



Leading change: insights from Jungian interpretations of *The Book of Job*

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Abstract *This paper explores insights from the psychology of C.G. Jung as it relates to leadership and the management of change in organizations. It draws especially upon Jung's archetypal interpretation of the biblical story of Job, and the relevance of this story to the modern day study of organizational life. It suggests that the transformations of consciousness represented within the story of Job are highly relevant to the ways that organizations and their leaders face chaotic, turbulent, and/or unpredictable circumstances. In particular, it describes the role of the feminine and the shadow within such situations, as forces that allow a new order to unfold during periods of intense change.*

When you do things from your soul,
You feel a river moving in you, a joy.
When actions come from another section,
The feeling disappears.

Don't let others lead you. They may be blind,
Or worse, vultures.
Don't insist on going where you think you want to go.
Ask the way to the Spring.
Your living pieces will form a harmony.
There is a moving palace that floats through the air,
With balconies and clear water running in every part of it,
Infinitely everywhere, yet contained under a single tent (Rumi, 1995).

Introduction

In the literature on the successful leadership of change, two of the qualities cited as essential are vision and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998). Here vision refers to a credible picture of a future that is better than the present and emotional intelligence is a sensitivity to self and others, and an awareness and understanding of emotions. If leadership of change is about telling participants a new story and guiding them through it, vision is the "happy ending." Along with linguistic fluidity and personal charisma (Gardner, 1995), the leader with emotional intelligence can build interest in "the story" and offer a plotline by which everyone can move towards the desired goal (Barry and Elmes, 1997).



Unfortunately, the literature on vision and emotional intelligence often reads like a “how-to” checklist. There is, within this literature, a tendency to ignore the deep and painful experiences that bring a person to genuine vision, emotional intelligence, and wholeness of character. We suggest in this paper that before change leaders can be successful, they must first go through a “crucible of testing” (Guinness, 1990), one that radically alters the individual’s relationship to life. Central to this shift, and explored herein, is an ever-deeper opening to the feminine and shadow elements of the psyche. Extending far beyond the “how-tos” of leading change, the crucible of experience can yield true confidence and wisdom to help others face the same difficult periods.

In this paper, we use Carl Jung’s interpretation of the *Book of Job* from the *Old Testament* to understand “the crucible of testing” and the deep shifts that might occur. Specifically, with Jung’s insights and with the aid of further interpretive works by Edward Edinger and poet-artist William Blake, we will come to see how Job’s “crucible of testing” brought a deeper opening to the feminine and shadow elements of his being, and what these meant in terms of his own ways as a leader.

The story of Job as guidance for leading change

Usually, without being aware of it, we try to change something other than ourselves; we try to order things outside of ourselves. But it is impossible to organize things if you yourself are not in order. When you do things in the right way, at the right time, everything else will be organized. You are the “boss.” When the boss is sleeping, everyone is sleeping. When the boss is doing something right, everyone will do everything right, and at the right time (Suzuki, 1970, p. 27).

William Safire (1993) depicts Job as the first great dissident, the individual who finally got up and complained about the way things were. In this sense, as we hear about Job, we can look much deeper than the story of an ancient seeker who went through a period of doubt about his faith. We find within Job the key attributes necessary for an individual to break from a rigid worldview, to transform, and to be lead when intense change and crisis prevails. Indeed, Job’s is a story of the transformative power of crisis and difficulty, of how, as Jung consistently observed, we have to go through some intensive experience before we accept the pain of change and approach our deeper identity – rooted in the transpersonal “self.”

Job’s story describes the painful process of letting go of one’s picture of “reality” – for one that is more comprehensive, more embracing of the totality of the psyche. It includes a removal of the sense of separation between inner and outer life. In a sense the isolated self comes to know itself as the greater, transpersonal “self,” connected to all of life. This more expansive view of the self can embrace the masculine and feminine, darkness and light, order and disorder, creation and destruction. Such a reconnection with and among all the dimensions of the self allows an individual to become aware of and to work with the many difficult and uncertain aspects of change. Ultimately, realizing the self brings a sense of

oneness with change. It is the very “self” that is transforming, resisting, responding, and becoming creative within any context of change. With such a vision, there is no longer any sense of separation from what is being experienced. Working with a situation is working with and discovering the nature of the self.

By way of introduction, we note that Job’s story is not at all about an otherworldly or abstract spirituality. Appearing as the first book of the “wisdom writings” of the Bible, it is meant to be useful in practical life. The story speaks of the discovery of meaning in a life full of turbulence, injustice, betrayal, and overwhelming difficulty, not unlike the writings of Victor Frankl (1968) and Etty Hillesum (1983), who chronicled the ways that people found meaning within the horrors of the Holocaust. Such experiences are extreme cases of what we all go through: the challenges of the outer life demanding a reorientation of the human being at a most fundamental level. In fact, to Jung, the story of Job was *the* story of the predicament of a modern human being, involving a changing image and definition of the sources of authority, power, and soul.

After recounting the *Story of Job*, we will explore the ways that it calls us to see things differently, and to frame issues of organizational change differently. We will also examine the elements of Job’s “crucible of testing” and look for the parallels to our own experience and our ability to work with periods of intense change.

The Story of Job

The following is our narrative of the story of Job, drawn from the interpretations of Jung (1958a) and Edinger (1986), and based on illustrations by William Blake. We are especially grateful for Edinger’s penetrating insights into Blake’s drawings, which give shape to our story and clarity to the issues involved.

Job is a great leader. He has vast flocks of sheep, good workers, and the highest standards. Though he is only a farmer and merchant, he has the respect and power of a king. The leader’s land is well fenced, yielding great harvests and nourishing his vast flocks. Under Job, people take a place of subservience. In Blake’s first illustration (Figure 1) of the story, all the members of the family are looking at Job. The situation is lifeless: musical instruments are hung up and not in use, and the animals are sitting in obedience.

In Job’s kingdom, there is no time for music and dance: there are things to be done and remuneration for doing them. People seem appreciative of being in his domain, and yet there is a lack of energy, of what Jung called “numinosity.”

Job follows to the letter what he thinks to be God’s rules. He is an extremely ethical man, has much faith, and gives generously to charity. And he has an earthly wisdom as well; he “fears God and ties his camel.”

Suddenly one day, Job’s fortune changes. His flocks are raided, some of his sons and workers are killed. Others among the young men are sneaking off to the market, listening to the poets or attending primitive rituals and orgies.

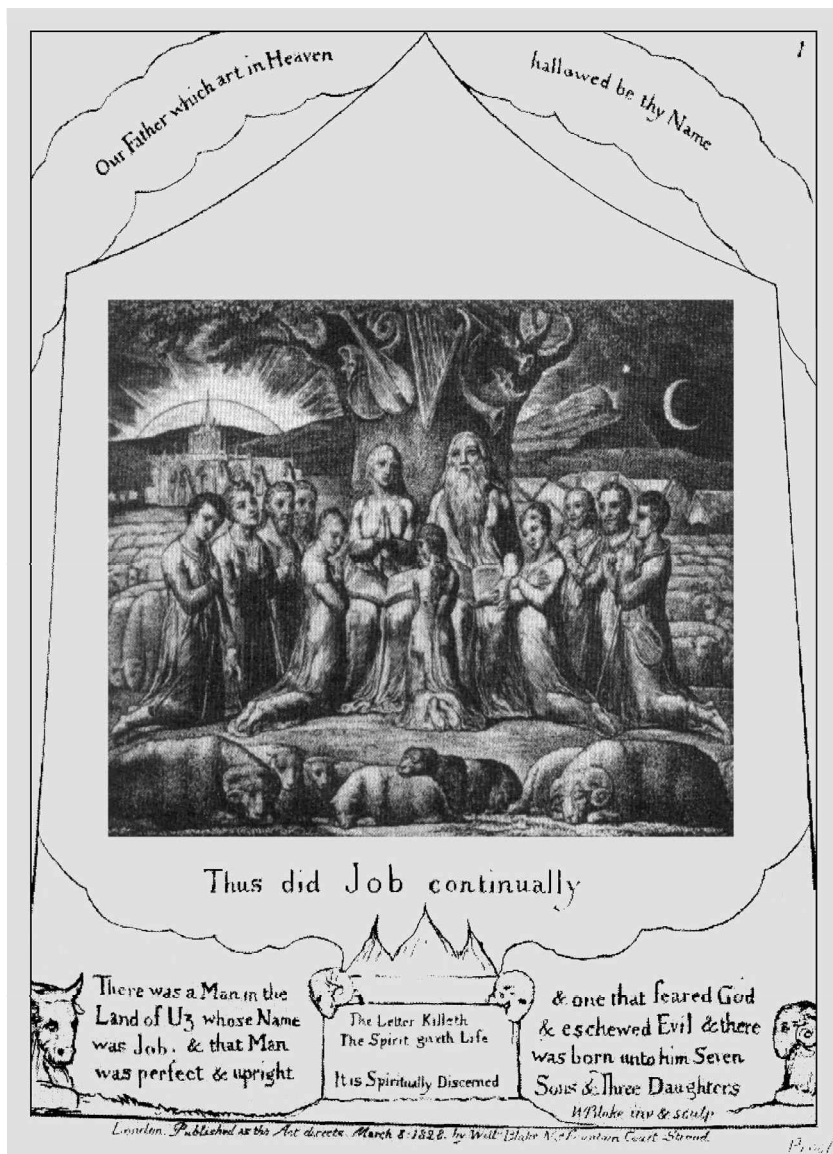


Figure 1.
Job, family and flocks
before his trials
(illustration by
William Blake)

Misfortunes continue to mount, and Job feels greatly troubled. It seems as though there is a plot against the great man. He thinks that perhaps by giving more alms things can change. He tries this, and, lo and behold, a great storm sweeps the land and levels the temple in his town – the place he reveres and finds his strength in. The storm brings down his barns, and the traveling tribes, along with some of his own workers, take advantage of the time to steal more of his flocks and all of his camels. His children begin to beg, drink, and stay out late, and some of them are killed in accidents. In all his grief, his

friends desert him, and even family members stop talking with each other. Finally, to top it all off, Job gets very sick.

For Job the illness is the last straw. Up to that time, he has been able to keep his cool, trying again and again to restore order through every possible means. He rebuilds his fences, seeks out wise counselors to advise him on his businesses, and tries to reinstill in his workers and family a sense of vision and optimism.

As despair set in, Job's counselors, all well paid and well meaning, continue to come to him overflowing with advice and words of consolation. They tell him he is doing everything right, that the problem is just one of cycles – what goes up, must come down. Just weather the storm, they say, have faith and everything will be all right.

But Job does not accept the counsel. He no longer believes that acting the role of the good person spells a prosperous and happy life. Down, down the great man goes. The counselors come and continue to tell him that he is still a great man, a hero to his people. They tell him that if he despairs, perhaps everyone will.

While he cannot pinpoint the problem, Job knows in his heart of hearts that these well-meaning counselors have not a clue about the present situation. As right as they have been about the past, there is something new here, discontinuous from all that has gone before. The whole playing field has been leveled, and the old rules might as well be thrown out.

A significant encounter ensues, one that takes Job some time to assimilate. Besides the older advisors, Elihu, a young and enthusiastic counselor, appears. The youth admits that he has failed to speak previously because he was respecting the age and supposed wisdom of the older counselors. But the older counselors' lack of understanding finally was too much to take, and Elihu has to speak up now. We can imagine that the youth, with a fresh perspective, agrees that things have changed and might go on changing forever. The youth warns Job to pay attention to his dreams, to literally "fear" that he may miss the whole point of his existence, and to put away any pride.

Still, Job complains bitterly. God answers him in a whirlwind. "Who is this obscuring my designs by his empty headed words?" Then, suddenly, Job is raised above earthly life. He is given a glimpse of both the light and shadow of God. God's response is to reveal to Job the nature of the divine, the fact that it does not neatly fit our human projections and expectations. Instead of containing only that which is just, good, and beautiful, it also contains the frightening, paradoxical, and illogical.

Subsequent images by Blake depict the creation story. Following the violent whirlwind and Satan being cast out of heaven, it is as if Job and his world are created anew. Blake depicts Job and his wife being infused with light by God. Inscribed below this image are Christ's words: "and in that day ye shall know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you." Here we can see a leap in consciousness that goes far beyond the moralistic and dualistic worldview that Job has held. Seeing things differently, Job is aware of his "oneness with the

Father” and the joining of divine and human nature. The reference to Christ helps make it clear that this joining comes from a willingly sacrificial attitude. Sacrifice here is not of goods and property: It is of having things on one’s own terms, rather than having things in accord with the overall harmony of the Divine. The discovery represented here is that, by giving up one’s will to its universal counterpart, one’s deeper will, the Christ-nature or Buddha-nature, is realized. In Job’s case, the universal will demanded a period of chaos, which brought a kind of clean sweep of his kingdom. Removed was anything sclerosed, stale, and lifeless. Life’s renewal demanded change, and finally, by opening to the chaotic conditions and completely letting go of all the order that he had come to expect, Job came to know more of his true nature.

Seeing through the eyes of Christ, serving in the “work” of the Comforter, Job’s concern becomes the welfare of creation, particularly the human beings in his life. In Blake’s painting, both Job and his wife are being showered with light, representing the integration of the feminine the alchemical marriage by which heaven and earth are joined.

Once again, the enterprises of Job flourish. His wealth increases and benevolence and goodwill prevail. It seems a new order is being attained, far different from the old one. Job rocks tradition by distributing his wealth evenly among sons and daughters, instead of giving all only to his sons. Restored to wholeness, Job also regains his health.

Evidence of an opening to the feminine can be found in the way that Job turns his attention towards his daughters for counsel. Perhaps they can see and understand patterns, or vaster dimensions of, the situations which Job faces. In any case, their role is pivotal in bringing forth a new perspective and restoring the vibrancy of the kingdom. In Blake’s illustration (Figure 2) of this final aspect of the story, there is animation: animals move about, there is music and dance, and the youth who have previously departed for the cults return.

Job’s story and self-discovery

To understand Job’s story from a Jungian perspective, it is necessary to see it in terms of his discovery of and coming to terms with the greater or transpersonal “self.” Marie Louise von Franz wrote that individuation or the “conscious coming to terms with one’s own inner center (psychic nucleus) or self” often occurs after a “wounding of the personality and the suffering that accompanies it” (von Franz, 1977, p. 169). She discussed the wounding in terms of its impact on an ego that feels “hampered in its will or its desire and usually projects the obstruction onto something external” (von Franz, 1977, p. 169). For many leaders, this might manifest itself as a penchant for blaming the boss, the customer, the systems, or the organization for everyday problems and failures that frustrate or poorly reflect on leaders. From the point of view of his ego, Job had done everything right – he had prayed in the right manner, he had followed the right traditions, and he had lived a righteous life. When the world around him fell apart and his life became chaotic and confused, he did not look within himself for an explanation but rather blamed God. If he had been good and



Figure 2.
Job, family and flocks
after his trials
(illustration by
William Blake)

righteous all these years, he reasoned, how could the troubles he faced have anything to do with him? They were God's fault.

Of vital relevance in Job's story to the leadership of change, is the "shadow" – that part of the unconscious personality that holds unknown or repressed attributes and qualities of the ego. This awareness emerges in us through seeming accident, through chaotic moments of conflict, through dreams and fantasies. Awareness of the shadow is vital because it contains those elements that make us fully human – fears, desires, and hatreds that are difficult to own.

It is only by coming to know and fully accept the shadow within the psyche that a full and rich relationship with the self is possible, unencumbered by the desires and fears of the ego. Without this deep awareness and acceptance, it is not possible to understand that what is happening, however intense, is not meant as a personal attack by God, and is ultimately useful in attaining wholeness. Without the embrace of the shadow, we too readily dismiss that which we fear, dislike, or cannot understand. With the broader perspective provided by the shadow, and the unconditional self-love provided by the “feminine,” our challenges can be seen as helpers that provide useful information. For example, consider the fear of failure or humiliation that arises within a leader during a change initiative. The fear is natural, and accepting its presence without resistance makes one more vulnerable, open, able to listen, and able to ask for and be receptive to help. On the other hand, resisting the fear, trying to push it away, makes one less able to listen, less responsive, both internally and externally. Without the depth of vulnerability, the individual cannot possibly have as keen an awareness of what a situation demands, what people need and require to be successful.

Job’s story illustrates that by shining awareness on all those parts of ourselves that we do not like – in his terms by understanding the shadow – we become more human and responsive. His experience brought out the dark side of life. Part of Job’s ego had been a very rigid and patriarchal view of the world. To Job, God had been the father. Job’s view of reality had been hierarchical and transcendent, with eyes focused upward to the exclusion of the life around him. This is why Blake pictured Job’s life as barren, without music. Before the change, everyone in Job’s world had remained in his or her assigned places and obeyed the rules. A conscientious and beneficent leader, with a moralistic view of right and wrong, of good and bad, Job had neglected to honor and nurture the people and life around him. After disaster struck, however, and Job’s ego was defeated, life was renewed. Blake portrays Job and his kingdom as much more animated and alive; music, the counsel of his daughters, freedom of movement, and respect for nature characterized his new realm.

Perhaps even more relevant to leadership and the management of change, Job’s transformation also calls forth awareness of the feminine, of the “anima.” von Franz describes the anima as “the personification of all feminine psychological tendencies . . . feelings and moods, prophetic hunches, receptiveness to the irrational, capacity for personal love, feeling for nature and – last but not least – (one’s) relation to the unconscious . . . It is the inner feminine side of a person that allows them to connect to the ‘ghost land’” (von Franz, 1977, p. 186). The anima is often portrayed as a goddess or priestess who has links with primal forces of light or darkness. As a negative force, that is, when the shadow is repressed or denied, the anima can manifest itself as feelings of worthlessness, moodiness, compulsive erotic fantasies, and romantic fantasies of love and maternal warmth, later to be betrayed. As a positive force, that is, when accessible to the individual, the anima can help a person be receptive to valuable insights and information from the unconscious

and thereby become more closely aligned to an inner sovereignty: wisdom and compassion. The anima is in this respect as Dante's Beatrice, the guide of the soul to the higher mysteries of the self and the mediator between earth and heaven, between the ego and the self.

According to Jung, it is by taking seriously one's moods, fantasies, and images – the substance of the anima – that one gains full access to the unconscious and to the self. A Sufi poem points to this guiding wisdom and well expresses Jung's reverence for the anima:

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out for some new delight (Rumi, 1995, p. 109).

Job began to question his old patterns and assumptions after everything had fallen apart and after his efforts to blame God had proven fruitless. Only then did the awareness of the feminine, and the symbolism of the marriage of feminine and masculine, dawn. Only then did Job begin to take the counsel of Elihu, which ultimately led Job to deeper realizations. Only through the intensity did he finally take the counsel of his daughters: by honoring feminine wisdom, his plight was resolved.

The encounter with the self in organizational life

The wonderful thing about these new forms of leadership is that they get easier as you practice them. Many of the most difficult things you have to face are the things that you fear because you have been taught to fear them in the old culture. Learning to expose your failures is one of the most liberating aspects of the whole journey. If one no longer is required to be perfect, then so many new things are possible. And stubbing your toe is not that painful, as long as you are willing to stand up and say, "I stubbed my toe. Now I am going to do something different" (Philip Carroll, CEO of Shell Oil Co., in *Senge et al.*, 1999, p. 211).

The story of Job is everyone's: at home; in everyday interactions with others; and at work. How do we recognize this encounter? Jung offers a clue:

"God" is the name by which I designate all things which cross my willful path violently and recklessly, all things which upset my subjective views, plans and intentions and change the course of my life for better or worse (Jung, 1961).

From a Jungian perspective, chaos is the influx of the feminine into individual and organizational life. The feminine upsets the plans, stories, assumptions, and dogma that people adopt to maintain a sense of control, comfort, and rationality in the world. In *Dancing in the Flames*, Woodman and Dickson

(1997) describe the role of the feminine in managing amidst situations of radical change, turbulence, and even chaos:

Science has very nearly grasped the paradox at the heart to reality – the paradox that mythology calls “goddess,” creating a momentum that has never existed at any other time in history . . . Ancient wisdom, in which chaos was recognized and preserved (particularly in gnosticism and alchemy) as the necessary element of transformation, has finally been restored . . . It is within this chaos that a deeper, intrinsic order reveals itself. This is not the imposed order that we have become so accustomed to in a patriarchal, conceptualized world, an order that is not connected to the creative matrix. Rather, it is an order that emerges rather than being imposed (Woodman and Dickson, 1997, pp. 38-39).

Allowing order to “emerge” from the events of life, rather than attempting to imposing it on them from a state of mental abstraction (e.g. planning, modeling, strategizing, and so forth) is the challenge of modern organizational life.

Being vulnerable, aligning to the feminine, and welcoming periods of apparent chaos all require us to become open to the uncomfortable aspects of our work. It can be difficult and painful, but immensely fruitful as well. The growth that results takes time and cannot be imposed through a quality program or culture change seminar. Given the forces of chaos and the profound evolution needed in each individual and organization, the changes necessary in modern work life are neither minor nor superficial. Present day consulting for “whole-systems” transformation that does not emphasize the importance of this deep, person-by-person change is often only window-dressing, what Zohar (1997) calls the “transformation lie”.

It is not intellectual knowledge that leads us to embrace of the shadow and our receptive side. It is crisis, the same Job-like conditions impinging on our own lives. An example is offered here by David Marsing, vice president and general manager of assembly test manufacturing at Intel. After a heart attack, Marsing was told by doctors that he was perhaps in the wrong profession, that maybe he should be a forester in a watchtower, or a librarian – anything but a leader under lethal pressure:

When I went back to work, I felt like I could see and hear things in a way that I never could before, picking up signals from all the people who had a difficult time at work. They were grinding themselves up – in emotional, physical and spiritual pain. I had never realized the degree to which all around me were suffering. How, then, could we create an environment for breakthrough performance at every level – not just the traditional work indicators, but interpersonally, and in terms of the individual integration of work and personal life? I believed that part of the problem was our managerial approach. It was like trying to swim with a full set of weights. It represented a macho achievement, but it wasn't efficient – and if you weren't lucky, you would drown trying. Getting the weights off would require some departures from Intel's traditional thinking and ways of doing things (Marsing in Senge *et al.*, 1996, p. 216).

To explore further the implications of Jung's *Answer to Job* (Jung, 1958a) to organizational change, it is useful to understand the three central themes of the wisdom tradition from which Jung drew (Smith, 1995, p. 248):

- (1) *Things are more integrated, more connected, than they appear.* Our situation, Smith says, is akin to seeing a great tapestry from the back.

While we see isolated threads, the beauty and harmony of the whole carpet is missed, only to be grasped when we see interconnections. Any human being, rather than being separate and disconnected, is integrally and intricately woven into life's tapestry.

- (2) *Things are often much better than they seem.* Human life, rooted in nature and made in the image of perfection, is infinitely greater than everyday experience might suggest. Despite appearances and/or feelings of limitation, each human being is an ever-new, ever-unfolding ever-beloved child of the universe. In spite of the misunderstandings, injustices, tragedies, and violence that surround us, there is always possibility and hope for humanity.
- (3) *Things are more mysterious than they appear.* The wisdom schools suggest, for example, a profound synchronicity at work in life, which joins people, events and situations in order to bring out the greatest potential. This means, Smith urges, that we never get too comfortable with our understanding of things. Opening to mystery, we witness surprise and find our understanding stretched to the point of bewilderment. The wisdom schools suggest that the more we are willing to live with mystery, to give up our certainty and our commonplace interpretation of events, the more this mystery becomes apparent.

Although Jung's work seemingly stands in direct opposition to the postmodern perspective through its essentialism, epistemological claims, and "Pollyanna" optimism, the two paradigms share a deconstruction of the ontological status of boundaries. That is, Jung views Job's story as exemplary in its dissolving of the boundaries between the "inner" and "outer" world. A thorough discussion of the two very different paradigms is beyond the scope of this paper; suffice it to say that a Jungian approach supports a movement toward more freedom and expansiveness, on an individual, organizational, and societal level, through the application of deeply suffered personal lessons of humility and compassion. In terms of meaning, we could postulate that the Jungian perspective corresponds to the systems view, in which the interconnection of events and situations with our "inner life" calls for a reflection upon and an appreciation of others. *The Marriage of Heaven and Earth*:

"God" is the primordial experience of [the human], and from the remotest times humanity has taken inconceivable pains either to portray this baffling experience, to assimilate it by means of interpretation, speculation or dogma, or else to deny it (Jung, 1958a, p. 480).

As the words above attest, Jung was fierce in communicating the need to get beyond outworn God images in order to ground understanding in personal experience. An abstract "God in the heavens" conception that excludes human love and compassion for one's neighbor serves no one. Bringing the self into everyday interactions and encounters, according to Jung, is essential to wholeness, at all levels.

Being fully human does not connote living in an abstraction; rather, it means being open to the light and air and the constant changes within ordinary life. It is only through this openness to heaven and earth that an alchemical marriage becomes possible. To Jung, each individual, like Job, has to endure and hold the paradoxes of awakening consciousness and the moments when there seem to be no answers. For those willing to go through this state of unknowing and paradox, a greater wholeness and connection with life becomes possible. In Edinger's (1986, p. 9) words:

At first, the encounter with the Self is indeed a defeat for the ego; but with perseverance, *Deo volente*, light is born from the darkness. One meets the "Immortal One" who wounds and heals, who casts down and raises up, who makes small and makes large – in a word, the One who makes one whole.

Ultimately, the "workability" of life was Job's lesson. His problem disappeared when his point of view widened and when his focus shifted from personal suffering to connecting with and gaining the fullest appreciation of the circumstances and events around him. In the gaining of this wisdom, and in this sense of appreciation for "what is," a dramatic shift in vision occurs.

My daily activities are not different,
Only I am naturally in harmony with them . . .
In every circumstance, no hindrance, no conflict
Drawing water, hewing wood,
This is the supernatural power
This the marvelous activity (Zen poem, in Smith, 1995, p. 91).

Jung offered clues to such an approach and vision of life, clues that help us in leading and managing within a turbulent world. By perceiving the "workability" of the seemingly worst of circumstances, it is possible to listen and act with wisdom and joy. Going a step further into the dimension of "mystery," the perspective offered by Jung and by Job suggests that we might look very carefully at our moment-to-moment experience for the signposts of meaning and guidance that are offered.

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