

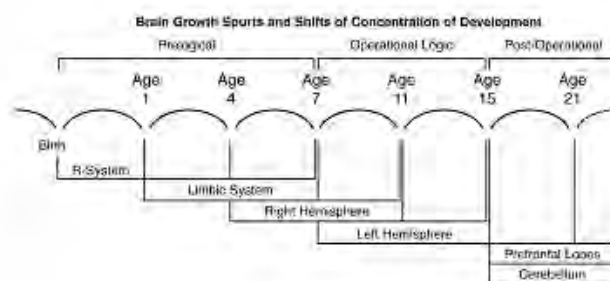


Strange Loops - Gestures of Creation

Implicit in all of Joseph Chilton Pearce's writings is the dynamic, strange looping, or mirroring of our 'astonishing capacities and self-inflicted limitations.' Woven in our design are capacities far beyond those commonly recognized and developed, with a combination of modeling and nurturing being the reciprocal catalyst that drives evolution, or its devolution. Joe lamented that the latter is now driving humanity's fate. "We grow smarter and less intelligent by the day." Our failure to model and nurture our highest, and even most transcendent capacities, betrays nature's intent, our own wellbeing, evolution, and maybe even immortality.

A central theme is the opening and development of higher capacities, empathic and prefrontal brain regions, and how these express in our 'imaginal realms.' Joe grieved that crippling the imaginative capacity with counterfeit virtual realities, television and computer images, prevents us from entering into these higher realms. As we will see, a sharp distinction is made between fantasy, hallucinations, what Rudolf Steiner described as "Imaginative Consciousness," the Eureka experience, or Insight.

In 'Magical Child' Joe describes how the developing body and brain 'anticipates and prepares' for the next emerging stage, while the current state is unaware of what new dimensions or capacities will soon open.



In his last book, originally titled 'Strange Loops - Gestures of Creation,' Joe extends this 'preparing for what is coming next' to mortality of the physical body, and what happens to a unique quality of mind, consciousness, or dare I say, 'soul,' that transcends. If not the body, where will that 'state' we call me go?

For Joe, full development of each stage defines the current stage. It also serves as the critical foundation that sculpts what comes next, including death of the body. "The emerging higher stage or capacities lifts (transforms) the lower into the service of the higher." Failure to fully develop the lower flips nature's design. The higher is drawn-down and enslaved by the lower, intellect, for example, serving envy, greed, aggression, power, lust, the building blocks of ego and culture.

Referencing David Bohm and others, Joe describes how 'thought' as we experience it, and intellect, represent a mechanical, conditioned process, distinct from true intelligence, which he equates with the 'Eureka' experience or 'Insight.' Ego, culture and the images-of-self that emerge from this conditioning represent a 'strange loop' that blinds, negates and prevents the activity of the higher brain function, 'insight-intelligence,' from lifting the lower, you, me and culture, out of its limitations, trapping us in the lower. Adding insult to injury, this devolutionary spiral grows with each generation without anyone being aware of what has been lost. Joe's 'Model Imperative' in retrograde.

Following the above stages of development, Pearce develops a proposal: the capacity to imagine, not what is imagined, but the ‘imaginal capacity of mind,’ and its development, which is the key issue, establishes a relationship with nonlocal ‘fields’ that are independent from, and transcend the limitations of the brain and body. This is Joe’s answer to the question; no longer grounded in the body, where will that ‘state’ we call me go? A very interesting proposal, indeed.

We think, are identified with, and attached to our personal and cultural conditioned mental images. I believe Joe is referring to a state similar to Krishnamurti’s ‘freedom from the known,’ illuminating what is perceived when the mind is free from these conditioned images. Or, the Dalai Lama’s daily meditation, training for clarity at the moment of death, when the mind must recognize its own nature. Joe was familiar and influenced by Plato’s concept of the ‘ideal.’ Ibn ‘Arabi’s (1165–1240), ‘Imaginal Realm,’ the Andalusian Sufi mystic and philosopher, along with Henry Corbin. Plus, Rudolf Steiner’s notion of “Imaginative Consciousness.” And a dash of Gurdjieff for good measure.

The Dalai Lama

The Dalai Lama’s daily meditation practice is deeply intertwined with Tibetan Buddhist teachings on death, rebirth, and the bardo states—the transitional phases between life and death. Each morning, the Dalai Lama rises around 3:30 a.m. and begins his practice with visualizations, mantra recitations, and reflections on bodhicitta—the awakened mind of compassion. This isn’t just devotional—it’s training for clarity at the moment of death. In Tibetan Buddhism, bardo means “in-between state.” There are six bardos, but the most well-known are those surrounding death:

1. **Chikhai Bardo (Moment of Death)** The dissolution of the physical elements—earth, water, fire, air and the emergence of the clear light, the fundamental nature of mind. If recognized, this moment offers instant liberation.
2. **Chonyid Bardo (Experiencing Reality)** The mind encounters peaceful and wrathful deities, projections of its own imprints. These visions can be terrifying or blissful, depending on one’s karma and mental training. Recognition leads to freedom; confusion leads to rebirth.
3. **Sidpa Bardo (Rebirth Process)** The nonlocal state we call the soul is drawn toward a new existence based on karmic tendencies. This phase includes symbolic visions of future parents and environments.

The Dalai Lama meditates to rehearse this journey—to familiarize his mind with the terrain of death so that, when the body dissolves, the mind remains lucid, fearless, and prepared. The bardo experience is a mirror. These meditations polish that mirror.

Note: No longer grounded in the body, where will that ‘state’ we call me go? In both Tibetan Buddhist and Bon traditions, the concept of a celestial realm is deeply woven into cosmology, ritual, and symbolic practice. **Celestial Realms** (Loka), incorporates the classical Buddhist cosmology of multiple realms, including heavenly realms like the *Deva-loka* where gods reside. **Pure Lands:** More spiritually refined than the Deva realms, Pure Lands (like Amitabha’s *Sukhavati*) are celestial domains created by enlightened beings to aid sentient beings in their path to liberation. **Mount Meru Cosmology:** Central to Tibetan Buddhist cosmology is Mount Meru, surrounded by concentric continents and heavens, with gods inhabiting the higher tiers. Rituals often involve accessing these realms through trance, offerings, and symbolic gestures to invoke protection, healing, or insight. Our western ‘Descartes’ mechanical clock body and cosmos closes our doors of perception from accessing these ‘other dimensions.’

See Appendix 1: The Self is the Self with Samdhong Rinpoche

Of course, the dull and gullible mind, like Henny Penny believing the sky is falling, needs sharpening. The Enlightenment was a step in this direction. However, as Joe’s life passion attests, woven in our design are capacities far beyond those commonly recognized and developed, with a combination of modeling and nurturing being the reciprocal catalyst that drives our wellbeing and evolution. ‘Cracks in our Cosmic Egg’ open the door.

Plato's Ideal

With Plato's concept of the ideal the soul's journey is toward truth, harmony, and goodness, a blueprint for becoming fully ourselves. Plato believed that the true self is the soul, that this soul is immortal, rational, and capable of knowing eternal truths. The 'ideal self' is not defined by external achievements or appearances, but by the soul's alignment with these highest realities. Plato proposes that beyond the physical world lies a realm of perfect, unchanging 'Forms'—abstract ideals like Justice, Beauty, and Goodness. The physical world is just a shadow of these.

To become our 'ideal self,' Plato insisted that we must 'pursue knowledge of ideal forms,' especially the form of the goodness, to cultivate virtue, which is the soul's alignment with these eternal truths, and to practice self-mastery, allowing reason to guide our actions. Plato describes the soul's journey as a process of remembering its divine origins and striving to return to the realm of truth. In Plato's reality the soul is given. Gurdjieff is not so sure. G.I. Gurdjieff (1867 – 1949), believed most people live in a state of "waking sleep"—mechanical, reactive, and unaware of their true potential. His goal was to awaken individuals to their full consciousness.

Plato's vision of the soul: an eternal essence, versus,
Gurdjieff: the soul must be *created* through conscious effort

Plato soul's origin: innate, immortal, pre-existent, versus,
Gurdjieff: not guaranteed—only a potential

Plato soul: three qualities: rational, spirited, appetitive, seeks truth, versus,
Gurdjieff: fragmented, mechanical; must be unified through effort

Plato goal: recollection of eternal truths; alignment with the Goodness, versus,
Gurdjieff: creation of a permanent (transcendent) "I" through self-remembering

Plato method: philosophical inquiry, virtue, education, versus,
Gurdjieff: 'The Work,' intentional effort, self-observation, exercises

Plato's failure: misalignment leads to ignorance and vice
Gurdjieff: without effort, one remains a bundle of conditioned "I"s—with no real soul

Ibn 'Arabi' The imaginal realm

The imaginal realm is a metaphysical middle ground between the physical world and higher dimensions of consciousness. Ibn 'Arabi (1165–1240), the Andalusian Sufi mystic and philosopher, is one of the foundational thinkers behind the concept. His writings describe a metaphysical domain called al-khayāl (Arabic for "imagination"), which functions as an intermediate world between the physical and the spiritual. This realm is not fantasy—it's a real 'ontological' force, a casual-creative space where spiritual truths take form.

The term "imaginal realm" was popularized by Henry Corbin, a 20th-century French philosopher and scholar of Islamic mysticism. You can explore Corbin's interpretation in his book *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*. There's a great overview in the essay that follows.

Despite the name, the "imaginal realm" is *not* imaginary. Henry Corbin and Cynthia Bourgeault argue that this creative force is more real than our everyday reality, because it's the source of visions, archetypes, and transformative energies that shape both inner and outer worlds. Carl Jung didn't use the term "imaginal realm" directly, but he explored similar terrain through his work on active imagination, symbolic imagery, and the psychoid—a realm where psyche and matter intersect. He saw imagination as a real force, not just a mental pastime.

Rudolf Steiner

Steiner comes close to the concept of the imaginal realm with his notion of "**Imaginative Consciousness**":

1. **Imagination** – Perception of spiritual realities in symbolic, image-like form.
2. **Inspiration** – Direct understanding of spiritual beings and processes.

3. **Intuition** – Union with spiritual realities through direct knowing, not via intellectual reasoning.

Steiner's approach and Ibn 'Arabi's share common traits;

- An ontological reality (causal-creative or generative) force of symbolic perception
- The transformative power of inner vision
- The need for purification and discipline to access these realms

All these traditions converge and depend on an evolved quality of imagination. In 'Strange Loops, Gestures of Creation,' like the Dalai Lama's daily practice, and aligning with Gurdjieff, Joe proposes that the higher capacity to imagine prepares our 'unconditioned mind' or soul for a journey that transcends the body.

But, as we will see, failure to develop the capacity to imagine, brought about by digital counterfeits, create a devolutionary 'strange loop' that pulls the plug on this 'what comes after the body 'transcendent' capacity.' "We grow smarter and less intelligent by the day." In Gurdjieff's view, the Dalai Lama's, and I suggest Joe's, this failure may negate anything after the body disintegrates.

From 'Strange Loops Gestures of Creation'

In the earlier part of the 20th century the Austrian philosopher-scientist, Rudolph Steiner, detailed at length how the universe arises from a point at heart's center, in a frequency-form that vibrates out-and-in untold myriads of times a second, (as do, for instance, many micro- or "sub-atomic" events as neutrinos, microtubules, etc.) Steiner claimed that the whole universe was contained in those radiations from our heart and made the prognosis that the greatest discovery of 20th century science would be that the heart is not a pump but profoundly more. Further he claimed that our species' greatest challenge, following our understanding of the actual heart-function, would be to *allow* the heart to teach us a new way of thinking. Through this new way of thinking the heart would find its own next step in evolution.

Chapter One – The Fall of Man

"A humankind abandoned in its earliest formative stage,
becomes its own greatest threat to its survival."

Maria Montessori, M.D

Paradise Lost

Today, nurturing, as needed by our species and the earth, has all but disappeared. Pockets of nurturing remained, even into mid-twentieth century, in a few remote and isolated human groupsⁱ. The societies they depicted offer us critically needed models to study and examples to emulate, if we are to recoup our loss of this major evolutionary tool, as nurturing proves to be.

Which Reflection Comes First?

The reason such an evolutionary set-back as loss of nurturing became near-permanent wherever it occurred, is simple, ironic and can happen rapidly. A prime example is Jane Goodall's account of a rogue ape, victim of a failure of nurturing, who upset the social structure of his whole ape-troopⁱⁱ. In the case of our un-nurtured humankind, and in spite of our vastly superior brain, we were caught up in a deluge of self-inflicted disasters of every description, multiplying at every level, that followed on the heels of our nurturing failure. The irony is that the intensity of our crisis and its near permanent status thereafter arises from, and can be attributed to, our very "superior brain." It takes some extraordinary brilliance and creativity to make the incredible mess we have made on this good Earth.

Precisely as Maria Montessori warns, we were so immediately absorbed in surviving the results of our own reactive patterns – brought on by failure of nurturing – that we had no time, energy or interest to reflect on how or what happened, or was happening, to us. This is our condition today, where such loss and projection onto others "out there" of the causes of such loss, has been replicated age by age. Our survival concerns have greatly expanded and changed with the times, since the sharper this new intellect of ours, the deeper our crisis.

And we *are* getting correspondingly smarter intellectually while less intelligent. *Intellect*, a head-based operation incorporating ever more complex variations and applications, each needing further explications and qualifications, has become separated from *intelligence* – the automatic and natural state of the heart which brings coherence.

The Cultural Counterfeits

A counterfeit is a duplication of an original, from crude resemblance to those so nearly exact as to defy all but the trained observer. But no matter how apparently perfect the counterfeit is, minor, near-insignificant differences are always present, and will eventually bring ever greater problems in application. *Meanwhile, the most minor miss in the fit multiplies into a major one through continual use.*

To grind on this a bit, failure to nurture expresses in such a myriad of constantly branching critical problems that all objectivity suggesting a possible cause is lost in the mounting dysfunction. This leaves us aware only of the dysfunction, which by then is considered natural, or “the human condition.” I spelled this out in the chapter “Time-Bomb in the Delivery Room” in my 1977 book, *Magical Child*. This effort did nothing to counter the effects of that delivery room, or time-bomb, years down the road, culture being the power it is.

The importance and significance of nurturing as a survival response has, on its loss, brought in its place a mass of cultural *counterfeits* of nurturing. These counterfeits are “head-based” intellectual conclusions bringing roughly approximate solutions for the missing intelligence; consequently, the inevitable problems inherent in counterfeits eventually appear and absorb our attention. Origins are forgotten. And, though these counterfeits continually betray us, we are constantly seduced by them because of our fundamental needs for nurturing, with which these counterfeits have some vague resonance. Virtual reality, in its myriad of current expressions such as television, computers, and electronic stimuli of endless variety, has almost completely replaced reality as the state of live, direct biological awareness and experience as developed over millennia.

Caught up in trying to make these counterfeits work, such attempts sustain and increase the counterfeit incentives and their power. And those counterfeits, products of our ever-new and ever-sharper intellect, can border on genius itself, although always causing problems at some point, spinning our webs of error and production of counterfeits ever tighter.

Even if these counterfeit structures are analyzed and brought to light, such analyses can only be interpreted through our cultural mind-set. This mind-set automatically counters any possible conflict to itself by its own cultural counterfeit of the analysis itself. This is a largely non-conscious response on our part, simply our mind-set interpreting the information – as it must, in order to maintain itself. We, with a sigh of relief, thankfully accept our culture’s counterfeit as the obvious solution for us, thus nullifying any threat of change to the culture or to our mind-set, while locking us into ever-deeper disaster. In just such ways, culture is a self-sustaining field-effect with our rationale at its service.

Continually lost in making corrections in our counterfeit world, we can’t regain that benevolence-driven mind-set which was and is our greatest survival asset and most important feature of being human. In our compulsion to right a fundamentally flawed logical world-view, we lose our connections with and ability to open to the intelligence called for – which is heart-based, not head-based. Long repetitive usage of a flawed logical approach can change brain organization to the point we can become neurally insufficient to the task of seeing the errors in our preoccupation with our counterfeits. Losing access to intelligence, we are left with plenty of “smarts” to maintain the counterfeits, none for opening to the intelligence that could reveal them for what they are.

Our razor-sharp intellect can create and build atom bombs and destroy the very atmosphere of our earth, but the basic intelligence needed to grasp this fundamental problem of loss of nurturing is *gained only by brain-heart development itself*. And brain-heart development is a major thrust of the nurturing function itself, which is, in turn, dependent on brain-heart development. In this reciprocal

and recursive movement, we find a “strange loop” in which nurturing and brain-heart give rise to each other.

Nurturing should have opened ever-new evolutionary pathways – and still could. Instead, we have locked into a survival mode which is now considered to be not just the norm, but the “human condition” and/or “human nature.” Around and through our automatic survival response we invent an incredibly complex and non-viable environment we must then attend with our whole being, both to survive in such environment individually, and to *maintain that very counterfeit environment itself*, whose loss is sensed as a major threat to that world-view we share as our cultural basis, trapping ourselves at every turn.

The failure to nurture results in serious brain-mind alterations, such that any moral-ethical persuasions concerning nurturing become useless, since not really *heard*. We can hear only that for which we have a receptive capacity. We have had love preached to us for at least two thousand years with virtually no appreciable decrease in violence nor increase in love. Only the state of love can hear that with which it is resonant. This is a classic double-bind, a Catch 22. An alternate approach – one I have long promoted – is a straight biological-neurological one that arises from a Darwin II position. In such an approach, the starting point lies in grasping the fourfold nature of our “evolutionary” brain.

Virtual Reality - Bending the Twig from its Beginnings

The average six-month old American infant spends an average of two hours daily in front of a back-lit radiant-light screen, as found in computers and television. Back-lit screens such as TV and computers produce radiant light, found only in sunlight or fire, stimuli which carry no environmental information. Visual environmental information, objects and actions of a world, can only be found in reflected light, and our primary visual system finds no information in radiant light other than the raw fact of sunlight or firelight.

This means that, due to the thousands of hours of back-lit radiant-light the infant-child experiences, he/she cannot form any visual information around which his/her world-structures can be built up (what Jean Piaget calls our “structures of knowledge”). Artificial light can reflect off objects and be cognized visually. Back-lit sources confound and confuse the budding sensory-motor receptors, whereby these infants quickly go catatonic and are reluctant to move their eyes from the screen, which makes TV the world’s safest baby-sitter – physically, while warping brain development.

By age five that child will have spent some five to six thousand hours in such virtual-reality flooding his sensory system, while undergoing a seriously insufficient exposure to natural environments. Building a full sensory pattern of a real world will be compromised, and the young person will be subject to boredom and a feeling of isolation in ordinary natural settings. Some such natural environment, similar enough in nature to the one in which brain formation took place in our evolutionary history, must be provided as a stable nucleus for early brain development and its “structures of knowledge.”

No five-o’clock alcoholic happy-hour acts in any more addictive way than this adrenal-cortisol overload and the body’s coping with it. According to early studies by the medical school of the University of London, cortisol overload is a major cause of many modern diseases, particularly cancer. Such overload is an automatic adrenaline by-product of television viewing in general, with computers, cell-phones, iPods and such creating a flood of new electro-magnetic stimuli, *each with their varying and non-cohering e-m wave-forms all adding to the general discord*.

(Our failure to foster imagination in children is a fatal error for humanity as a whole, threatening to undermine the very creative potentials we are exploring here.)

¹ See Wolff, Robert, *Original Wisdom*, Inner Traditions, Rochester, VT 2002, and Leidloff, Jean, *The Continuum Concept*, Addison Wesley Press, Reading, MA 1977

¹ Goodall, Jane, *The Chimpanzees of Gombe*, Belknap Press, Cambridge, MA 1986

Questing Creates its Answering

And so, we come full circle, faced not only with the inevitability of personal death, but also the looming prospect of death on a much larger scale. What we are suggesting here is that human life, confronted with the apparently insoluble problem of death early on, nevertheless, in its striving to transcend or “move beyond” even this constraint, has now brought about the necessary *potentials* for achieving such goal, although hardly in a direct miraculous wave-of-wand, but rather indirectly through natural process. In typical strange loop form: the question – ever more pressing in light of our pan-global destructive potential – is entering into the creating of its answer, with the answer entering into and continually clarifying the nature of the passionate quest itself, mirror-to-mirror. In this way self as brain-mind has entered into the evolution of self-as-heart.

Matrix-shifts

Thus, we can see the preliminary outlines of an evolving shift of matrices from tangible body-brain-heart “concreteness” to the non-tangible “abstractions” of a non-temporal-spatial field of mind. Bear in mind, however, that our original matrix of tangible primary survival systems, instinctual and strongly entrenched in every cell of our body, is always in this body as part of its maintenance system, and will be until death-do-us part. This new “non-temporal-spatial state” takes time and extensive development to establish, not being an overnight quickie operation...

Only a fully developed mind can contribute to and so become, in its turn, the matrix for further evolutionary states. Emerging out of a fully emergent process itself, like an abstraction – or “extraction” – out of abstractions, mind can then move beyond any and all known physical functions and their restrictions.

This of logical necessity includes the phenomenon of death, wherein further and even more complex movements extracting or abstracting out of abstractions are involved.

When poet Blake said “Anything capable of being believed is an image of truth,” he didn’t imply that some or any belief is the truth as such, or even necessarily “true.” But...

The capacity to create such images and even believe in them is the way we are “made in the image of God,” even, as with any strange loop, we make God in our own image, both images being necessary.

In such imaging, being the way by which all our vast creativity unfolds, some creative efforts indeed become true, even on a broad consensual level.

Imagination –creating images of possibility – is the stuff of life and its creative evolution, and part of what our human story is all about.

Evolution’s Work-in-Progress

So, this species-wide development of a mind capable of recognizing personal death and then going beyond it, has taken time to establish as a possible field of potential. Mind, as self-awareness, must now further develop the capacity to imagine and project beyond its present physical embeddedment.

If the resulting imaginal state is entertained over time, it can set up a strange loop, mirroring between image and its object, beginning early on, which is in process today. The issue lies in creating a stable enough matrix for mind to reciprocally interact with and achieve a stable-state within itself, which is rather like the stability of heart’s torus – such stabilization also being an intentional-imaginal process.

This stabilization is of course one particular aspect of the imaginal dynamic involved in grasping and realizing the related series of holonomic torus fields of heart fusing with Earth and thus with Sun. In such imaginal activity we may discover that our notions of sentience are a bit too localized within our own personal frame of reference, opening the prospect of a more universal sentience than accepted heretofore. In this we have, as well, a near perfect example of what Rudolf Steiner claimed was our mind’s role with heart, and heart’s “next level of evolution.”

I would again call attention to the sober fact that Nature operates by profusion and selectivity, and of necessity the selectivity grows more stringent the more complex the process involved. Constraint and limitation, like the horizon, always lie right beyond. So, that “many are called and few chosen” is not a dictate from some hell-dealing judge or loving arbiter on cloud nine, but simply the way this creative cosmos is set up.

jcp

Appendix 1:

The Self is the Self

From my five-year conversation with Samdhong Rinpoche, one of the Dalai Lama’s closest colleagues.

The actual self is entirely different from what we imagine it to be. We think of the self as a person. We generally conceive of all living things having a self. The self does not exist in a chair or in a camera. Non-living things do not have a self. And that self, if you are a believer in reincarnation, birth and rebirth, you identify as an individual, a person. But who or what will take the next life? Who are you? What we generally call a person, a self, is absolutely misconceived, misunderstood. No one knows who I am.

When somebody asks you, “Who are you?” At that moment the imaginary reaction is, “I am Rinpoche” or “I am Michael,” the name. But the name is not what I am. The name is just a symbol. We say, “I am Samdhong.” This strong feeling does not differentiate between the symbol, the mental images we carry, and the subtle consciousness that has no beginning or end. It is all mixed up.

Then we ask, “Who am I?” Even when questioning that, there is a strong clinging to a firm belief that there is an independent entity held in the conception of your thought. That is to be negated. The Buddha negated it. Nagarjuna negated it. Krishnamurti negated it. As long as the mind grasps after, clings to, the false misconception that the mental image of an independent thinker is separate from thought, we cannot see ourselves as we really are.

After removing the false image completely, then what self remains is that transitory continuity of your inner subtle consciousness. At this moment, the inner subtle consciousness abides in the body, and at the time of death, it can divorce or separate from the body.

Some of the Western philosophies used to say, “I think, therefore I am.” Now some philosophers say, “I am, therefore I think.”

M: *Is your-self different from my-self? Or is there one self, one subtle energy that I individualize as “me”, and you individualize as “you”?*

S: That is a very complex question with which the entire Indian tradition has been involved for thousands and thousands of years. This question has divided the entire Indian thought into two mainstreams: one is *Ishwarvaadin*, and the other is *Unishwarvaadin*.

Ishwarvaadin means *he who believes in a creator* and that we are all created by one creator. That in Sanskrit is called *Ishwar* or Almighty God, and the Almighty God by his will created all individuals and the entire universe, and so forth. The majority of Indian tradition belongs to this belief, except for two living traditions: the Buddhists, and the Jains. Jainism and Buddhism do not believe in a creator. All other non-Indian traditions, such as Christianity, Islam, and Zoroastrianism, believe in a creator. They talk a great deal about the soul in the individual, a living soul. So, the self is, in reality, one, which is expressed as many different individuals. They believe when you become free from your bondage, the body, you merge back to the greater soul. They take the metaphor of a glass of water or water in a boat. They are limited. They are measurable. When the water is put back into the ocean, there’s no difference. The water in the glass is indistinguishable from the larger ocean. They are the same.

Similarly, when you are in your body you are in the bondage of ignorance, and when you become free from ignorance, you merge with one self or one soul. Each individual is created by the greater soul and when this individual dissolves, it goes back to the greater soul. This is one theory.

M: *Is this the Buddhist theory?*

S: No. This theory is for those who believe in a creator. Buddhists and Jains do not believe in a creator. As I have said many times, individuals are not created by anybody but they do exist without beginning or end, and it is by this nature that there are so many selves, so many souls. Each self is different.

Now, the word *different* must be used carefully. I am not you, you are not me, even if you achieve Buddhahood and I achieve Buddhahood. Both of us become the Buddha. Then there is no differentiation between your Buddha Nature and my Buddha Nature. *No differentiation* does not mean not having an identity. It means no greater or lesser, higher or lower. It means equality.

All Buddhas are equal. Yet there is identity. They can be identified. The trace of the individual remains. So, *your-self* and *my-self* are not expressions of *one self*. They are intrinsically different selves. There are countless selves that are called sentient beings, so there are unlimited sentient beings. They all have the potential of becoming the Buddha Nature, but they are all individuals, meaning they are different.

M: *In one you maintain some form of identity.*

S: Yes, maintain identity, that's right.

M: *When I die, my subtle consciousness merges back into the ocean. How do I maintain my individual soulness (identity) if I'm the ocean? What holds the soul together?*

S: The ocean and the drop metaphor is used mostly with the non-Buddhist tradition in India. Buddhists use it very seldom. It arises from the belief in a creator... The Buddhists say the Buddha Nature has three qualities: the truth body, *Dharmakaya**, which embodies the principle of enlightenment and knows no limits or boundaries... Your *Dharmakaya*, my *Dharmakaya*, all *Dharmakayas* become a single consciousness. No one can differentiate. They are all inseparable. But the Buddhas can trace back which drop in the *Dharmakaya* is Michael's *Dharmakaya*, which drop in the *Dharmakaya* is Rinpoche's *Dharmakaya*. So, each individual identity is still there but not separable and differential. All *Jatakas*** of each Buddha are different because each Buddha was individual in past lives and remains identifiable in the Buddhahood also. (After death of the body) It will remain identifiable, who is who.

*The **Dharmakāya** is not a "body" in any physical sense. It's the unconditioned, formless reality—the ground of being from which all phenomena arise.

**In Buddhism, Jātakas are a revered collection of stories that recount the previous lives of the Buddha, often in both human and animal forms. These tales are not just folklore—they're moral and spiritual teachings wrapped in narrative form.

Appendix 2:

Seeing the Unseen: The Imagination and the Imaginal

Citation: Kinney, Jay "Seeing the Unseen: The Imagination and the Imaginal" *Quest* 112:3, pg 20-24

By Jay Kinney

In this essay, I would like to continue the discussion of the remarkable metaphysical insights of the great Sufi *shaykh* ("master") Ibn 'Arabi (1165–1240) that I last touched upon a year ago in these pages (["Imagining God Imagining the World"](#) in *Quest*, spring 2023).

In this case, it is a consideration of the special role of the imagination—both human and divine—in fostering a capacity to see what might be called the unseen. For this work, I will be heavily relying upon the religious scholar Henry Corbin (1903–78), who had a special interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi and seeing the unseen in what he called the "imaginal world" (*mundus imaginalis*).

In our contemporary era, the imagination is often considered a capacity or talent to simply make things up. If someone tells us, "Oh, you are just imagining things," this usually implies that we are being fanciful or conjuring up things that don't exist. In a more complimentary usage, we might refer to a favorite author or artist as "having a great imagination."

However, as Henry Corbin was at pains to point out in his study [*Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*](#), the imagination in earlier religious eras was considered a capacity of the human heart to be receptive to higher spiritual planes or realms. Thus, the imaginal world might be considered a space within the conscious loving heart that is hospitable to self-revealings of God (*Allah*, in Arabic), which Corbin calls “theophanies.”

In these days when medical science is busily mapping out locations in our brain where different emotions or thoughts are seemingly triggered, it is assumed that human cognition is located in the brain and not in the heart. But it is probably safe to say that what Corbin and Ibn 'Arabi were referring to as the “heart” is not the physical organ of the heart itself, but a subtle energy center sensed in that general bodily region, akin to what is perhaps more familiarly called a *chakra* in Eastern esoteric teachings, a *latifa* in Sufi teachings, or what might be called the core of one’s being.

According to Ibn 'Arabi, this “heart” is where intuitive mystical knowledge is fostered. The tradition of Islamic mysticism known as Sufism, within which Ibn 'Arabi is often known as the *shaykh al akbar* (or the “greatest Master”), continues to encourage its practitioners to develop and cleanse their hearts in order to better intuit the spiritual realm. This might be helped along by certain prayers, meditations, chants (*dhikrs*), breathing exercises, visualizations, and bodily movements, as well as qualities such as sincerity and diligence—but of course nothing is guaranteed. Ultimately it is a matter of divine grace, which is not beholden to time or place or anyone’s expectations.

A related but slightly different take on the imagination was encouraged by the great twentieth-century psychologist Carl Jung, who shared with his mentor Sigmund Freud a deep interest in what they called the “unconscious,” the repository in the human psyche of emotional reactions, forgotten memories, and unprocessed traumas that would commonly find expression in dreams, for example. Freud famously ascribed most of these symbolic upsurges to sexual incidents and desires that his patients experienced early in life that were still unresolved and expressing themselves in their neuroses.

While there was no doubt some truth to this, Jung felt that a largely sexual reading of dreams and other outpourings of the unconscious was not broad enough: it left out human yearnings for religious and spiritual answers that had traditionally played a key role in resolving and healing human anxieties.

Jung found that often the most effective advice for his troubled patients was to encourage them to reengage with the religious traditions in which they had originally been raised. I don’t interpret this as a simplistic solution of dumping them back into their earlier belief systems. More likely it reflects an insight that those earliest and most influential symbol systems still spoke to them on some level and perhaps held a key to reencountering the numinous core of their earliest sense of divine mysteries unfolding in their lives.

Jung, utilizing intuitive hunches of his own, developed the practice of creative imagination (or active imagination): encouraging some patients to enter into a meditative imaginal realm where they could allow images, symbols, entities, and messages to bubble up more or less unfiltered from the unconscious, perhaps woven into mythic dramas or lucid dreams. These were considered valuable raw material that would help them better understand their own motivations and concerns.

Working in part from his own inner experiences, Jung thought it possible to enter into dialogues or cognitive interactions with “beings” within one’s unconscious who embodied different aspects of ourselves yet seemed to have a volition of their own and lessons to teach us. Needless to say, such notions were quite controversial and for many people might amount to playing with fire. After all, hearing and talking to voices in one’s head is one of the hallmarks of schizophrenia and is not normally considered a condition to be cultivated. Yet with certain cautions and conditions, Jung seemed to feel that this effort was worth the risk.

Henry Corbin, professor of Islamic studies at the Sorbonne and scholar at the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, seems to have been destined to meet up with Jung. This occurred when Corbin was invited to participate in the annual Eranos conferences at Ascona, Switzerland, after the Second World War, which also welcomed the participation and insights of Jung, Mircea Eliade, Joseph Campbell, and

other scholars. The result of this cross-pollination of psychological, religious, and mystical concerns was groundbreaking and fostered the encounter between concepts such as Jung's creative imagination and Corbin's exploration of Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysics of the imaginal.

As this cross-discipline multilogue in the 1940s and 1950s spread within elite Western cultural discourse, it began to seep into wider creative circles of poets and writers at large, as chronicled by Tom Cheetham in his several penetrating books delving into the depths of Henry Corbin's studies.

Cheetham noted the impact of Corbin's [*Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*](#) on poets such as Charles Olson and Robert Kelly, who discovered that Corbin's defense and exposition of the imaginal spoke to their own experiences of how the imagination worked in their intuitive poetic output.

Cheetham also pointed to Mary Watkins' insightful book [*Invisible Guests: The Development of Imaginal Dialogues*](#), which quoted several authors' experiences of their relationships with their stories' or novels' characters more as characters dictating their own dialogue and actions than as authors running the show. For example, Watkins shared a description by the popular British children's author Enid Blyton of her own writing process:

I shut my eyes for a few moments, with my portable typewriter on my knee—I make my mind blank and wait—and then as clearly as I would see real children, my characters stand before me in my mind's eye. I see them in detail—hair, eyes, feet, clothes, expression—and I always know their Christian names, but never their surnames . . . I don't know what anyone is going to say or do. I don't know what is going to happen. I am in the position of being able to write a story and read it for the first time, at one and the same moment . . . Sometimes a character makes a joke, a really funny one, that makes me laugh as I type it on my paper—and I think, "Well, I couldn't have thought of that myself in a hundred years!" And then I think, "Well, who did think of it, then?"

Who, indeed?

It is not uncommon in our ego-based daily lives to cling to our self-created identities and relegate everyone and everything else to the category of "other." But Ibn 'Arabi mystically realized that the entire cosmos, with all its myriad minerals, plants, animals, and other beings, were expressions and extensions of what might be called the Absolute; thus, a unity of being underlies the apparent multiplicity of existence.

Similarly, all of us humans encompass a multitude of facets within ourselves. They may each have a voice, as Enid Blyton attested, but ultimately, we and they are all expressions and outcroppings of the One.

Which brings us back to Ibn 'Arabi and his metaphysical philosophy, which has had a major impact on Sufism and Islamic mysticism in general. In describing his own imaginal experiences, Ibn 'Arabi attested to his visionary encounters with the living presences of the monotheistic line of prophets as envisaged in Islam, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, as well as with Sufi masters and saints, all of whom remained available beyond linear time and space to those who successfully sought them out.

Such encounters took place in the imaginal world, which, in Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysical system, was an intermediary realm between the eternal and the temporal, between the ineffable and the concrete, or the divine and the material. It was a realm in which angels or jinns or archetypes or ideas could be subtly perceived and interacted with—the world of dreams, but also of visions and theophanies.

As Ibn 'Arabi's greatest modern interpreter, Corbin underscored that beings we might take to be mythical or symbolic live their own existence in the imaginal world. This rather paradoxical assertion was confirmed by Jung in his encounters with Philemon, an imaginal sage, that he chronicled in his *Red Book* and *Black Book* journals. According to both Jung and Corbin, many of these noncorporeal entities serve spiritual functions. (For more on this, I direct you to Daniela Boccassini's recent paper "The Invisible Teacher and His Disciples: C.G. Jung's and Henry Corbin's Approaches to 'The Green One.'")

No matter how much we might like to be given unambiguous truths to believe in, the path of the sincere seeker of *al-haqq* (the “Truth” or the “Real”) is not toward some dogmatic final answer that takes care of all doubts thereafter. Rather, it is the ongoing engagement with the paradoxical, the ambiguous, the unclear—the truths spoken in a foreign accent that one grasps, at best, only 75 percent of the time...

By a route that I don’t fully understand, I was led to Corbin’s and Ibn ‘Arabi’s delineation of a metaphysical imaginal realm, where one might be able to make contact with spiritual beings who transcend linear time and space, yet who seem to play a significant role in guiding humankind.

I do not mean to inflate my experiences in this realm, as they are far and few between, and nothing I wish to brag about. At the same time, I can’t deny that there was something going on. It was impacting me and yet throwing me off center. I was being tossed into the mix of what seemed to be imaginal encounters but also into outpourings of desires, many of which are taboo in today’s world.

All of which sounds pretty heady and properly induces skepticism (as most of my own spiritual unveilings have done). We are not provided with solidly proven truths. We are given ambiguous flashes of insight that we have to work our way through, weighing one intuition against another, trying to interpret our heart’s messages. It seems that the goal is not certainty but an open-hearted engagement with the paradoxes of a divine reality (*haqq*) that is simultaneously the All and the infinite manifestations of multiplicity.

Of course, Corbin, Ibn ‘Arabi, and Jung do not have a monopoly on the creative imagination. In the eighteenth century, Emanuel Swedenborg’s detailed visions of heaven can be interpreted as coming from his access to the imaginal world, as can the later poetic visions of William Blake or William Butler Yeats. The Theosophical Society’s own history is rife with communications at a distance with H.P. Blavatsky’s Masters, and with the clairvoyant readings of Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater. Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church of Latter-Day Saints (commonly known as the Mormon Church), reputedly received the text of the Book of Mormon (the Mormon Bible), along with other prophetic declarations, in a kind of visionary trance. That only scratches the surface.

“But hold on!” one might say. “Many of these visions or revelations or creative imaginings seem to contradict each other. Doesn’t that imply that they are all bogus or false prophecies?”

After decades of wrestling with this question, the best answer that I have come up with is that, as unique individuals, every person has their own history, their own influences, their own talents and blind spots, indeed their own relationships to the Absolute, which may work for them alone...

Henry Corbin spent much of his life trying to draw parallels or links between the myths and symbols of Persian Zoroastrian angelology, Shi’a Twelver Imamology, Ibn ‘Arabi’s mystical visions, and other imaginal systems (including Jung’s). It was a stunning and magnificent effort, but one so dense and erudite that very few (except perhaps Tom Cheetham) have been able to fully grasp it. But that makes it no less valuable or numinous.

Ibn ‘Arabi asserted that ultimately the open heart needed to accept the seeming contradiction of the many and the One at the same time. The Absolute—that which underlies all of what is— simultaneously manifests as the multiplicity within each of us and within the cosmos at large (Joseph Chilton Pearce *Strange Loops*).

The realization of this truth is not an abstract philosophical exercise but an experience—perhaps fleeting, occasional, or permanent—that suggests, as my drawing teacher taught me, that what we see depends upon the perspective from which we view it. Being open to the possibility that the unseen may be seen with the eye of the heart is just one of the perspectives to be found in Ibn ‘Arabi’s teachings. (“A change in world view, changes the world viewed.” jcp.)

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Jay Kinney was the founder and publisher of *Gnosis: A Journal of the Western Inner Traditions*. His lifelong studies in mysticism and esotericism were nourished by his contacts with the Theosophical Society dating over fifty years ago.

ⁱ See Wolff, Robert, *Original Wisdom*, Inner Traditions, Rochester, VT 2002, and Leidloff, Jean, *The Continuum Concept*, Addison Wesley Press, Reading, MA 1977

ⁱⁱ Goodall, Jane, *The Chimpanzees of Gombe*, Belknap Press, Cambridge, MA 1986