value; when we emphasize competition, success, self-sufficiency, individualism, and material progress over the development of the integrity and spiritual quality of our lives, we put ourselves, our inner as well as social selves, at risk. Because of this emphasis, our self-worth rests on our achievements and our possessions rather than on our moral character, compassion, and wisdom. The advertising media portrays the successful person as organized, on-the-go, and in control of a complicated lifestyle. Self-validation is a constant process of comparing ourselves, especially those in our peer and friendship groups. In this world of brands and brand names we are what we possess.

The forces of the culture shape our personalities in such a way that we want to do what we must do for society to function. The traits of our social character become transformed into our personal needs as we come to believe that success, feeling better, and self-regard are based on having and consuming things.

Our indoctrination into this code begins at an early age, when we teach our children to define themselves by the grades they make, the awards they achieve, and clothing they purchase. J. Crew, Abercrombie, Tommy's, and Calvin's are code words by which our children rank each other, and appraise themselves. Our opinions, most especially of ourselves, become based not on our substance, but on continually comparing ourselves with the changing images of the media and the achievements of other people. While the achievement of a friend, classmate, relative, or colleague may not affect our position of success at all, it may make us envious, cause us to feel we are dropping behind or not living up to our capacity, and in the end, like the changing images in advertising, make us think less of ourselves.

Once we are caught in this unconscious cycle of living it then

becomes natural to think that if we feel bad we should consume something to feel better. Our feelings become an excuse for consumptive self-indulgence on a material level. If we feel anxious or depressed we consume medications. If our marriages grow stale we may remodel our houses, buy new ones, or purchase vacation homes. Our social character teaches us that consumption is the key to happiness and the answer to most of our problems.

In this climate we cannot help but think of ourselves as commodities. The great vocations of medicine, law, psychology, and the ministry have all turned toward marketing themselves. In today's world we find that efficiency, cost effectiveness, and doing things in the easiest, most convenient way are more important than the effect these approaches to life may have on our souls and health. "Who I am" has become less important than "what I can do," whether it's at work, in relationships, or at church. Even the vocabulary for romantic attachments has fallen into this same, cynical idiom; comments like "my partner doesn't fill my needs" or "I've invested so much in this relationship" underline this perspective, as if human relationships could be calculated, measured, and exchanged, rather than nourished and cherished.

I've often heard people trying to find good reasons to do something they value that is not valued by our social character, such as taking time off from work for a child's field trip at school, an important anniversary, or enough time to truly mourn the death of someone close to them. Most people I know are reluctant to take all of their vacation time and sick days. We feel that we must justify these things to ourselves and to the people close to us. We have trouble justifying spending money on our self-development, on reserving time for quietness and reflection, or even in allowing ourselves to realize we're tired and need to relax without feeling angry with ourselves and guilty about not being productive and working toward our goals. The confusion and uneasiness we feel about investing in the subjective values of honoring ourselves as human beings, with psychological and spiritual needs and potentials, reflect how we have become estranged not only from ourselves but from the value of life.

As we develop through childhood and into early adulthood, the attributes of our culture's social character are structured into our personalities by our parents, families, teachers, and other institutions. This process is so subtle and powerful that we do not become aware of its influence on our lives until suffering, conflict, or illness may cause us to question the meaning of the values we are living by.

We all want and long to be part of a world that will understand and support us. But the truth is the model of our social character only allows these things at a price. When we remain unconscious of its effects we are guided by false authorities that reside outside of ourselves. Our need to be accepted, to be a meaningful part of society can leave us feeling more and more estranged from ourselves, from our own hearts. Because the model of our social character defines what we think of as normal, to be *normal* actually means to be alienated from ourselves.

When we examine how out of balance, dehumanizing, and self-alienating our idea of normalcy has become, it's easier to understand many of our personal and cultural problems. For example our society teaches us to solve our problems by overcoming them. Therefore when we are faced with a difficult situation we attempt to gather our strength, develop a strategy, and try harder. In addition our news and entertainment media make it appear that only powerful people succeed. The simplistic approach to problem solving erodes our self-esteem because it simply doesn't fit many human situations that range from being shy or overweight to being physically or economically handicapped. When a culture supports such a power-oriented perspective it should come as no surprise that people who feel powerless will become enraged and turn to violence as a way to seek empowerment. We see signs of the symptoms of frustration and feelings of powerlessness: road rage, race rage, militia groups, school shootings, or the violence against ourselves—anger turned inward in the form of depression, self-mutilation, self-starvation, suicide, or family violence.

For most of us, our cocktails of frustration take subtler venues such as restlessness, overeating, drinking too much, or losing our spirits and our desire for intimacy and closeness. While we may not turn actively violent, we may be slipping into a pattern that implies giving up on life. I want to emphasize that by learning to know ourselves we can complete the process of achieving adulthood and attain a level of individual consciousness that will free us from the "model of normalcy"—the constricted patterns and perspectives of the culture; help us develop our inner authority; and in our small ways help change society. Destructiveness comes from self-alienation, feelings of powerlessness, boredom, and a lack of love. The creative solution for achieving a fulfilling existence requires developing the kind of self-knowledge that leads to love and a deep respect for life. Our choice is to either grow in consciousness or to see our lives and society become more alienated and destructive.

Moving on, I will continue the exploration of society's influences on our personalities and the meaning of the individuation process—and I will begin to outline how we can participate in life with more conscious awareness. Conscious participation in life requires a religious devotion to the search for self-knowledge because we are usually trapped by our model of normalcy into believing we are conscious when we haven't even begun to understand the forces shaping our lives.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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