DARK LIGHT OF THE SOUL

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In an age focused increasingly upon a cultural, political, and social understanding of otherness as diversity, preferring to ponder God, if at all, mostly in terms of immanence, depth psychology is in danger of becoming breadth psychology. The search for transcendence has become more and more the province of New Age weekend workshops. On the other hand, depth psychology that seeks only the transpersonal without the incarnate spirit in the flesh of everyday relationships in history may likewise prove to be a failed enterprise.

In such an era, we may expand our vision to reviewing something of the inner journeys of the seventeenth-century Protestant mystic Jacob Boehme and the twentieth-century depth psychologist C. G. Jung. Each was passionately engaged with the immediacy of experience, yet each believed in the vital importance of spirit as a real and transforming presence in human life. Reflection upon the crosscurrents in the experiences and select writings of these two intriguing visionaries may help to ground the work that we do as depth psychologists, clinical practitioners, teachers, and those whose interests lie in the arenas of religious experience and spirituality.

In this work, I compare and contrast Boehme’s and Jung’s experiences with a special focus on the religious or psychological experience of what Erich Neumann calls
unitary reality, a ground of being that contains all opposites in potentiality. I examine and analyze these experiences from the overlapping yet distinct viewpoints of depth psychology and religion, with the goal of offering what I find meaningful for anyone who is on the journey of healing and wholeness—as well as instructive to the professional working in a clinical setting.
This book rests on the premise that a unitary reality underlies all psychological experience. The experience of this unitary reality is the culmination of an encounter with the deepest layer of the collective unconscious, the psychoid, archetypal layer, in which we meet all forms of otherness. The otherness we meet at this depth of experience is so radically transforming that all that was formerly known to us and thought to be real from the ego’s point of view is surpassed. Drawing from Jacob Boehme’s and Carl Jung’s images of radical otherness, a new reality is born—the Self in Jung’s terms, Christ in Boehme’s terms—a unitary reality that enables us to see through our newly constellated reality to our former origins, to a pre-differentiated, universal ground.

Innate to this experience of depth, we find throughout history and in comparative literature that, psychologically speaking, a breakdown of varying degrees often accompanies a breakthrough to this unitary reality. Deintegration, or fragmentation, seem to be important aspects preceding the integration of all the disparate parts that are contained in what is experienced psychologically as unitary reality, or oneness. The experience of unitary reality may be a
single event that happens once as a way for the personality to restructure and locate a new intrapsychic core from which the ego can proceed in its development. More often, unitary reality is the culmination of a long process of struggle and suffering that we engage in through analysis or psychotherapy or spiritual direction, or even through our own creative endeavors of seeking, in which we are led down, or into the Black Hole of what Martin Buber called “the divine Void.”

Jungian analyst Erich Neumann, who analyzed with Jung and practiced as an analyst in Tel Aviv, describes this breakthrough event or process as “a borderline experience of the beginning of all things that corresponds to the mystic’s experience of the universal diffusion of the unitary reality” (Neumann, 1989, p.74).

The outcome of the experience of unitary reality is a meeting of human spirit with divine spirit. This conjunction or sacred marriage conjoins the spirit of the divine with the body of nature. Our consciousness changes. We begin to know that we have a distinct and personal identity that is known by something far more vast and more trans-personal than our ego. We are infused with new confidence that this other that knows us so distinctly will embrace the specificity of our identity long after the ego and the body that houses it have passed back into the earth. Thus, the process of struggle and becoming very attentive to our inner lives, images, and feelings is a worthwhile endeavor since it gives meaning to existence.

Becoming active participants in the vital process of life-transforming encounter with the collective unconscious requires that we attend not only to the role of experience
but to the fact of purposive suffering, suffering in this case pertaining not to masochism but to wrestling with the opposites of psychological material. When we engage with the opposites within us, of our projective tendencies and our projective identifications, the ego inevitably suffers. It is no longer the center of psychological life, and this is painful, especially initially.

The experience of unitary reality, or knowledge of it, makes a difference in clinical work and the study of analytical psychology because unitary reality contains all diversity, all otherness, both in terms of experience and of persons. Analytically, we get glimpses of unitary reality in the radical otherness of dreams, in the transference and counter-transference, through the experience of the transcendent function, and in and through the trauma of breakdown, creative depression, deintegration experience, or what Jungian analyst John Weir-Perry refers to as spiritual emergency or acute episodes.

These experiences that lead us to the knowledge of unitary reality have relevance to clinical practice because they are so transforming. As we work with the imagination, our emotions, images, and dreams suffering, we grow and change. Sometimes, we achieve potential that we never could have imagined was part of our personal blueprint. Whether the transformation that begins to occur leads to healing or to dissolution is of great concern to the practitioner. It is not that we should fear dissolution in a containing context, but there are specific things that the analyst needs to watch for in terms of the ego becoming totally overwhelmed, inflated, or deflated into a clinical depression. In later chapters, I will give examples of how
the analyst can discern what road the patient is on (and what to do about it).

I have chosen the two central figures of Jacob Boehme and Carl Jung as my initial examples of the experience of unitary reality because they engaged so deeply with the collective unconscious, suffered profoundly, and brought back knowledge that has given us a window into the depth of experience to which I wish to attest.

In offering them as illustrations, I will compare their primary images of unitary reality—the Ungrund and the Pleroma—and focus upon the nature of the experience itself. Boehme and Jung use different vocabularies that I also will compare and contrast while emphasizing depth psychological concepts that house their common experience.

A secondary theme is threaded throughout the text, namely, depth psychology can make a valuable contribution to the contemporary conversation on diversity and otherness.

Diversity refers to the distinctions we recognize in gender, race, ethnicity, and lifestyle choices. Otherness refers to the ego’s view of any of a variety of inner psychological contents including, but not limited to, the relational level of otherness, the primordial level of otherness, and the level or layer of otherness radical enough to be perhaps conceived of as unbound, although connected to, the ego and the psyche—spirit. Depth psychology is uniquely positioned to explore all these layers.

The relational level is important in terms of our exploring projection and introjection, not only to others but also to other people’s otherness (difference) from us. Depth psychology certainly is able to work with the level of projection
and introjection, but further, to probe beyond developmental issues and to explore the frontiers of otherness at the primordial level of the psyche. By primordial, I am referring to that of the psyche that exists at the beginning of time (L. “primus,” first, “ordiri,” begin).

At the primordial level, depth psychology raises to consciousness a new experience of otherness, a *transcendent ultimacy* beyond the psyche that continuously encroaches upon, seduces, dismembers, and transforms surface immediacy. *Surface immediacy* pertains to our experience of the real at the level of our needs and projections.

Transcendent ultimacy, in contrast, pertains to experience in which our previous notions and images of God, the transcendent, the ultimate—whatever we call it—are shattered and redefined through this experience I am calling a *unitary reality*. The *abyss* of spirit may be so other that it feels as if it is beyond our categories of understanding altogether. This presence may render us speechless. Or, if we can speak and describe, we might claim that the quality of this otherness, this Holy Other, is a “Wholly Other,” beyond being itself, even beyond God and our conceptions of God.

Because so much tension exists in the world in the way each of us apprehends the divine, we sorely need a way of working with our psyches; this is imperative, in fact, to human existence and survival in the face of terrorism, fundamentalism, and archetypal evil. We need to locate and work within a psycho-spiritual umbrella that is large enough to house contradictions. Within the archetypal realm of the psyche, there is most definitely potential to order the opposites of diverse experience without eliminating the essence of what makes our neighbor other.
In order to expand our psychological comprehension of otherness, we need to build the intrapsychic muscles necessary for embracing tension, contradiction, and paradox. Learning to house tension and to hold the polarities of otherness are central to exploring the nature of the transcendent, how it might function creatively within the realm of human relatedness. It is within the embrace of contraries, the “yes” and the “no” of life needing each other, that we might find new ways to strive toward a restorative, healing peace in ourselves and in the world, even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

I have chosen Jung and Boehme as relevant figures to illustrate the above notions because they have experienced the abyss and have returned to tell of it. Not everyone does. They have fostered new categories of experience, giving us a fresh and accessible understanding of how the transcendent moves among us. They have an immediate grasp of consciousness as psychological process, and they proceed with psychological insight that arguably takes place in spirit. By spirit, I refer to something actual and real, as do my sources. We discover the nature of spiritual freedom within the dialectic of opposites in the psyche.

Jung focuses upon an immediate relation to transforming spirit. For Jung the qualities of spirit are present to ground or inform the psychoanalytic encounter between patient and analyst, conscious and unconscious. Spirit is significant in the clinical setting in its tendency to fuel both complexes and healing.

Jung’s relevance to a discourse between religion and depth psychology is that the psyche is the medium through which we apprehend and keep alive an existential grasp of
the presence of the transcendent. This presence is experienced by the psyche in the form of an archetype, particularly the Self archetype, a psychic center linked to instinct and characterized by the features of numinosity, autonomy, and unconsciousness. Ultimately, his approach to spirit is as an archetype, and also a reality transcending the ego and the contents of the objective psyche. In general, an archetype is expressed by a symbol that is a captivating, although enigmatic, portrayal of archetypal reality itself, often leading us toward a reorientation of our conscious position.

For Jung, attending to symbolic process means that the ego must relate to the unconscious contents of the psyche that are often represented in dreams or waking fantasies of opposition, contrasexual otherness, or cast-off otherness. As we correspond with these inner contents through a deliberate exercise of reflection, whether in analysis, therapy, spiritual direction, or other forms that allow for a depth of reflection, eventually a third factor or position emerges through what Jung calls the transcendent function of the psyche. When the transcendent function is activated, a symbol begins to unfold in pictorial, tactile, or auditory statements and images that represent a synthesis of the opposing elements and a resolution to the conscious conflict (Jung, 1921, par. 825; Jung’s Collected Works are cited by publication date and paragraph). The transcendent function of the psyche is a crucial conduit of perception through which unitary reality is experienced.

Attending to this conscious-unconscious process fuels a living, symbolic process: one vivid, alive, inspiring, meaningful, wherein we begin to understand the specific significance of our individual symbols that, simultaneously, point
toward, and participate in, their archetypal source and its own source. When we begin to pay attention to this innate capacity, our lives change significantly as we develop the inner psychological strength to deal with the opposites and with paradox that we often rationalize out of experience or ignore because it is painful or provokes anxiety.

Being of religious roots and unknowledgeable of depth psychology in the seventeenth century, Boehme thinks of spirit as the kindling, animating power, or soul of existence. For him, spirit emanates not only from God, but significantly also from a primal preexistent freedom that is before God. Boehme’s apprehension of spirit is another sort of reality altogether, a certainty that he attests to that gives meaning to existence rather than being merely a layer or part of existence. In Three Principles of the Divine Essence, Boehme speaks of how he understands the structure of divine-human relationship. As summarized by scholar Arthur Versluis, Boehme says,

God the Father is the First Principle, the Divine Essence; the Second Principle is the Holy Spirit, associated with the “Light-World”; and between these two is the Third Principle, which includes the elemental and sidereal world, where the counterposed powers of Satan and Christ appear (Versluis, 1999, pp. 13–15).

Versluis goes on to explain that Boehme’s Second Principle (that of spirit) is “opened unto us” by “living in the Third Principle.” We could say that there are correlations between Boehme’s Third Principle, with its “counterposed powers,” and Jung’s “world of opposites.” Further, Boehme’s Second Principle (of spirit), which is “opened unto us” as we wrestle with the counterposed powers, appears to
be analogous to Jung’s transcendent function that leads us to an experience of the Self, the archetype that contains all opposites.

But, for Boehme, more than a principle, spirit is direct immediate experience. He grasps this immediacy in the way he gets inside himself and is honest about what is passing through his consciousness. He does not deny what exists but claims it with visceral honesty, intuiting and acknowledging both the transcendent and the immanent as intrinsic to the expression of spirit in terms of unitary reality. Spirit, as it inspires (*inspirare*: to breathe) the inward union of two beings, breathes the essence of soul from one into the “other” and thus imprints the other with what Boehme calls its *signature*.

The activity of spirit in Boehme and Jung, which is so present and vital, expands our notions of human freedom. Our conception of what it means to be in relationship with an other is expanded considerably beyond categories of “other” determined by the ego that are bound by the intrapsychic and/or externalized products of introjection and projection.

For Jung, the other is any part different from the ego with which we are identified. Jung’s notion of individuation centers upon the development of personality, which is a practical and inevitable process for all of us throughout our lives; but he further emphasizes the profound creativity, and the possibility of rather profound healing and transformation that is possible when the opposites of otherness in the psyche are confronted consciously. As the ego (necessary to us, but actually not the center, or central force of psychological structure) opens to and can relate to
the otherness intrinsic to the nature of the human psyche, the ego is thereby relativized but not annihilated.

The individuation process in its fulfillment is called by Jung the *coniunctio oppositorum* or the union of opposites that embraces and reconciles all contraries (noting that there are various levels of *oppositorum*). Jung’s immediate way of knowing gives us a valuable method for knowing how these expressions of contrariness, as they occur in and through the psyche, can be identified, related to, and synthesized. Our inner house gets stretched and we begin to understand the scriptural essences of the notion of “many mansions.” Not only does life become increasingly interesting as a result of this inner expansiveness, but also things begin to come to us that we never would have expected, because the ego is no longer holding us captive to restrictive projections.

And then there is Jung’s idea of *unus mundus*, the conception of a unitary world based upon a principle of acausality, which has bearing in this discussion. Currently, this concept of *unus mundus* is being considered in terms of an interactive field in analysis (*cf.* Schwartz-Salant, 1995, p. 2). The *unus mundus* is a unitary world (psychologically speaking) that offers glimpses of a unitary reality while, at the same time, emphasizing the relations existing between things and the relations between relations. Each stratum of existence is understood to be linked with all other strata in this original unity. So, we have the experience of the whole but also that of the parts of the whole. Not only is this experience awe-inspiring, it also aligns us with external otherness in a way that is crucial to our global identity as we strive toward a global consciousness in which we do not need to obliterate one another.
Jung speaks of the *unus mundus* as connected to the archetype as psychoid. *Psychoid* for him suggests that psyche and matter may be two aspects of one and the same thing (Jung, 1960, par. 418). In other words, the archetype may be capable of manifesting in both material and psychical forms of existence (Ibid., pars. 840–841), meaning that what we glimpse as otherness in the psychoid event is a linking of the psychic and material worlds. These events do not coincide in time and space, but they do occasionally intersect physical and psychic reality and give us the background for discerning psychological meaning.

Unlike the more fundamental levels of the unconscious that I have mentioned, the psychoid level is not easily accessible to consciousness; but, when intersected, it gives us glimpses of a unitary reality. My purpose in offering the examples of Boehme and Jung’s experience of the abyss/Ungrund and Pleroma as other is to illustrate this layer of unconscious activity.

Clinically, the therapeutic value of the other in the process of individuation leads toward the healing experience of a unitary reality in which analyst and patient may be directed by an actual event or process to areas of traumatization or suffering that otherwise remain unconscious. Boehme and Jung offer valuable examples that exemplify processes and psychological events that are helpful to our understanding similar occurrences in the clinical transference, in dreams, and through the synthesizing effect of the transcendent function.

The process and/or event of unitary reality is a healing one. It is healing in that at the level of the archetypal as psychoid we also glimpse the reality of the Self, what Jung
calls the archetype of the center. The Self mediates for the individual both poles of the archetype and bridges between material and psychical forms of existence. The experience of the Self is of having spirit in the body. The patient may begin to experience having a center, even though this internal kernel of core-self is initially experienced as other and continues to have its own independent life even after the ego comes to consciousness of it.

The Self opens us to the experience of all-encompassing worldliness. We exist anew with the perception that there is unity in all things even though this perception may be for only fifteen minutes, as we shall see with one of Boehme’s experiences, or for flashes here and there, clinically, when the analyst carries one of the poles of the patient’s psyche for a time before the patient can relate to it and integrate it consciously.

As the manifestation of Self is constellated, we usually feel very alive, hooked by an impetus of desire that pulls us forward like a great magnet, and we often feel the polarities of life-death, joy-sorrow, light-dark, safety-paranoia, moral imposition-ego justification—many opposites—oscillating back and forth in us as the Self makes its presence known. Simultaneously, the ego is thrown off-base and loses its position of central command. We can become terribly confused and fearful, a fear that is impending and ominous, life-threatening, at least as the ego perceives it.

If we move away from the center the Self has forged with its penetrating otherness, depending upon what this central archetype has in store for us in terms of what in us needs integrating, we may feel anything from terror to bliss, or both, as opposite positions emerge through an internal
dialogue, completely throwing off what we thought we knew. We are presented with the tremendous challenge of hanging on for the duration of what may last for minutes or days, months, or years. At best, if we can hold the center, converse with it, translate its contents into life, then we most often can feel the abundant flow of creativity, new ideas, new forms of expression as spirit surges into our life directing and redirecting our activity.

Later chapters devoted to clinical examples will give us raw and contemporary material to explore the Self event and process at the psychoid level, which Jung also refers to as the somatic unconscious (1988, pp. 44,1ff.). In contrast to the psychic unconscious, which is for Jung more about our psychological movement on a mental-spiritual level in which images, patterns, and causality are the informing materials of individuation, the (psychoid) somatic unconscious is more about a psycho-physical layer of reality. What is efficacious for the healing and wholeness of some persons may be less about the *prima materia* of mental and spiritual processes and more about the restoration of spirit in the body, in matter.

In instances of severe trauma, Jung’s concept of the archetype as psychoid alerts us to a revolutionary notion, one in which the unfolding of the Self as an innate and potential bridging reality links the material and psychical, inner and outer, in one reality. We may go in and out of this reality, but once we know it is there and that it is real, it makes a difference. For instance, we might realize that our childhood injuries are not entirely dependent upon our mother or father’s reality but instead upon unitary reality, a oneness that is present to us beyond our first caregivers.
I am emphasizing the possibility for healing, even for those with more severe trauma, by working in relationship with another person toward a meeting of human and divine spirit. Over time, as the presence of remembered oneness is allowed authentically in the relationship, we begin to live into and to integrate into our conscious experience the potential unity of all opposites that we once experienced in a pre-differentiated state of being. This pre-differentiated state of being reaches all the way back in time, to the mother of our developmental years, and before time, to that moment of severance from our creator, the moment in which we became incarnate.

Unitary reality, and all the trials and suffering that are entailed in forging a relationship with this reality, gives us hope beyond hope that there is a preexistent ground of unitary reality. This preexistent ground exists, is personal, knows us, and we can relate to it in a meaningful way through tools of the psyche that we inherit. Knowing and experiencing this reality, even once, can sustain our restless souls for a lifetime with an inspired confidence that only the ego and body will die—there is something more eternal at this primal center that transcends death and sustains aliveness in some form that we cannot claim to know yet.

Crucially, given this point of view, an individual’s potential for wholeness would not be entirely dependent upon a human being—the maternal figure so emphasized in most psychoanalytic developmental theory—who is a limited human being like all the rest of us. Our impetus in psychological work would be reclaiming one’s birthright to live in the image of our original ground.
Jung, for one, claims that the physical and psychic are possibly but two aspects of one and the same underlying reality. The world of matter, then, is a mirror-image of the world of spirit or of the psyche, and vice versa (Jung, 1963, pars. 766–69). Quantum physics is confirming this notion of mirror image. An image of this “vice versa” might be that of a great universal conjunction of all that is vital of nature with all that is alive of spirit. The idea would be the possibility of consummating a relationship to this larger Self that bridges heaven and earth as a creative act penultimate only to heaven itself.

Clinically, to access later in an adult life what is stored or hidden at this difficult and fairly inaccessible psychoid and somatic layer, we would have to access not only what is unconscious in the usual psychic sense—for example, with the images and emotions we know and are familiar with—but also the somatic, or body-matter, pole that is so unconscious that it feels to be unconscious to the unconscious itself. In other words, what is known even at the primordial level has to be encountered and relinquished as known to meet what is beyond it, more unconscious, more unknown. In essence, it means encountering what is totally unknown from the conscious viewpoint of the ego, and it involves the body specifically.

The nature of the trauma is “doubly un-conscious” given the fact that the psychoid-and-somatic level of reality is already tremendously inaccessible. Our usual, causal measures of accessing trauma at the level of the psychic unconscious (mental images) would therefore not be particularly mutative.
What would be the nature of the experience necessary to access this psychoid layer? What would the experience feel like? How would we access and approach such states of unknowing in a way that promotes healing and circulation to this very difficult and impenetrable layer?

Boehme and Jung give witness to this layer of existence. The Pleroma for Jung and the Ungrund for Boehme grounded the fact of a unitary reality for both, a “window to eternity,” which enabled them to see through their newly constellated realities (the Self, and Christ) to a pre-differentiated, universal ground.

For Boehme, there are similar layers of otherness to Jung’s. Otherness for him takes on a more spiritual language. Analogous to the projection and introjection level of surface immediacy in Jung, otherness for Boehme pertains to the outward life. The outward life can border dangerously upon becoming an external shell when it becomes one-sidedly rational and devoid of deep feeling. Otherness at this level pertains to our being subject to worldly spirit in contrast to the immediacy of divine spirit.

At the primordial level, which points beyond the psyche but still is of the psyche, Boehme speaks of otherness as the fact of wrath and evil thrust directly into the fact of silent emptiness and the good. He insists that the imagination connects us to the center of existence while distinguishing imagination from a fantasy that separates us from reality (1978, p. 103). At the deepest center of imagination, “What remains hidden since the beginning of the world” becomes a mystery that we can apprehend and hold in our consciousness.

Here, like Jung, Boehme attests to another level of radically other otherness. The realm outside of time and space
is accessible and real. Boehme attests that experience of the divine is beyond any of our rational categories and can best be described as a void or an abyss. What psychology speculates is an interactive field may be analogous to Boehme’s experience of the Ungrund as a negative presence that is full. He is referring to something beyond the ego, beyond the unconscious, to the divine, although he tends to equate the divine with the unconscious. Nonetheless, what he is referring to is a movement of the ego to something positive, real, and transformative.

Methodologically, in lining up the images of the radical otherness—Ungrund and Pleroma for Boehme and Jung—I will briefly discuss the different vocabularies of the two in the context of spirit and otherness. Additionally, I will address some of the resistances to otherness at this level of experience that are evident not only in individuals, but also on a cultural level. My primary focus will be to elucidate notions drawn from their individual experience that are applicable to the healing of persons in clinical practice.

Boehme and Jung, in their respective ways, are open to participating in the immediacy of transforming spirit. They share an interest in the world of the subject and a concern for the interior life.

Although they meet in these specific ways, there are also some differences between them that distinguish them as theologian and as depth psychologist. There remains, for Boehme, a seventeenth-century German man, something ineffable in religious experience. At the other end of the spectrum, Jung, a twentieth-century man of Swiss descent, focuses upon manifestations in the clinical encounter, often
skipping over the subject of another layer of existence beyond the objective unconscious altogether. He does talk, however, about God beyond the objective psyche and thinks we do have a soul that is “related to deity,” which we are capable of knowing.

In the examples of Boehme and Jung, we see that unitary reality underlies all psychological experience. In the encounter of both men with the deepest layer of the collective unconscious, they meet all forms of otherness including radically other otherness. What was known to be real from the ego’s perspective is surpassed. A star is born—a unitary reality that enables them to see through the psyche to a pre-differentiated, universal ground.