

FOREWORD BY GAIL GODWIN

Knowing the
QUESTIONS
Living the
ANSWERS

A JUNGIAN GUIDE THROUGH THE PARADOXES OF PEACE,
CONFLICT AND LOVE THAT MARK A LIFETIME

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I would like to beg you, dear Sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love *the questions themselves* as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. *Live* the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing, live your way into the answer.

– Rainer Maria Rilke

Author's Note

All stories, dialogues, and dreams in this book, except those I specifically designate as being my own, reflect material people have shared with me. To protect the privacy of those people, I have carefully altered anything that might disclose the identity of particular individuals or permit the identification of actual relationships or circumstances. Any similarity between the people and situations I have used for illustration and actual people or situations is unintended and purely coincidental.

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THE QUEST FOR LIFE

THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

Once we are born, the symbolic dawn of childhood begins. Childhood is the bedrock of our personality, the foundation of how we relate to ourselves and the world. As children, we develop in two ways simultaneously. We develop physical skills and we also develop a sense of identity, of psychological *form*.

This quest for identity is both personal and collective. Thus, as history evolves, human beings in general seek an always-becoming collective identity along the lines of life's general pattern. This quest is also carried forward by each of us as individuals, in every generation, in terms of our personal path.

Jung used the term "psyche" (meaning the whole of our being, conscious and unconscious, body and spirit) in contrast to the more commonly used term, "personality" (which usually refers to personal characteristics or traits in a manner that ignores spirit and often ignores important components of our unconscious mind as well as our body). The breadth of this definition of psyche is important if we want to understand our own

childhood, because childhood occurrences are not simply cognitive events. The dramatic circumstances of childhood live on in our emotions, our temperament, and our body as well as in our mind—they are “structured” into our personality by our experiences. That is why we cannot simply leave them behind, think them away, and “get on with our lives.” We must return again and again to locate our roots. Each time we do, we will find the energy to carry us more fully into the experience of living. Each time, we will become less dominated by the events that formed us.

This process is particularly important if we have been harshly wounded in childhood, if we have been rejected or otherwise traumatized by our parents. Such wounds shake, and may destroy, our trust in the world. If these wounds are deep enough, they may leave us detached from our own nature, cut off from the reality of our feelings and experiences. As a result, we may live either in an idealized fantasy world or in an emotional hell of depression and anxiety. Neither is real, even though we experience it as though it were.

When either of these things happens, our ability to relate to life realistically has been repressed into what Jung called the shadow side of our personality. Ordinarily, our shadow consists of the inferior (traits or qualities we are not good at and therefore we try to avoid developing), uncivilized (socially undesirable), and animal (baser instinctual) qualities of our personality. They are the qualities we repress in order to fit our identity into the conventional molds put forward by our family and culture. However, if our family and others in our environment disapprove of a particular quality or are brutal, threatening, or anxious and disturbed, we may also repress our *best* qualities in an effort to draw as little attention to ourselves as possible. As a result, we will have disassociated from our capacity for a normal life. At this point, our life’s work, psychologically, becomes a crusade for our own existence and for the courage to mourn our cruel beginnings.

In some cases, childhood wounds may be deep enough to destroy a person. But in less extreme cases, difficult childhoods often contribute to the redemption of culture by giving us extra-sensitive, creative people. If we examine the lives of outstanding individuals in almost any field—politics, art, business, and so on—the greatest ones almost always come from homes that were in some way troubled. Whether Beethoven or Churchill, Roosevelt or MacArthur, DaVinci or Emily Dickinson, we find the mythological pattern of a challenging development calling forth the spirit of their particular talents to create their destiny. Further, because all of us are wounded to some extent, mourning needs to be reincorporated as an accepted, necessary, and respected part of our culture, for we all suffer as a result of living. In fact, Joseph Campbell, the

well-known authority on mythology, observes that the quester is precisely a person who *has* failed, because his or her life does not work. Interior difficulties force questers to reorganize their life on a higher level, to become, out of necessity, adept at the art of living.

The idea that the way to peace is through adversity runs contrary to the way many of us were brought up. However, harmony and the absence of conflict are not necessary conditions for peace. In fact, if we blindly cling to the notion that they are, we will create a psychological world that *must* explode in our faces, and this explosion is often acted out in the lives of our children. Such an illusory vision of peace leaves us unable to appreciate the world we actually live in and to celebrate life. We have to accept life's imperfections and be at home in them. Otherwise, we deny the cycles of existence, lose our opportunities for meaning, love, and truth, and live as ghosts, both longing for and fearing some future substantiation of our vitality and spiritual potential rather than living now. Pursuing harmony, like pursuing happiness on a shallow level, often robs us of our potential for joy and fulfillment.

The true way to peace is to recognize that our childhood, whether we were happy or not, whether we *think* we were happy or not, was not truly a peaceful time. Our boundaries were fragile. We depended entirely on others for our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, and these others often hurt us, either maliciously or unintentionally. And yet childhood, no matter how bad it may have been, is not a disease to be cured. Because it is the foundation of our life and the beginning of our soul's incarnation, we cannot entirely dissolve or correct its pain by psychological treatment. We can only digest that pain and incorporate it.

Our real struggle is to find a conscious relationship to our own childhood, no matter what it was like. This struggle may call for healing and understanding, but neither of these attainments will count if we cannot also come into a conscious relationship with that period in our life. We must be separate from our childhood—not dominated by its emotional tenor and its events—but we must be connected to it as well. Like it or not, we should see it as the cornerstone of our life, hoping eventually to transform it into a friend, if it is not one already. In chapter 8, in the section titled "Shalom," you will find a very good example of this process, given by a man reflecting on his analytic work.