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An Education of the Heart

By Richard R. Williams

It is simply amazing that in times such as these there are still general educators worrying over what to do to behave like one. I strongly suspect, furthermore, that the largest worriers are those who insist that any education worth its weight must be painfully extracted from existing disciplines and refashioned (i.e., “generalized”) to meet the needs of a so-called liberal arts program. The principal oversight in such approaches lies in mistaking things which, on the one hand, occur with the greatest frequency for those which, on the other, are of general importance to life and experience. It is in the latter that we must find clues to the nature and scope of a general education; the former we should consign to the more meticulous care of the specialized disciplines.

In calling attention to these remarkable times, special notice must be paid to rapidly growing interests in exploring the reaches of consciousness: in attempting to open ourselves full measure, that is, to such freedom and dignity as will surely lie beyond narrow, mechanistic concepts of human behavior. And as we look about today we see a great coming together of East and West in a meeting of minds such as the world has never before known. On the one side there are Eastern understandings of the vast depth and potential available to all who would honor the ancient admonishment to “know thyself”; while on the other, there is a Western expertise in the comprehension and cultivation of the logic of measurement and control. That the twain should meet is an event which, in the words of James Joyce, is “utterly impossible”—but—“as like those which may have taken place as any others which never took person at all are ever likely to be.”
But then this is an age, also, of anxieties. There is an uneasiness afoot for which usual remedies or suppressives are ineffective. Could it be, I wonder, that our dis-ease results from nothing less than the intrusion into the affairs of everyday life—or what we took to be the affairs of everyday life—of supernormal images. That is, that our tenuous, materialistic and possession-oriented grasp of life is finally becoming unsettled by an awakening of spiritual needs: needs now reverberating to the importation of Eastern philosophies and teachings as if the latter were echoes of some dim memory. Yes, memories they are indeed! For there is nothing to be learned from the East that is new. Rather, nothing could be more ancient. The lesson is that each man and woman is the center and focus of the mystery of life, and, as such, each one both plays into and is played upon by all of what is, has been, or can ever be. Our problem is that we have forgotten.

What then about the needs of the East? Is there not an awakening there which can serve just as well some needs of similar proportion, but dissimilar form? Yes indeed, again! Can we not see that the peaceful repose of the world-denying Orient has been moved to peek from behind one raised eyelid, shocked at a discovery that any enlightenment which closes off the world and one's fellow beings is also an illusion woven by Mara, the lord of death?

We could do no better, it seems, than to address ourselves toward a facilitation of the leavening and balancing of these two forms of psycho-cultural exaggerations and exclusions. This means the discovery of a different point of balance that can act as a fulcrum for the affairs of woman and man: a rendering unto both Caesar and God so that our challenge is to find that vital center where spirit plays into matter and matter, reciprocally, into spirit so that one becomes a mirror for the other.

This center, interestingly enough, is at the level of the human heart. Of course, this is proffered not as fact, but as an effective metaphor that is revealed in principle throughout the mythologies of the world. And are we not discovering more and more every day that what has been known in principle for ages in the symbolism of mythology is emerging in yet another way as fact in the language of laboratory and logic? Namely, the revelation is that “the one is the many, and the many the one.” On the one side, that of spirit, is the silence of sheer at-one-ness about which nothing can be said, but without which nothing said is worth telling; on the other, that of matter, is the cacophony of multiple appearances and all the commentary they engender, without which the spirit would suffer an untold loneliness. In the middle is the heart, midway, as it were, between the basal libido of the genitalia, symbolic of primordial energy and the urge to multiply, and the crown of the head, the
location of the mythical door through which the spirit passes into unity.

In an ancient Egyptian mythology, for example, the importance of the symbolism of the heart appears to have been well understood—that is, as said, in principle. For the way to judge the souls of the dead was to weigh their hearts against a feather before dispensing rewards or punishments, which was the charge of the Lord of the Underworld, Osiris, who held court, appropriately enough, in the Hall of the Two Truths.

An especially poignant and revealing metaphor concerning the heart is found more currently in the marvelous legend of Beowulf, which, like all myths, conceals an inner message from all who can afford nothing beyond a single glance.

In one wonderful scene the hero Beowulf, having slain the plundering Grendel, is called upon once again to vanquish the beast's vengeful mother: a dread she-monster from the watery depths. The ensuing battle between the two is surely one of the epic free-for-alls in Western literature.

Before plunging into the lake Beowulf is properly armed for combat. And what more could a questing warrior desire? His advantages will lie in the use of two battle-tested implements: A helmet and sword borrowed from a king, each of which has been brandished with glory and polished with honor (someone else's glory and honor to be certain, but we are ahead of our story). As Burton Raffel tells us:

... Beowulf began to fasten on his armor, not afraid for his life but knowing the woven mail, with its hammered links, could save that life when he lowered himself into the lake, keep slimy monster's claws from snatching at his heart, preserve him for the battle he was sent to fight. Hrothgar's helmet would defend him; that ancient shining treasure, encircled with hard-rolled metal, set there by some smith's long dead hand, would block all battle swords, stop all blades from cutting at him when he'd swam toward the bottom, gone down in the surging water, deep toward the swirling sands.

So much for the defense, or so he thought. And what is to be his offensive might? The story continues:

And Unferth helped him, Hrothgar's courtier lent him a famous weapon, a fine, hilted old sword named Hrunting; it had an iron blade, etched and shining and hardened in blood. No one who'd worn it into battle, swung it in dangerous places, daring and brave, had ever been deserted—

In the symbolism of myth and dream the helmet, like a hat, frequently represents—putting it simply—matters of the head. As Freud discovered, the reference is often to a process of rationalizing or, perhaps, "armoring" oneself in dealings with the powerful forces of in-
stinct and nature. In a similar way the sword represents—in a more Jungian than Freudian vein—a process of spiritualization: a transformation of base substances (*prima materia*) into a more refined element. A classical illustration is seen in the image of the sword drawn forth from a rock, as in the case of the legend of Arthur and his weapon Excalibur. It is also the instrument of the knight whose primary job—as everyone knows—is overwhelming the evils of the dark and rescuing pretty girls (i.e., redemption of nature). Taken together, helmet and sword represent a coming to grips with all of the challenges and mysteries of life.

Pursuing the symbolism of the legend a bit farther, it happens that the she-monster herself represents a projection into the realm of time of those very mysteries lying forever outside temporality: those same mysteries of which we have just spoken. She is the maternal womb of all becoming (as well as all ending), personified here in her hideous aspect, i.e., the devouring mother who will not relinquish her claim to each and every soul in its struggle for an individual existence, consciousness, and destiny. Grendel, her son, the first to be vanquished by the hero, stands for the Jungian Shadow archetype and represents the first challenge to be met in the self-actualizing process. Before dealing with transpersonal experiences one must first come to terms with negative and rejected aspects of his own individual personality. (Hence, the shadow is always of the same sex.) That is, this must precede a confrontation with the forces of the unconscious (*Mater Natura*) which are of a more impersonal, and, therefore, more powerful nature. A successful sortie against each aspect of the unconscious, amounting to their defeat and assimilation, offers a promise of spiritual growth, often symbolized as a solar quality such as gold (i.e., the sun of earth).

The citizens petition Beowulf anew:

> Our only help, again, lies with you. Grendel’s mother is hidden in her terrible home in a place you’ve not seen. Seek it if you dare! Save us, once more, and again twisted gold, heaped-up ancient treasure, will reward you for the battle you win!

Let us not mistake the meaning of the cosmic come-on, “Seek it if you dare.” The citizens here are playing a role similar to the voices of a Greek choir: to articulate innermost thoughts and to highlight ironies that might be overlooked by the casual observer.

In this case Beowulf is challenged to enter combat with a force so well hidden that its location can only be within the psyche of the hero himself. What is more obscure, we can ask ourselves, than those elements of our own life and experience which a proud ego rejects as irrelevant to its own needs and wishes? And what greater folly can there be than to march forward to engage them with devices and implements *borrowed* from other persons? It matters little how honor-
ably they have served in other times and situations. The error lies in assuming that what has worked for others will necessarily meet the needs of one's own spiritual adventures. And how is Beowulf to discover this error?

... he saw the mighty water witch, and swung his sword, his ring-marked blade, straight at her head; the iron sang its fierce song, sang Beowulf's strength. But her guest discovered that no sword could slice her evil skin, that Hrunting could not hurt her, was useless now when he needed it. They wrestled, she ripped and tore and clawed at him, bit holes in his helmet, and that too failed him; for the first time in years of being worn to war it would earn no glory; it was the last time anyone would wear it.

Now we are at a point of severe existential crisis. The best of what others can provide toward another's self-actualizing has been rendered ineffective and one is stripped bare of all but his own devices. In many ways the situation is identical to that encountered during a shamanistic travel or vision, wherein experience opens to a realization of the truly awesome depth and wonder of the mysteries of life and the universe. One sees, so to speak, behind the exteriors of life into that vast field of the psyche interior to every role and mask. The realization is "disarming" to say the least and one is faced with the prospects of either victory or defeat in their ultimate sense. One can, of course, simply have a nervous breakdown.

Beowulf, however, driven by the determination that "fame comes to the men who mean to win it and care about nothing else," sets upon the creature with naught but his bare hands. That is to say, he finds what he can within the depths of his own character and hurls himself headlong into battle equipped with nothing more. "He was weary, that best and strongest of soldiers," the narrative continues,

... his feet stumbled and in an instant she had him down, held helpless. Squatting with her weight on his stomach, she drew a dagger, brown with dried blood, and prepared to avenge her only son. But he was stretched on his back, and her stabbing blade was blunted by the woven mail shirt he wore on his chest. The hammered links held; the point could not touch him.

Victory is finally Beowulf's. The terrible mother's neck is severed with the aid of a very special sword found hanging on the wall of her cave. "A heavy sword," we are told, "hammered by giants, strong and blessed with their magic, the best of all weapons but so massive that no ordinary man could lift its carved and decorated length."

We are reminded, are we not, of the great bow of Ulysses which could not be strung by Penelope's unworthy suitors, but only by the voyager himself? It too represents a resource within oneself (i.e., one's own house) which is a potent weapon in the hands of he who proves
worthy of its stature and weight. Beowulf's sword was fashioned by giants, we are told. And who can they be other than those mythical beings symbolizing collective or universal man (Adam Kadmon). They, like the Titans of old, represent in their habitual and constant rebellion the principle of transcendence. Against what? Against narrow and limited views of life which can only be loosened by freeing consciousness from the grip of the unconscious. In the process we must dispense with any and all notions that our own interests can be served (our own battles won) through means, however tested and proven, adopted from others.

The most essential element in this wonderful tale, however, has yet to be mentioned. It is found in the blunting of the monster's blade upon the chest of Beowulf. ("The hammered links held.") This is the region of the heart, where we have said that spirit plays into matter and matter into spirit. It is the fulcrum between the brain and the sexual organs where, as many ancients believed, the meanings of the two are combined. Hence, it came to be regarded as a center, and as such a symbol of eternity (as all symbolic centers are). In Egyptian burial practices, for example, the heart was the only part of the viscera left in a mummy since it was thought to be indispensable to the body in eternity. And we can also imagine the thoughts of the Mayans opening the breasts of sacrificial victims because a deity is "hungry for hearts": the meaning of which may be the same as the East Indian understanding that: "I the food, am the eater of food." In other words, a god eats himself as his own sacrifice. We can hear an echo also of practices among countless hunting tribes where the slain animal is decapitated and the head offered a portion of its own flesh to eat.

And so there are many examples indeed of how the heart has come to have special significance as the seat of intelligence and love. It is the opening through which the heavens touch the earth and the latter responds in its longing to return.

It is the center also through which a radiantly alive form of teaching can emerge of such magnitude as to merit the title General Education. For we would be set the task of showing how each and every one of the many forms and inflections of this amazing world is a potential window to universal truths which have forever fascinated the minds of men. We may even be brought to the point of a delightful terror that anything so magnificent could be true. It is this point which James Joyce called the "ever the same yet changing ever," the model for which can be found in a form of Yoga that has recently captured the imaginations of many in the West.

* * *

In Kundalini Yoga the heart plays a special role that cannot be understood independently of the rest of the system. Briefly, the rationale is this.
Kundalini is based on the notion that spiritual awakening is achieved by arousing and elevating a dormant energy (the Kundalini) found entwined around the base of the spinal cord. This, it should be mentioned, is a feminine energy, envisioned as a coiled serpent, which passes up the spinal cord and activates psycho-spiritual centers, called chakras. The task of the meditating yogin is to get the energy moving and to keep it in motion until each of seven centers have been opened. As this happens, the life force is invested in progressively higher ways until it attains its truest state at the top of the head at chakra seven, called the crown chakra or Sahasrara. With this the All is achieved. The lost one has returned home.

The first chakra, however, where the energy lies dormant, called Muladhara, represents in Indian psychology a state of grossest existence. The element associated with this chakra is earth and one thinks of a condition wherein spirit is wholly engulfed in matter to the point of total ignorance (avidya) of its original nature.

As often happens in studies of comparative mythology, one myth can be used to illustrate another. Accordingly, the Indian view of spirit embedded in matter has a parallel in the legend of Lucifer’s fall from heaven: a fact that may be due not so much to either coincidence or parallel development as to their common mythic origins. In the case of the Indian system there is little question that close resemblances existing between it and some Christian legends are attributable to their common origins in an older mythology based upon observations of the planets and “fixed” stars. Many scholars put the date of such a system in the Near East at about 3500 B.C.

One of the common features shared by both the Eastern and Western versions is the role played by the number seven. As we have seen in the system of Kundalini this is the number of chakras which, to be exact, are to be thought of as six plus one. The seventh is identified with God or total absorption of the individual into Self. Hence it is “out of sight.”

The genesis of the number seven and its importance in mythology stems in large part from the ancient idea of the seven celestial spheres, each associated with a particular spiritual or physical quality. In the Ptolemaic system it was thought that the universe existed as a series of shells each characterized by its resident planet. The outer-most region was heaven, all encompassing and embracing, containing the “fixed” stars and the transcendent Father, sheer light. Lying immobilized at the very center was Earth covered, as it were, by these immense Chinese Boxes.

We must note how (God) has
deeded the natural heavens
with seven planets, seven
noble stars which are nearer
to us than the rest [says Meister Eckhart]. The first is Saturn, then comes Jupiter, then Mars, and then the Sun; after that comes Venus and then Mercury, and then the Moon.

A widely shared Near Eastern understanding of the period, which also found its way into the East, was that each soul had, at birth descended through each of these planetary spheres before emerging from its Earthly mother's womb. In the process the individual had derived from each a particular temporal-spatial quality. This had the dual effect of stamping him with his own individuality, as any astrologer would insist, and setting upon him also the limitations which held him at bay from the divine light. A return to God, therefore, was seen as a process of systematically relinquishing each limitation, in reverse order of their acquisition, hence the concept of seven stages of initiation and the notion of the soul standing “naked,” or unadorned, before the presence of God.

At the very center of creation, however, heavily clothed in the garb of his own egoism is Earth’s principal occupant, Man. He is subject there to the influences of the once luminous, now dark angel Lucifer who perpetuates ignorance, desire for gross matter and, accordingly, spiritual torpor. And how did this come about?

As the story goes, there was a time when the most beloved of all God’s celestial creations, the archangel Lucifer, looked deeply within the mind of God and foresaw another impending creation. He saw that God planned to create Man. What was more, Man was to be so magnificent and beloved of God that he would be set above Lucifer himself in the heavenly lights.

It was then that the event occurred that was to shape history and creation for all time to come. Lucifer said, “No!” Now, up until that point Lucifer and all the other spiritual beings (i.e. Cherubim, Seraphim, etc.) could be regarded as completely obedient to the will of their maker; meaning, by the way, that their existence as truly individual beings was more potential than real, even though each was endowed, in the image of God, with free will. In other words, all of the beings were simply manifestations, or reflections of a single divine unity: a unity which Lucifer’s resounding “No!” was to split asunder.

It is a simple fact, be it noted, that for every negative there is a positive, and vice versa. Lucifer’s decision, then, marks the coming of primordial dualism into existence which, as many mythological traditions teach, is the precondition for all phenomenal manifestations whatsoever. As punishment for his grave offense, Lucifer and all his hosts are cast out of the presence of God—or, as one might put it, he cast
himself away in the very act of disobedience—to suffer imprisonment in the most remote part of the universe. And what, we might ask, is the most remote place in the universe? It is, as Alan Watts has suggested, within the heart of every person whose excessive “I-ness” excludes experiences of a larger Self which is God. Such people see life from the perspective of themselves as a focus of attention, and each activity from the bias of one’s own needs and wishes.

The image of the coiled serpent in Kundalini Yoga is none other than the same principle of creation fallen into a state of ignorance, where yes and no, positive and negative, light and dark, and all other forms of dualism are taken to be literal and final truths. In that way they are seen as problems requiring moral instead of spiritual solutions. The serpent as a symbol of life-supporting energy and divine mystery lies asleep therefore, and consciousness is limited to the confines of the most mundane matters.

The spiritual exercise of Yoga is intended to awaken that serpent energy and, through meditative discipline, to return it to its condition before the fall: back through the heavenly spheres past all dualism whatsoever to rejoin, in great bliss, the blinding glory of the divine light.

As the serpent begins its ascent, the second chakra to open is Svadhisthana, located at the genitals. The preoccupations of a person at this level are primarily sexual and affairs of life will seem to be inflections of underlying erotic needs.

At chakra three, Manipura, the orientation is power. Such a person is always evaluating experiences in regard to his own performances. Being in control of things and imposing his will upon other people consumes his time and energy.

At chakra four, Anahata, life opens up for the first time to things distinctly human. Literally translated it means “not hit,” which my friend Joseph Campbell has shown to mean: “The sound that is not made by any two things striking together.”

But what sound can this be? For all sounds, like all phenomena, are manifested from the midst of conflict: a clashing or coming together of contrasting things. This is a perennial insight lying behind the great mystical traditions of the world. Antecedent to all phenomena is the primal energy of life and the universe itself which has been called, variously, “the One,” “Brahma,” “the Father,” “the Void,” and so on. “One might think of it as comparable to the great humming sound of an electric-power station,” says Campbell, “or as the normally unheard humming of the protons and neutrons of an atom: the interior sound, that is to say, of the primal energy, vibrating, of which we ourselves and all that we know and see are apparitions. And when heard, they say, the sound that it most resembles is OM.”

The metaphysics of the sound syllable OM as developed in the Mandukya Upanishad is rather lengthy and requires its own separate
commentary, but this much can be said: The uttering of the syllable is meant to contain, representatively, the act of eternal creation, destruction, and then re-creation.

Pronounced and written as AUM, the three sounds are interpreted as referring to three states of consciousness plus a fourth. A is waking consciousness and means the world of everyday appearances. Things are seen as separate and unconnected. U refers to dream consciousness where all dualism is overcome and subject and object are the same. On the collective plane this is also the realm of myth which bespeaks the common ground into which all individuals coalesce. The sound of M is absolute dreamless sleep where consciousness neither of separate things nor of mutual identities can be found. A classical symbol for the latter is the serpent swallowing its own tail—Uroboros—as the eternal round of endings and becomings which is the great "chaos." And then prior to the utterance of A and the following hum of M is silence as the fourth syllable: never pronounced but always, always implied. And this final element (which is to be seen as also the initial) is the unspeakable and unthinkable mystery containing and contained in all consciousness, regardless of its form and nature.

AUM, therefore, is the sound of the heart, associated in Yogic imagery with chakra four. The syllable A refers downward on the spinal pathway toward the first three chakras and the world of manifesting forms, allures, and preoccupations. U is the midpoint at the heart where, like a kind of cosmic valve, spirit flows into matter and matter into spirit. And M reaches ever upward toward the beatific realms wherein the many return to the One.

Continuing the journey upward, the next awakening at chakra five, called Vishuddha, is where one begins to loosen attachments to Earthly forms in a process of self-purgation, since the sight of God cannot be attained by those not cleansed of attachments to profane existence. It is at this point, in the words of the New Testament, that "he who puts his shoulder to the plow and then looks back, is not worthy of the kingdom of heaven." For to glance backward is to express regret and that implies a reluctance on the part of the individual to forsake Earthly attachments. If this is the case, spiritual progress is arrested or even reversed and one is, like Lot's wife who looks back, turned into a pillar of salt.

Upon arrival at the next chakra, number six named Ajna, the yogin sees God and is blinded and enraptured with the glory of that vision. This is yet a dualistic experience, however, where subject beholds object, and one must not linger in the glory of this radiant sight. There is a danger, though, that one might, foregoing as a consequence the fulfillment of the next and final stop in the spiritual quest.

I am reminded of a story that very neatly tells the pitfalls to be encountered at chakra six. It is the tale of an over-zealous Buddhist
monk who, after an evening of practicing meditation, approached his teacher with a wonderful report. "I had been concentrating on my breathing, master, and while meditating I suddenly saw a beautiful, radiant light. Seated in the middle on a lotus flower was the image of the glorious Buddha." "Never mind," the wise old man replied, "the next time that happens just return to your breathing and it will go away."

Transcending all of the preparatory levels, the last chakra, called *Sahasrara* and located metaphorically at the crown of the head, signals the absolute disappearance of subject and object. The two become one and withdraw into the great silence lying beyond anything that can be said or imagined. As chakra seven it denotes the mysterious center out of which all creation pours forth into the six directions of space. It is also the number of musical notes in a basic series as well as the number of colors in a rainbow, over which only gods and bluebirds can fly. Mortals, as Jung said, must walk under.

Let us refocus our attention, however, upon chakra four at the level of the heart which, as we have seen, was where Beowulf's strength was to lie. This is the chakra of Anahata associated with the planetary sphere of the Sun. In mythic imagery the Sun represents the light of consciousness and, as the midpoint in the series, the separation between the upper and lower triads. The former, i.e., Saturn, Jupiter and Mars, would lie within a region which is unshadowed, partaking of the light eternal; while the latter, i.e., Venus, Mercury and the Moon, lie in the region of the shadowed, meaning a demarcation of light and dark which is the realm of the tides of times past, present, and future. The upward ascent of the soul, in the practice of Yoga seeks release from all such inflections symbolized in the waxing and waning of the lower three spheres, entering through the solar door (chakra four) to ascend also, the ladder of the upper spheres toward an eventual reabsorption in primal oneness. All is left behind including the solar quality of illumination and individual consciousness. Once chakra seven is attained, represented by Saturn who with his curved scythe cuts the soul free of all attachments, the task is finished. Time is ended.

It seems to me, however, that for most Westerners, including myself, a complete purgation of individual consciousness makes little sense. It even strikes me as repulsive, even though some of my yogin friends would insist that this feeling is part of what creates suffering. Nevertheless, as in the tradition of the Bodhisattva, I think it is necessary to remain very much in this world of waxing and waning tides while, at the same time not being precisely of it. As I write this the image I have is of a person with one foot in heaven and the other in hell. The best of both worlds. And the worst, too, for that matter!

The mythological importance of chakra four is that it is the point where the world of spirit plays into and creates the phenomenal world.
It represents the heroic principle, the coming of the beauty of personal consciousness into or out of a chaos of oneness, so that knowledge shines forth in the form of the individual. As Jung pointed out, the Sun stands for the source of life and the wholeness of man. In the symbolism of Christianity it is represented in the person of Christ who descended through the planetary spheres to be born in remoteness and anonymity only to rise through suffering—i.e., the interplay of opposites and conflict—toward supernal consciousness. Interestingly, this cosmic occasion is often depicted in Christian art in the form of a sword-pierced heart shown forth from the bosom of the Virgin. In alchemy, also, the heart was the image of the sun within man in the same way that gold was the image of the sun on earth.

Overall the imagery effected in all of this is of a seat of intelligence within the heart—as many ancients actually believed—which looks in two directions like the Roman Janus. One face looks toward unity of spirit and the other diversity of matter. The interlocking insight possibly being, as Sri Aurobindo has suggested that “spirit is the most ethereal aspect of matter; matter the densest part of spirit.” Through intelligence and individual realization then flows the eternal strength and wisdom that transubstantiates all mundane existence and, in turn, humanizes and “reduces” to manageable units the immensity of God.

Each of the chakras, also called padmas or lotuses, is associated with a flower bearing a distinct number of petals. Progressing from the lower lotus to the highest, the number of petals are, respectively, four, six, ten, twelve, sixteen, two, and a thousand. It should be remembered that Oriental mythology often depicts the All, or unity, in the form of large numbers. Hence, an expression such as “a-thousand-and-one” actually means “a huge amount” or, paradoxically, the One.

The number of the heart chakra’s petals is twelve: the number of cosmic order and rebirth. As in a clock, twelve is not only midnight, it is midday, and mediates the new and the old. As the deepest hour of night it is also the youngest moment of morning and there is a wonderful mystery here for those who can read it! Furthermore, twelve is linked to ideas of time and space and, in this way, suggests a circle enclosing an area, the center of which is the ever vanishing point related to the Father, or outpouring Spirit. Through the heart, as our imagery would have it, eternity enters into the space-time field. As a famous verse says: “Eternity is in love with the forms of time.” The upper three chakras are united with the lower through the medium of the heart. What a lovely thought! Symbolized as emerging consciousness, it is through this medium that Christ (God incarnate) enters into the world. It is He, after all, who bridges the apparent, but only apparent antitheses of birth and death, sin and holiness, and the many and the one.
There remains one additional point to be made. We have concocted through the metaphor of the Kundalini something of a model of the East and West. That is, in a very general way, the upper three chakras can be taken to represent the traditional spiritual preoccupations of the East, while the lower three reflect more the extraverted, ego-oriented interests of the West. The crucial insight, however, is that either orientation taken apart from the other results in a condition of imbalance. Specifically, the inwardly directed, more mystically inclined Oriental who withdraws from the affairs of the world tends to leave the latter, if not in worse shape than he found them, then at least in no better. There is little inclination on his part to become involved in the very things from which he must gain psychological distance. In the same way, the more externally oriented Occidental is apt to forego spiritual concerns in favor of strictly social and environmental matters. He is always “involved” in some way, although, I should think, constantly mistaking optimism for inspiration.

Looking closely at the psychological characteristics of each of the chakras, an interesting counterbalancing arises.

At the lowest level the individual is lost in matter and displays absolute lethargy toward life. He has either never discovered the smallest possibility for his existence or he has tried and quit. One can think, for example, of those pathetic souls who spend each day soaked with alcohol and self-remorse. Nothing seems to excite their interests except, perhaps, a new and better way of numbing their minds and senses. Their devotion is to the maternal womb and the forgetfulness it brings.

Casting our glances upward to the level of chakra seven we are unsettled, are we not, by a striking similarity? “Even as a mirror of gold, covered by dust, when a man has seen the truth of the Spirit he is one with him, the aim of his life is fulfilled and he is ever beyond sorrow.” Non-duality and Oneness, the aim of the questing yogin and the aim also, albeit in a less conscious manner, of the village drunk! Now, I have seldom met individuals who, when speaking frankly, were not disturbed at the prospects of either of these psychological extremes. They simply did not want to lose themselves in either the immense inertia of chemically or emotionally induced psychosis or, on the other hand, in a blinding and dissolving light of cosmic Oneness. In both instances the reason is found in a reluctance to sever ties to other elements of experience. And is there not cause to think that a preoccupation at the level of the lowest chakra indicates impoverishment of the affairs of spirit, in a similar way that preoccupation at the highest may lead to a neglect of the world?

At the levels of chakras two and six unity of any sort gives way and, dualistically, one thing is attracted to another. The expression of dualism at chakra two, involved as it is with the world of matter, is manifested as sexual energy or libido. Here the prevailing force is that
of *eros* where biological stimulation and response tends to color existence. The archetypal image is that of the orgy. At chakra six dualism is expressed in the spiritual realm as *agape*, and a person is consumed with his vision of the divine. The archetypal image is that of the "love feast" wherein the prevailing behaviors are charity and spiritual love expressed through the community. Both are *impersonal*.

Continuing at the levels of chakras three and five we see that each, in its own way, is concerned with activity. Chakra three emphasizes the submission of the world through the exercise of intellect, "development of resources," and a general achievement of power. Reciprocally, chakra five is concerned with inactivity (purification), meaning that all attachments to earth (influence and power in particular) are to be left behind.

We return once again, then, to chakra four at the level of the heart where, acting as fulcrum for the balance of East and West, the excesses of each might be resolved. As Lancelot Law Whyte has said: "The genius of man lies in his growing faculty for enchantment without illusion." And illusion, I think we can see, is found wherever answers to the important questions of life are sought through a process of either avoidance or denial.

In becoming disillusioned we realized more and more that whatever comfort or bliss is found in living on only one side of ourselves (spiritually or materially) is of an incomplete and temporary nature. Ego-annihilation may produce ecstasy, but at what cost, we ask, to the needs of others? If a single individual achieving Nirvana inevitably benefits all other sentient beings, a proof will surely have to be sought in ways very different from what a historian will require. It simply will not wash when the East is examined against a background of centuries of human poverty and suffering. In like manner, the Western hemisphere is only now awakening to the fact that an obsession with science and technology leads to its own type of profound impoverishment. We have nurtured a degree of existential loneliness and despair unknown among even the most primitive of peoples in "underdeveloped" countries.

Returning to our story, through the language of myth we can now discern the innermost meaning of Beowulf's struggle. It is, for all who can hear the deeper song, that life's most brutal onslaughts will ultimately break upon the strength of a well-tempered heart just as the legendary she-monster's blade failed upon our hero's breast. Such a heart belongs to one who seeks to suppress or deny nothing in life, but rather to look upon all with full affirmation and love. Not just in regard for the underlying source or oneness of things, but for *things themselves* as they variously inflect the mystery of the universe through every grain. Moreover, the tragedy represented in the failure of the noble helmet and sword we see as a necessary step toward the uncovering of one's own inner powers. With bare hands alone can the ap-
parent horrors of existence be dispelled and caused, not to disappear,
but to attain new meanings. For all of our devils, like all of our gods,
are ultimately within.

* * *

On the opening pages of this paper my remarks concerned the
need for fashioning a truly general education. Since then a large and
circuitous path has emerged which I will now try to bring full circle.

It is often asked: What is the task of a general or liberal arts
education? And the answer, as I have said, has frequently taken the
form of a suggested “integration” of some type or another: a drawing
of various disciplines so that a summary (i.e., “big picture”) can emerge. By and large this has been a flop. Predictably,
faculty have not been able to agree upon ways and means for produc­
ing integrations and students have shown little enthusiasm about join­
ing in the effort. It remains, as one says, something that looks good
on paper.

The primary reason behind such a cul de sac is that a simple
yoking together of various disciplines or areas of knowledge does not
necessarily lead toward an understanding of what is general about
being human. And what, we must ask, could be more appropriate to
a general education than that? That is, what could be of greater
general importance than efforts to reveal those universal truths, which
underlie and outlast the changing panorama of “facts,” and which
have been represented in the dreams and myths of humankind since
time immemorial? The greatest of these truths being, possibly, that
all individuals are one: that underneath the myriad appearances of
the world and manifesting life is that common ground of being that
has forever mystified and held us in awe. Which is to say, it is an all­
embracing harmony that is life itself, reflecting and being reflected
by all the many phenomena which a strict disciplinarian is pleased to
call the “real world.”

Unless one is informed by the unity or higher nature of things it
is unlikely that the affairs of life can be viewed in ways other than
the way they are initially presented. Life, viewed from the level of
the lower three chakras of the Kundalini, will appear in terms of
either gross inertness and torpor, sexual desire and attraction, or offen­
sive and defensive strategies. Visions no broader than this give rise
to the sort of science-and-machine approach so typical of the Western
world. It is the view also, in traditional academic disciplines (each
claiming a portion for itself) which myopic “generalists” would have
us “integrate” for the production of higher and bolder insights. One
might just as well ladle up soup with a fork.

However, raising one's sights to the level of chakra four, the heart
as Sol invictus, the heroic principle of activity, will and intelligence,
effects a wedding among dualities. Such a one is able to face the im-
mensity of the unity of all things and to vanquish the powers that would otherwise dissolve individual consciousness. Such intelligence bespeaks the capacity for seeing how things of the phenomenal world flow into the universal over-soul from which they sprang. One can bear the sound of pure Being giving rise to all.

In the same way, seen from the opposite direction, through the heart comes the "birth of light" as eternity enters into the inflections of earthly existence. In this way intelligence is an agent of creative maya seen in all becoming and ceasing, birth and death, and appearance and disappearance. Which is to say, at level seven there was only the One which we are told existed even "before Abraham was" or any one-else. At six and at five there are dualities, but of a mostly celestial nature. That is, the situation is rather like—horrors!—what one is told in Sunday School about heaven. Different beings exist, but they spend all of their time enraptured with the image of God. It took the likes of a Lucifer, we are told, to break that sort of volitional stranglehold and to exert the self-determination that gave forth the "infernal," i.e., earthly realms. No wonder the very name means "light bringer." In this aspect the heart (Sun) casts the shadows which play upon the screens of our senses and dance their cosmic game. The solar eye opens and the world springs forth into action.

Herein then, as my metaphor would suggest, is a job for a general education! And the challenge is this: Can one see a light shining through particular disciplines, vocations, or perspectives and emanating from that common source which is, after all, the ground of all our being? In other words, can we find it within ourselves to relate to transpersonal experiences in a way similar to what James Joyce called an "enchantment of the heart?" If we can, we are truly on the path of general education, and of showing individuals the meaning of their vocation in the way of the Latin vocatio (i.e., summoning) through which one can express whatever transcends himself.

An implementation of this view of general education is, despite its basic simplicity, extremely difficult to pull off. The reason is that it requires, above all, an unusual degree of willingness on the part of faculty and students alike to test the limits (if there are limits) of experience. In a word, it requires a readiness to undergo psychological and spiritual transformations. Until now we have talked (oh-so freely) about increasing our insights and broadening our views of life, but, alas, from the safety of the academic lectern. What we now need are ways of translating theory into action, and not just in regard to our students either!

Today, we see many different attempts to conduct searches inward toward vast, unexplored regions of the psyche, and there is no reason to doubt that the journey will be as large and revealing as explora-
tions of outer spaces. Actually, such investigations have been con­
ducted for centuries in the East, a realization just dawning upon
Western scientists who now see themselves as mere beginners and
spiritual fledglings. It shows, also, in the several rambling and unco­
ordinated flirtations with large varieties of spiritual techniques and
disciplines, a condition in our country that one person recently described
as a “spiritual supermarket.”

This kind of mental agitation is understandable enough, due in
large part to the fact that the East represents, as Carl Jung put it,
“the West's unconscious.” No wonder we are so entranced! The depth
of our fascination is in direct proportion to our need for knowing
ourselves.

What to do then? Practice Zen? Yoga perhaps? Sufism? Or maybe
extinguish all desire in the ego-quenching fires of Jainist meditation?
I think the answer is, in the long run, no. In the short run, why not?

If the Western individual is to come to his senses (and beyond?)
it must be in terms of his own life style, not that of any Oriental
aesthetic, not to mention the guy next door. Meaning that there is a
basic problem of ecological psychology involved that, to date, few have
stopped to consider.

Specifically, we must see that the various spiritual disciplines com­
ing to us from the East cannot be understood or practiced apart from
the historical, sociological, geographic, and psychological contexts out
of which they arose. Importing Kundalini Yoga to the United States,
for example, and attempting to pursue it in its traditional forms makes
as much sense as trying to grow tea in North Dakota. This can be
done all right, but it requires a greenhouse: an artificial environment.
In a similar way, those who profess to practice an Oriental discipline
in the West must maintain a certain distance from the realities of
everyday Western life. They construct around themselves a protective
barrier made of fantasy, role-playing, and wishful thinking. Such
people can be seen on almost any street corner chanting ditties and
bopping to and fro in white robes and tennis shoes, as one popular
cult is seen to do. Just as the greenhouse protects the plant, the pre­
tense protects the game.

More serious students of Eastern psychologies understand that the
traditional forms are ways in which various people have literally con­ceived a psychology of the unconscious. The principal value of
these forms to us is that they are time-tested means of encouraging
spiritual development, and we should understand them as such. That
is, they are proven guides toward experiences of a “deeper self.” As
maps of psychic regions, however, they are absolutely indigenous to
their native cultures and should serve us only as introductions to our
own inner research. Once we get the feel of what it's about we must
translate as much as we can into our own style and vocabulary. The
alternative is to become enchanted with Oriental concepts, thereby running the risk of a more or less permanent preoccupation with esoteric symbolism. Instead, our task should be to distill what we can from non-Western traditional psychologies and to apply that distillate to our lives as we wish to live them. This is no watering down. There will be changes enough for all!

Again, here is a large challenge for a general education. One which I dare say should not be subjected to a charge of over-simplification. That would indicate a gross lack of understanding of what is involved.

It is encouraging to see that some efforts along these lines have already gone forward in some quarters. A start has been made by those interested in transactional and transpersonal psychology. We are now on the threshold of other larger steps, however, in the form of new programs that will significantly transcend what has been accomplished to date.

It would be entirely presumptuous for me to specify exactly what these new directions should be—and too large a task anyway—but a few general suggestions can be made. A sufficiently imaginative reader will have little difficulty in picking up the gist.

* * *

It is common knowledge among educators that more time has been spent speculating about ways to facilitate and develop creativity than in actually doing it. The reason is simple enough. Few individuals have any clear notion concerning what to do, not to mention agreeing upon what “creativity” means in the first place. But times are rapidly changing.

“Ordered, disciplined thought is a skill governed by set rules of the game,” says Arthur Koestler in his book *The Act of Creation*, “some of which are explicitly stated, others implied and hidden in the code. The creative act, insofar as it depends on unconscious resources, presupposes a relaxing of the controls and a regression to modes of ideation which are indifferent to the rules of verbal logic, unperturbed by contradiction, untouched by the dogmas and taboos of so-called common sense. At the decisive stage of discovery,” he continues, “the codes of disciplined reasoning are suspended—as they are in a dream, the reverie, the manic flight of thought, when the stream of ideation is free to drift, by its own emotional gravity, as it were, in an apparently ‘lawless’ fashion.”

In other words, Koestler is saying that creativity is closely related to or identical with the sort of irresponsible “daydreaming” that few teachers will allow in the classroom. One gets his knuckles or head rapped.

Ironically, evidence is forthcoming that fuller and freer enjoyment of one’s own creative potentials can be learned through gaining self-control over dream-like states of consciousness such as reverie: states
that are ordinarily not under voluntary control, but occur spontaneously under many different conditions. The idea is that instead of punishing an individual for allowing his mind to "drift," he is rewarded, and he rewards himself, for drifting at will. At such times he may be engaged in subterranean mental activities that may find their way to outer consciousness in the form of novel shapes and associations. As a kind of bonus, furthermore, it may be that in aiding creativity one might also be practicing a self-administered medicine for which no license is needed.

Specifically, through research in biofeedback, it has been found that individuals can learn to control their own brain wave rhythms (as measured by an electroencephalograph) thereby producing at will a state of controlled reverie conducive to creative mentation. As if that were not exciting enough, now comes this suggestion by Elmer and Alyce Green, researchers at the Menninger Foundation in Topeka, Kansas: "It seems increasingly certain that healing and creativity are different aspects of a single picture. Both Swami Rama (an Indian Yogi) and Jack Schwartz, a Western Sufi . . . maintain that self healing can be performed in a state of deep reverie. Images for giving the body instructions are manipulated in a manner very similar to [the way] in which we find ideas being handled creatively (by two pilot subjects) for the solution of intellectual problems. What an interesting finding! Creativity in terms of physiological processes means then physical healing, physical regeneration. Creativity in emotional terms consists then of establishing, or creating, attitude changes through the practice of healthful emotions . . . whose reflection in the viscera is one that physicians approve of as stress resistant. Creativity in the mental domain involves the emergence of new and valid ideas, or a new and valid synthesis of ideas, not by deduction, but springing by 'intuition' from unconscious sources."

What tremendous possibilities this holds for education! There are two principal stumbling blocks, however. First, and no doubt foremost, we must understand that a large part of life—perhaps a larger part—lies outside our conscious control. In the realm of creativity it appears that when we have set the stage psychologically by entering a different state of consciousness, we have done all we can do. We cannot force ourselves to be creative, we can only facilitate it by increasing the odds that it will occur. Second, we have to dispense with the idea that idleness and "wasting time" necessarily mean the same thing. Instead, we would purposely allocate times for people to engage in meditation and techniques of self-regulation and -relaxation. It is hard to imagine why anyone would object to such exercises—although it is a safe bet some will!—since every discipline is fueled by creativity and every person stands to benefit from increased self-awareness.

A second suggestion toward developing a general education is that
we pay far more attention to archetypal features of life. By that I mean matters such as birth and death, love and fear (hate being one type of response to fear), suffering and bliss, and madness and mystical experiences.

For example, it has often struck me as tragic that we have created highly elaborate means for bringing babies into the world, while, at the same time, imposing upon the dying a means of leaving that would be absolutely repugnant to any sensitive "primitive." The clergy and their medieval notions of the afterlife offer no solutions. At best, they behave as if they know only of death and the "beyond" while exhibiting a total ignorance about the art and experience of dying. Something considerably more is needed. Hopeful signs are now appearing that serious thought and research concerning dying and death are taking hold, but let us hope that they are dislodged from remote corners of tender-minded sociology and religion departments and moved squarely within the mainstream of general and popular studies.

In my own efforts along these lines I have employed the language of comparative mythology as a way of understanding various stages of life. The value in this is that mythology is a way of providing support during moments of transition or crisis when the field of experience is undergoing reorganization. Traditionally, a function of ritual has been to provide this support since it is itself an acting-out of a myth. The problem is that in the Western world we have largely cut ourselves loose of ritual, at least in the sense of its important functions, and deluded ourselves into thinking that we are somehow freer and more mature for having done it. What we have really done is to have thrown out the baby with the bathwater, for the price of our freedom is that we no longer have a means for alleviating the dread that surrounds the transitoriness of life. The very mysteries which life presents, instead of eliciting a pattern of growth and self-realization, become irrepressible foes misdirecting our energies in the form of untold anxiety and repression. Existence is seen, consequently, as a matter of coping instead of joyous fulfillment.

What we need to do, it seems, is to throw our doors wide open to a study of so-called esoteric teachings, including some that are regarded as "occult." We might discover that they are occult, meaning "hidden," only because Western science has chosen to ignore them. We might find out that the arcane disciplines are attempts to articulate the mysteries of life no less than are the sciences. Often as not, they have managed to evolve highly sophisticated models relating to aspects of life lying beyond the reach of our current scientific vocabulary. In that respect, if we see that some affairs of life require a form of address different than the confines of linear logic we may take a giant step toward the evolution of badly needed theories of psychic relativity. There is no defensible reason or excuse for our reluctance. Every argu-
ment against encouraging spiritual development within the confines of formal education is, if not inept to begin with, at least a terrible bore.

In deference to the sensitivities of Western life, it should be said that opening ourselves up to esoteria does not mean, *ipso facto*, wallowing in what Freud called the "mud of occultism." We need not fear chaos and loss of direction. As stated earlier, the goal of general education is to achieve a delicate balance between the world of objective affairs (*maya*) and the life of interior Oneness (*nirvana*) located, metaphorically, at the level of the heart. This does not exclude or deny the importance of scientific objectivity.

If anything, it tends to illuminate one's work along disciplinary lines with an enthusiasm and vitality that transcends our usual baccalaureate platitudes. At the same time, and perhaps even more importantly, an involvement with esoteria allows a working through of one's own inner needs and potentials in a way not constricted by the usual demands of the workaday world. In short, we allow dreams to take their rightful place alongside cognition as "openers of the way" to higher understandings; and we see that just as cognition is the imprint of the outer, the dream is the upcrop of the inner.

As a further suggestion, we should invest a good deal of time and effort into the study of paranormal and parapsychic phenomena. They are not only suited for inclusion in a general studies program, they can hardly be located elsewhere! The scope of the problems involved in studying these phenomena runs well beyond usual disciplinary boundaries, requiring collaboration among psychologists, biologists, physicists, engineers, sociologists, neurologists, and theologians to name a few. Of particular importance, also, is the apparent necessity of including "lay" people who, to the embarrassment of many academicians, often have an easier time accomplishing parapsychic and paranormal feats than they. This means, of course, opening teaching and research to individuals lacking scholarly credentials: a bitter pill we may refuse to swallow. We can wash it down with the same tide that engulfs our excessive pride, however, and in the process contribute to a widened image of human potentials.

Finally, a last suggestion in a list that can grow too long is that we pay more attention to what has been called a "general systems approach." That is, a searching out of general principles that apply across a multitude of objective situations, man being one highly elaborated variation upon a theme running throughout the universe.

"The systems view of nature and man is clearly non-anthropocentric," says Ervin Laszlo, "but it is not nonhumanistic for all that. It allows us to understand that man is one species of system in a complex and embracing hierarchy of nature and at the same time it tells us that all systems have value and intrinsic worth. They are self-creating expressions of nature's penchant for order and adjustment. The status
of man is not lessened by recognizing that sociocultural systems are his supersystems. Seeing himself as a connecting link in a complex natural hierarchy cancels man's anthropocentrism, but seeing the hierarchy itself as an expression of self-ordering and self-creating nature bolsters his self-esteem and encourages his humanism.”

There is enough in Laszlo's remarks to encourage our working together, it seems to me. And there is enough despair in the affairs of our troubled world to establish the need. Clearly, we must have a larger and more ennobling idea of who and what we are. At the very least, a systems approach is a way of firing the imaginations of students and teachers alike, leading, if not to final truths, at least to openings in the twilight world of ever-changing, ever-emerging realities. There is nothing wrong with dreaminess. It does not negate identities. It establishes them! When one sees himself as a part within a whole, which in turn resides within a larger whole, yet all the while retaining an identity in his own right which is divisible in infinite ways, there arises the sense of awe and wonder that is sine qua non of the compassionate and educated heart.

Herein lies the key to a humane education: an education of heart where, as in the imagery of Kundalini, the spiritual and material become one. Or, in the marvelous Beowulf tale, where the brute forces of life spoil their blades upon the stout chest of understanding. We are not interested, however, in disclaiming discriminatory knowledge or the disciplines that base their identities upon its accumulation. Neither are we about to propose a world-denying mysticism where some kind of joyless self-forgetting leads to neglect of our surroundings. Instead, we seek what Mahayana Buddhists have called the Middle Way which “cannot be called either void or not void, or both or neither.”

“Am I on the right path?” asked Carlos Castaneda in his book The Teachings of Don Juan. And the old Yaqui sorcerer asked in return what question Castaneda had in his “heart” when he confronted Mescalito, a “protector” who appeared during a drug-induced experience.

To think about the question I had had in my “heart” was a difficult problem (Castaneda writes). I told Don Juan I had had many things in my mind. When I asked if I was on the right path, I meant: Do I have a foot in each of two worlds? Which world is the right one? What course should my life take?

Don Juan’s conclusion was that a lesson provided for Castaneda by the “protector” had been missed, despite the fact that the latter had been perfectly clear in his explanation.

You think there are only two worlds for you (Don Juan tells Castaneda)—two paths. But there is only one. The protector
showed you this with unbelievable clarity. The only world available to you is the world of men, and that world you cannot choose to leave. You are a man! The protector showed the world of happiness where there is no difference between things because there is no one there to ask about the difference. But that is not the world of men. The protector shook you out of it and showed you how a man thinks and fights. *That* is the world of man! And to be a man is to be condemned to that world. You have the vanity to believe you live in two worlds, but that is only your vanity. There is but one single world for us. We are men and must follow the world of men contentedly.

"I believe that was the lesson," concluded Castaneda. I believe it is ours also.

My very special thanks to Joseph Campbell for reading my manuscript and providing some invaluable suggestions. His thought can be spotted here and there throughout my writing, but he never fails to refer to it as "our thinking."