

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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ISBN: 1453736778
ISBN-13: 9781453736777
eBook ISBN: 978-1-4392-8797-2

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.

5 (Excerpt)

MIDLIFE—SHIFTING SHADOWS

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Midday is a suitable analog for our psychological encounter with midlife. The symbolic sun of our personality is at its highest point and at this time the identity we have built is often at its pinnacle as well. Then, as the sun starts to move past its zenith and toward the horizon, we find that the shadows begin to shift and lengthen. Likewise, within ourselves we may sense the shifting of our inner perspectives.

Approaching any boundary situation in our psychological growth unbalances our energy. As we discussed in the previous chapter, the midday situation becomes even more unbalanced as we realize, even if only vaguely, that our life is neither what we think it is nor what we think it should be. This curious discovery may seem elusive, provocative, or even challenging. It may be humbling or terrifying. As all of this is happening, we also begin to catch glimpses of remote psychological realities that haunt us more than we have ever expected they might.

Our dreams may begin forewarning us. We may dream of living in a house that turns out to be an apartment or a dormitory, showing us that our personality is now in a transitional state. Or we may open a door and discover a hidden portal to some unknown place, warning us even further that we are about to make a passage. Perhaps it will lead into a mansion or a cathedral, or we may fall into a dusky basement or find ourselves in an open space with no shelter at all—an indication that the future is unclear and may be filled with promise or danger.

At this stage, when we are walking in the quiet, we may develop a vague sense that we are being followed. Perhaps, when we enter periods of contemplation (or, more likely in today's world, when fatigue overtakes us), we sense another presence moving along behind us. Unfamiliar figures may appear in our imagination or in our dreams, seeming ambivalent, even when they are pictured as friends, foes, robbers, or murderers. These figures usually leave us uncomfortable and afraid because we cannot truly tell if they

want to help or harm us. They may represent our greatest fear, like the shadowy angel following Christ in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Nikos Kazantzakis' powerful story of Christ's struggle to recognize and accept his identity and its ensuing destiny. We may fear the potentials of our own destiny, of living authentically, and worry that doing so might upset the life we've built.

These mysterious dream figures are the faces of our "shadow." You may recall that as we form our personality, the characteristics, attitudes, and ideals we have "chosen" are in the foreground of our self-consciousness. We present them to the world through our social personality or "persona." But the traits we have rejected have not disappeared. They have simply remained more or less in the background of our personality. This shadow is thus the reflection of a portion of our wholeness. If we deny or repress it, as we normally try to do, we become increasingly one-sided and lacking in human substances.

At the noon-point in our lives, when the light of our psychological sun shifts and begins its descent toward sunset, the time has come for us to go through a similar shift. We must start to direct our energies away from the creation of form and toward the loosening of form. This will allow us to reorient ourselves toward wholeness and prepare for the completion of our journey. Jung was fond of noting, "When *Yang* has reached its greatest strength, the dark power of *Yin* is born within its depths, for the night begins at midday."

When we face this transition, we can resist nature and struggle to keep building onto our hard-won form, but doing so is risky, and nature may tear us away from that form using such apparently uninvited problems as obesity, depression, panic attacks, chronic fatigue syndrome, or other malady, often one that seems beyond the understanding of medical science. This time of transition is especially precarious in an action-oriented society, which is so focused on moving ahead that we run right over our wake-up calls and transition periods, never realizing what we are doing until nature strikes us with a bolt from the blue.

The obsession with performance and the need for control seem to team up to create another danger in our societal selves—an idolizing of "identity." Identity in our media-based culture rests on recognition and power, and is generally based on controlling the impression we make on the public, even when the "public" consists of those we love. (As you might imagine, relationships, inner and outer, suffer when we over-focus on identity.) One of the greatest fears triggered by the noontime shift in perspective is the loss of control and the perceived public shame that may result. The cliché of the man who leaves his wife and family for a younger woman, his own

apartment, and a sports car reflects one common reaction to this fear of the loss of control and the shame that often results from being judged and misunderstood by families, friends, and colleagues.

Without a doubt, our identity is legitimately threatened at midlife, for it must change. It may loosen, rigidify, or transform, but it will not remain static. Fear may compel us to rush from our prior identity into an idealized new one, as many middle-aged women did in the seventies when they left their husbands and families and rushed into a new social identity that wasn't necessarily authentic. In such a case, we may appear to be fashionably self-actualized, but we may also live to discover that underneath the new identity, the old one still is present. We recognize that we have not made the transition until we come to grips with ourselves on the inner level as well. We simply cannot rush through this transition, because we need to discover too much about ourselves and life if we are to make it successfully.

Millennia of wisdom have taught that self-knowledge is the key to loosening our attachment to the form that is our identity. And a fundamental aspect of self-knowledge is figuring out how we assemble our picture of the world. Early in his career, Jung explored the various ways we do this. One of them involves what he called *psychological types*, which are important foundation stones in our development of form. In Jungian psychology, investigating these styles, or types, is a primary step in self-understanding, because the types we have chosen to incorporate into our personality play a large part in determining our perspective on life and how we relate to ourselves and others. Also, the opposites we rejected follow close behind us, causing us no end of problems until we assimilate them into that perspective.

In the fun of classifying ourselves and others, we often forget that Jung's essential message is that we should try to understand psychological types so we can better understand ourselves and become more open to the other types, both inside and outside of ourselves. These insights are some of the easiest we can come by as we begin a process of introspection.