

Where Do We Go From Here? The Myth of the New Millennium

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The Age of Pisces dawned with the story of a man who rose from the dead, but was no ghost. He could eat bread and drink wine, and still had the marks of the nails in his hands. Yet there was something startling about him. Sometimes he shone whiter than snow and could walk through walls. His disciples found they could speak in their own rude tongue and be understood by Persians and Medes. They had the same powers as the risen man. They gave the blind sight, made the lame walk, and they could even cast out devils. Whole towns emptied, as the god-struck followers retired to caves and stone huts in the deserts of Egypt, Syria, and Palestine.

Now with Aquarius on the horizon, we hear some of the same themes. People who have been declared dead have returned to tell us of the brightly shining beings they have seen and the transcendent feelings and convictions that have turned their values upside down. Others are able to see us all as shining egg-shaped auras of light, and by manipulating them heal our solid bodies of flesh. A white buffalo was recently born in Wisconsin -- possibly in fulfillment of a Lakota millennial prophecy. People are experimenting with lucid dreaming, out-of-body journeys, and shamanism. Others claim to be "channeling" wisdom from aliens, intergalactic Beings of Light, who are beaming love and exotic knowledge onto this planet from distant stars or "mother ships." Their message -- despite its techno-jargon -- is structurally almost identical with the Gnostic mythologies that had such a strong influence on C. G. Jung.

We Jungians -- despite our mystical reputation -- are hard-headed enough to be dismayed by much of what we see in the New Age. Our New Age analysts seem to jump from one fad to another and be overly gullible about everything that smacks of the marvelous. New Age enthusiasts may generally be characterized by their fascination for anything that prompts the "Oh Wow!" response. They're in love with promises of wonder and bliss, and delude themselves into thinking they're more than half the way there, by the simple device of denying and projecting the shadow.

Every analyst that learns I've been studying New Age has said, "I hope you're going to take them to task for denying the shadow!" But I have no intention of shaking my finger at them. Rather I've been trying to figure out what they find so compelling. I've been looking for the mythological foundations of this mad and maddening popular enthusiasm that we so often dismiss. To that end, I've been less interested in the "Oh Wow!" enthusiasts, those who flock to workshops where overnight transformations are offered and gullibly hoped for. Instead, I've concentrated on the few I call the New Age Pioneers.

The pioneers of the New Age are often people who do not consider themselves New Agers. They've had experiences which have scared them and challenged consensus reality. But having no choice in the matter, the pioneers have been unable to dismiss their unwanted experiences. Therefore, they have had to struggle with themselves and the uncanny events that have befallen them. They have felt assaulted and have had to struggle with shadow figures possessing archetypal power. In doing so, they have changed in ways that suggest Jung's notion of individuation.

My aim this morning is to tell the narrative of the New Age Myth that lies behind all the mysticism and all the bunk. I won't have time to give you much of the evidence I've sifted through. But I can give you a short list of some of the kinds of New Age claim that I've examined.

Aura-reading, for example, seems to amount to a visionary intuition regarding the psychology of the individual being "read." This corresponds to our own counter-transference reactions. Some analysts report that they often feel sensations in their bodies which help them to understand unexpressed aspects of their patients' psychology. Others, like Schwartz-Salant and Spiegelman, write of having such sensations in their "subtle bodies." Aura-readers I've spoken with confirm this connection, telling me that the vision of an aura is perhaps more a feeling they are having in their bodies than it is a visual image.

Common sense tells us that these feelings may not always be accurate. They may be more subjective than objective. Nevertheless, the fact that some aura readers are remarkably accurate in diagnosing psychological imbalances and even physical diseases, implies that their intuitions can be as reliable -- and unreliable -- as our own. I conclude, therefore, that aura readers are gaining imaginal access to the interactive field that exists between themselves and their clients. When they speak of the visual image of a luminous egg, they are giving us a simplified description of an experience which is actually as complex and multidimensional as our own counter-transference reactions.

Near-death experiences, insofar as they generally deal with a life-review, seem to be providing access to the same sort of imaginal vision -- a contrast between the ego-identity as it was lived before the close brush with death and the potential of the larger psyche. Unlike the aura readers, they are seeing images of their own psychological state and their own life-style -- rather than that of someone else. But the information is so much of a similar nature that I'm inclined to say, What the near-death people experience as a condensed life-drama from a perspective much larger than the ego, the aura readers see as a kind of snap-shot. Near-death journeys into a Kingdom of Light seem invariably to challenge and loosen up the rigidities of the complexes, providing a perspective more in line with what we Jungians call the Self.

Out-of-body journeys, when they are autonomous and force themselves upon the individual, lead in a similar direction. To leave the body behind means to gain a distance from our fleshly existence in collective consciousness and from our own personal complexes so as to enter an archetypal realm. People like Robert A. Monroe have been required to struggle with their shadow and fear of death in order to catch a glimpse of human existence *sub speciae aeternitatis*. The experience of out-of-body journeyers is more diffuse than that of the

near-death life-review. But it tends in the same direction. By conscientiously taking up shadow issues from a viewpoint close to that of the Self, these people are stumbling along the road toward individuation.

Urban shamanism shares much with aura-reading and out-of-body journeys. Again, we might say these imaginal experiences take place within the interactive field between shaman and patient. All shamanic work is based on what we call counter-transference. Shamans enter altered states of consciousness to heighten the visual dimension of the intuitions arising from the interactive field. But we analysts, too, are attentive to shifts in our consciousness while doing the work of analysis. And we use the information derived from these shifts for purposes of empathy, interpretation, and influence.

UFO encounters and abductions -- whatever else they may be -- are surely also imaginal experiences. Dream-like and out-of-body elements imply the same sort of distinction between a fleshly ego that lives in consensus reality ringed about with complexes, and a much greater identity -- the identity of the soul, the luminous journeyer, which may be "read" as an object (the aura) or imaginally *lived*, as the subtle body that travels through a greater Cosmos invisible to our fleshly eyes.

In a more fragmentary manner, those who have merely *seen* aliens, angels, or other Beings of Light, have not so much entered and sojourned through the greater Cosmos, as encountered a hint that another order of human experience may be available to us. As I see it, the difference between a visitation by an angel and a close encounter with an alien is more a matter of theological interpretation and defensiveness than anything else. Aliens have much more of the shadow about them. We haven't the faintest idea of what they may do. They seem to be dangerous archetypes, personified in lycra suits of silver or gray. Meanwhile, those who write books about angels are careful to assure their readers that angels are -- by definition -- inherently good, that we have nothing to fear. Obviously the fear is being suppressed by appeals to the bible and Roman Catholic folklore. A Luciferian shadow lurks just off-stage.

In their various ways, all of these New Age pioneers have discovered the reality of the soul -- not as a quaint churchly notion but as a living experience. They say that their souls have left their bodies and been transported on beams of light to flying saucers or have passed through a tunnel to a Kingdom of Light. Or else they have sojourned through a greater Cosmos comprised of spheres of Light nested inside one another and growing in purity and spirituality the farther they ascend from the Earth.

They have, in fact, rediscovered the greater Cosmos articulated by the ancient Gnosticism that flourished 2000 years ago, the cosmology of shamanism that reaches as far back in human history as anthropologists and scholars of religion have been able to go. Their experiences resemble that of the *merkabah* mystics who preceded the Jewish tradition of Kabbalah, the *mi'raj* of Muhammad, and the visions of the alchemists. In this sense, there is little that is new about the New Age. It is a rediscovery of human capabilities that have been suppressed out of the mainstream of human culture for the last five or six thousand years, while we have been developing theologies, philosophies, literature, history, and science -- in short all the conceptual apparatus of a discriminating ego.

These New Age pioneers have not abandoned their left-brained egos. If it is their *right* brains that have functioned during their out-of-body sojourns in the greater Cosmos, they have struggled with this "Cosmic Consciousness," employing their left brains in a tough-minded way to integrate as much as they can. The universe has changed for them in a profound manner, and they are wrestling with all their might to assimilate the changes and figure out how to live accordingly. In this sense, they are quite different from the New Age enthusiasts who flock to weekend workshops to dabble in wonders and never pass beyond a kind of "Oh Wow!" stage of amazement. The New Age dabblers are impressed with the idea of soul, but they are doing very little to integrate it into their daily lives.

The New Age values soul in a manner that closely resembles the attitude of the ancient Gnostics who divided the world's population into three classes. The great unwashed majority, they called the *sarkikoi*, the "flesh people," who saw themselves as identical with their bodies and were therefore trapped in a world that is merely empirical, where they blindly struggled to survive and to obtain temporary gratifications. Hopelessly benighted, the flesh people were driven by their instincts and complexes and could not achieve salvation.

A much smaller portion of the human race had to some extent escaped the determinism of the flesh. These were called the *psychikoi*, the "soul people." These individuals had real first-hand experience of what it means to be a soul. In their visions, they could wander through the nested spheres of light that surround the Earth and gain a certain wisdom from these experiences. Nevertheless, they were always in danger of falling victim to the Archons, the rulers of the lower spheres, who would deceive us into thinking that they are the central and highest power in the universe -- rather than the petty demons that they are. The Archons are the shadow side of the spirit archetype.

The third and smallest class of Gnostics, the spiritual elite, the ones they called the *pneumatikoi*, were the "spirit people." They had gained the wisdom found only through gnosis -- that special sort of knowing by which the mystic can see right through the fascinating multiplicity of the greater Cosmos, all the way to the unitary principle that lies behind it. This ultimate source of all Being was the One, the God beyond all qualities, from whom the universe of spirits, souls, and bodies has emanated.

After encountering the One, the spirit people were invulnerable to entrapment by the Archons. Their archetypes were in balance, they had realized the Self. Or so they tell us. We might have our own ideas about how many of them succeeded in this task. But the goal -- however it may be described -- is the kernel of the myth. It forms the ground beneath every character and every event in the story. It is the ultimate *raison d'être*.

The mythic narratives of late antique Gnosticism were as motley and full of symbolic balderdash as the cosmologies and morality tales of the New Age. For all that, Hans Jonas has shown us that the general lines of a single narrative can be found in those old papyri. It's not so much different from the tale I'm about to tell. A sacred history that began *in illo tempore*, in the time before time began. Yet it stretches far enough forward to encompass the trials and ecstasies of our own human existence.

In the beginning was the One, a Being of ineffable Pure Light. Having nothing outside itself to serve as a point of comparison, the One did not truly know itself. Wanting to know, the One emanated from itself spheres of Light in a progressive series, each less pure than the last. These spheres were not inanimate realms, like the circles on the surface of a pond, but were filled with living, intelligent Beings of Light. From the very beginning they all knew, through *gnosis*, that their origin and destiny lay in the One. They were riveted by the One in their *gnosis*, and did not know themselves.

Just as they were created to reflect the One, and enable it to know itself, so they needed something other than Pure Light by which to know themselves. Inspired by their memories of the creation of the Cosmos of Light, therefore, they created for themselves lesser worlds from the most impure substance of all, matter.

With the creation of worlds of material life, time began. Time is the measure of change and growth. This is the one feature that had been missing from the static nested spheres of the Cosmos of Light.

Material beings are characterized by growth. Each one is born, develops to its maturity of optimal independence and autonomy, and then declines toward death. Material, temporal existence is always a Being-toward-death. In death, living beings decompose into their elements; and these, in turn, comprise the fleshly bodies of the beings who live at a later time. On account of this cyclical process of life giving way to death and death supporting life, every material world, every growing world, is itself engaged in a process of evolution. Higher, more complex, forms of material life evolve out of simpler forms.

All material beings live by changing, are in fact nothing but the series of changes that constitutes growing, temporal, material existence. Fleshly life in time supplies the change and opportunity for learning that is missing in the static Cosmos of Light. Recognizing this, the Beings of Light saw that their chance to gain self-knowledge would best be realized not simply by observing material existence from afar, but by choosing to enter it themselves.

They entered the only way they could, as the souls of newly conceived human bodies. In doing so, they had to accept the biological conditions of human life: birth, growth, the struggle for existence, and death. They entered on a temporal basis, in each instance only for the lifetime of a single human being. But because from the viewpoint of the greater Cosmos, all time is simultaneous, each Being of Light was able to enter many lives.

We are those Beings of Light as they have become enfleshed in the last centuries of Pisces. The Beings of Light are our more complete reality, our soul, our journeyer, which becomes visible as the luminous egg of our aura, and which has been incarnated many times before and will likely undergo many more incarnations in the future.

Human existence is a forgetting in order to learn. We have had to forget the Being of Light who is our journeyer in order to immerse ourselves in this world of emotions and thoughts. The evolution of human consciousness represents a collective learning process -- learning what it means to be alive, what it means to feel, what it means to know. Above all, it is a process of learning who we are.

Ages ago, before the rising sun in spring had entered the Sign of Taurus, we had Cosmic Consciousness, but little else. Our human existence was a fight for survival, but we had not yet entered that fight in earnest. We relied on our Cosmic Consciousness to help us find the food, shelter, warmth, and companionship we needed to survive on Earth. But we also remained detached. Our Cosmic Consciousness lent us a knowledge of being one with the Earth and all its creatures. We had a vague mystical awareness, but we had not yet come really to know the planet or ourselves.

In the Age of Aries, the Beings of Light immersed themselves more deeply in their human flesh. The ambitious and talented used their newly developed sensory knowledge to overpower and control others in order to increase their own wealth, fame, and comfort. They were the kings, traders, and military officers. Everyone else had to become cunning to survive. Cunning guided a thirst for the knowledge of techniques and strategies. We largely forgot our Cosmic Consciousness, mourning it vaguely, establishing religions to try to rekindle it.

In the Age of Pisces, we developed stable egos for the first time, began to know ourselves and to appreciate one another. We developed highly diverse literatures, histories, philosophies, and science. We mastered the physical world with our machines. We completed a phase in our immersion in the world of time and flesh, but paid a rather high price. We have come to distrust Cosmic Consciousness. For most of us, it has become an unthinkable impossibility. We have been marshaling arguments for centuries to prove that it does not exist.

The New Age of Aquarius represents a monumental change, something like the reversal of millennia of suppression. People are spontaneously encountering fragments of Cosmic Consciousness -- excitedly talking about the auras they have been *seeing*, and the Beings of Light that have appeared as angels and other entities alien to our bodily experience as fleshly egos. We are again enthusiastic about the possibility of reincarnation and other amazing wonders. People who have nearly died are returning from their experience with reports of the nested spheres of Light they have seen, and the suggestion that we ourselves are the Beings of Light that live in that greater Cosmos.

Many are beginning to challenge ideas that have dominated the Age of Pisces: the separateness of individual egos and the mastery of the planet. We hear talk of a Global Village and Spaceship Earth. Beings of Light who had largely forgotten their essential identity over the last two astrological ages are beginning to remember who they are. Their Cosmic Consciousness is making a bid for equal consideration alongside the sensory and conceptual knowledge of fleshly egos. The plan of the One to know itself is making a huge leap forward.

Like every myth, the sacred narrative of the New Age functions as a moral exhortation. Having discovered how things "really" are, we are called to change our lives. But this time there is no Code of Hammurabi or Ten Commandments, no imperial decrees regarding which specific acts must be done and which avoided. Still, the New Age is hardly a call for licentiousness and moral chaos. A larger principle has been discovered -- something akin, perhaps, to what Nietzsche called "Beyond Good and Evil."

Each of us is faced with the discrepancy between our larger, essential identity as a Being of Light and our more limited habitual persona as a fleshly ego. We catch *sight* of our life-review in the snapshot that is the luminous egg of our aura. It calls us to a wider perspective, not one that can be encoded in general rules of right and wrong. Instead, we are each presented with our own individual task to balance our aura by bringing our fleshly life-course into alignment with our journeyer. What does it mean to be alive and not just living? What do I say to the One, as I sit every day in meditation? Why do I imprison myself in a broom-closet, now that the door is open?

The morality of the New Age eschews simple generalities. In each case it formulates itself as a mysterious *koan*. The Being of Light incarnated in each life-course has its own unique lesson to learn. We distract ourselves by developing self-righteous internal monologues that condemn other Beings of Light for following their own *koan* instead of ours. We abandon our own holy obligation when we look about and condemn ourselves for our stupidity and inadequacy at not having made the achievements that others seem to have made.

In each case our moral task is our individual life's work and may not be exchanged for anyone else's. At the same time, however, each individual task is the work of a Being of Light who is coming to know itself and thereby to reveal another facet of the ineffable One. In each case, therefore, our individual task is a small piece in the monumental work of the One's quest to know itself. Each is a contribution to reconciling gnosis with sensory knowledge and a self-conscious way of life.

This is the Myth of the New Age as I reconstruct it. It is a great church window, full of colors and forms, each fascinating in itself; but taken altogether, it comprises a magnificent, unified design. Clearly most New Agers -- certainly the enthusiasts of the "*Oh Wow!*" variety, and very possibly even most of the pioneers -- the vast majority of New Agers have never glimpsed the whole window. When we look at the New Age, as it presents itself in most books and workshops, it seems as though the glorious window has fallen out of its frame and crashed into a million shards on the ground. People are running off, each enthusiastically clutching a single fascinating fragment. The New Age is in disarray. We have a long way to go. I'm left asking myself, is this the blueprint for our next 2200 years of human consciousness? Or will the natural Gnosticism of the human soul be driven underground again?

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No doubt you have noticed in this account a remarkable similarity with the views Jung expresses in the "Late Thoughts" chapter of *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. This is hardly surprising. For Jungian psychology is in large part a conceptual and clinically oriented exploration of the natural Gnosticism of the human soul. In the New Age Myth we have a drama that begins in unconscious unity. But process is unkind to states of oceanic oneness. It poses problems that force us into conflicts, internal oppositions, and a painful course of differentiation. But, as the alchemists said, *Solve et coagula*. After the dissolution and differentiation comes the coagulation, the reunification at a new level.

The Myth of the New Age tells us that the differentiation of the ego out of the collective unconscious, together with its conceptual and technological achievements, has brought us to a seeming dead-end. It agrees with Jung's assessment that modern life is characterized by chaos, meaninglessness, and the defensive stance of mass-mindedness. The solution to this condition is to recognize that we have fallen. To take up in all seriousness our collective depression and our dissociative splits. To descend more-or-less consciously into the collective unconscious. To hold the tension between ego and archetype. To await the guidance of the transcendent function.

If we wish, we can view the New Age Myth as thoroughly Jungian, and we are not far wrong to do so. Nevertheless, there is a difficulty here. Our Jungian shadow enters the picture as soon as we think of the New Age as nothing more than an unconscious form of Jungian psychology decked out in motley and bells. Our triumphant, know-it-all stance clashes with those bubble-headed New Age dabblers that wander into our consulting rooms -- when we want to shake our finger at them and sternly warn them about denying the shadow.

We're in danger of telling them that this greater Cosmos and this Cosmic Consciousness that makes them say "Oh Wow!" is *nothing but* the collective unconscious. We're in danger of becoming reductionists when we say it's all *inside*, or that the nested spheres of Light are merely a vision of the psyche itself. The New Age represents a re-emergence of what Jung called "primitive mentality" -- the view that the psyche is outside rather than within. To work effectively with these people, we have to allow ourselves to be taught by them -- much as Jung sat at the feet of the Woman Who Lived on the Moon. That catatonic young woman had been impervious to all the other psychiatrists who had worked with her. Only because Jung allowed himself to be taught -- only because he concluded, *She really is living on the moon* -- was he able to connect with her and enable her to rejoin the human race.

The New Age is trying to teach us Jungians a new sort of "primitivity." The reality of a psyche that exists not only inside us, but outside as well, and that can approach us so compellingly that we have no choice but to admit its autonomous reality. These Beings of Light are as real as the lunar vampire who raped the Woman Who Lived on the Moon. What the New Agers need from us is recognition of the vital reality of luminous eggs, nested spheres of Light, and beings that change shape seemingly at will. We need to steal a page from Pierre Janet, who said of his psychotics at the Salpetriere, "I *believe* these people." Only then can we be of any use to the alien abductee who said to John Mack: "Some of this stuff *ain't* real. Help me to sort it out."