

A NEW VOCABULARY

Ann and Alexander Shulgin

This paper is based on a presentation made at the 22nd Annual Conference of the Association for Humanistic Psychology, 21-26 August 1984, in Boston, Massachusetts, and is an abridged version of a chapter in the Shulgins' book, TIHKAL (Tryptamines I Have Known and Loved).

Several years ago, at a symposium in Santa Barbara, California, an audience gathered to hear about and discuss "entheogens," a word created to mean "generation of God within" – yet another name for psychoactive drugs. Our presentation there was an answer to an often-asked question, "Why do you do the work that you do?" What are our reasons for the designing, the making, and the evaluation of drugs which can bring a person into some form of understanding of the drives and unconscious motivations of himself and other people? And why the subsequent publication of this work and its results?

We had named a number of substances which had been developed – some by ourselves and some by others – which we chose to call words in the vocabulary of communication, words which allow the exchanges of understanding and insights. We had felt that the chemicals were the words of vocabulary; we feel now that this concept is not correct. The vocabulary is not composed of the catalysts that evoke the experiences; the vocabulary is created by the experiences themselves.

What we are doing is looking, as have countless others before us, for a way to communicate the experiences of the deeper parts of ourselves, a way to share knowledge which has traditionally been called "occult," or "hidden," and which has been, until our time, considered the private preserve of those few shamans, teachers, or spiritual guides in each culture who had earned their way to it.

In their hands was the responsibility of choosing from the multitude the gifted, intuitive people who would become students or disciples. These special ones were taken into temples of learning, into the pyramids, the secret lodges, the monasteries, or the sacred kivas, and were slowly led into a recognition of their own interior landscape. These guided explorations evolved, in time, into a state of mind and heart which was then – and still is now – known as wisdom.

We now live in a time when these teachings are completely in the open. They are exposed and available, in books, on tapes, on television and radio, in magazines and newspapers, by letter or telephone – a thousand and one places. Secrecy is no longer necessary in this Western culture filled with noise, both auditory and visual, and those who are not prepared to hear or see, learn nothing. In our present-day western world, true secrecy is often – if not always – a tool of power-seekers, of men and women who know the attraction of the forbidden and mysterious to the naive person who is willing to be controlled and led.

We are here today to try to explain why we feel it essential to attempt to instill a greater awareness, an expansion of conscious knowing, in the people who lead our society and shape its direction. We can no longer trust to time, as our ancestors did, to the gradual and natural unfolding and evolution of comprehension and wisdom.

We do not think we have the time.

If we did have the time that our ancestors had, we would expect to see a gradual increase in the number of people aware of the interior workings, the energies, the complex balancing of drives, fears, instincts and learned patterns, which make up the interior universe of the human being. We would have reason to anticipate an eventual growth in understanding of the nature of mind, soul and psyche. Until recently, this growth had been keeping pace with, and counterbalancing, the flowering of knowledge in the physical world. In the last few decades, developments in physics, chemistry, electronics, mathematics, and information distribution have occurred at a rate unique in human history. The impact on even the most intelligent and thoughtful people in our Western world has been so massive, and so rapid, as to have produced a state of mind known now as “future shock.”

This understanding of the nature of the physical world has not, however, had the necessary and vital counterpart in the understanding of the nature of the human unconscious, of the images and emotions and energies which determine the uses to which the knowledge of physical matter may be directed.

We see all around us the results of unconscious projection, unconscious archetypal energies, and this time – instead of having reason to fear the destruction of a culture, or a race, or a civilization – we are facing the com-

plete annihilation of the form of life known as mankind, a final end to the entire human experiment. What we do not acknowledge consciously, and what we have not allowed ourselves to confront consciously, may this time kill all of us.

The concept of "archetypes" was made familiar to us by Carl Jung. One can also describe them as fundamental psychic energies presenting themselves within the human psyche as powerful images. The Jungian analyst, John Perry, has given a good definition of what is meant by archetypes. "They are," he says, "components of the deeper layer of the psyche which express themselves in mythic or symbolic imagery, and which portray the developmental process of the individual – and the culture. The archetype is made of image and emotion; the image presents the meaning of the emotion, and the emotion gives the image its dynamic energy. It is autonomous, usually residing in the unconscious. In order for the archetype to be experienced consciously, it is necessary for the individual to be in an altered state of consciousness, however induced."

Until we are prepared to undertake that most essential of all explorations, the difficult but rewarding journey of discovery into our inner universe, we will continue to make choices motivated by the unseen, unrecognized, and unadmitted energies and images within us, both constructive and destructive.

Our political leaders will continue to make decisions based on the energies engendered mostly by the destructive archetypes, and those of power and control. The difference between our present time and any earlier time in history is that, among the tools available to unconsciously motivated leaders, there are now brand new ones known as nuclear weapons.

Most of the great religions and spiritual belief systems of the world have chosen to deal with archetypes in projection, as aspects of the spiritual world with which humans must deal in order to survive. In the mythologies of all cultures we find ways of portraying the duality of life-giving and death-dealing, of nurturing and destroying.

It is easy to believe that the most insightful and spiritually advanced wise men of each culture must have realized that these forces of light and dark lived within their own psyches. It is also reasonable to assume that the priest-kings of ancient times gained and kept power by externalizing these archetypal images as gods and demons, and by assuring the people over whom they ruled that only they, themselves, knew how to keep these entities satisfied and thus benign.

In Greece, for example, the gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus mirrored the contradictory nature of man. For each Demeter, representing life and growth, there was a Hades who brought cold and death, and who had to be granted his time and his due. And usually, within each god and goddess

there were two aspects – the giving, teaching and nurturing aspect, and the revengeful and destructive aspect. In teaching the people by means of stories and ceremonial rituals, the priests acquainted them with the means of handling these various human impulses and contradictions. They were not known as the “destructive instinct,” the “nurturing and connecting impulse,” the “power drive,” but as Zeus and Athena and Aphrodite, Hermes and Hestia. Those who chose to pay attention to the lessons contained in the stories, honoring the needs of these projected energies by means of ceremony and sacrifice, were expected to live lives of relative safety and contentment.

Every culture has had such god-images, and throughout thousands of years the archetypes that, in reality, reside within us have been given names and places outside us – on the sacred mountain top, above the altar, beneath the earth where the dead ancestors dwell, inside the secret cave, or at the bottom of the sea. Buddha and Ahriman, Christ and Satan, Lucifer and Shiva, Kwan-Yin (the Chinese goddess of mercy and compassion) and the Black Kali (the Indian goddess of blood and death) – all outside. Their existence inside us has remained unacknowledged by the conscious mind.

In a day when a majority of the public in this country is increasingly well-informed and has some exposure to logical thinking, the ancient god-forms of these interior energies are less often mentioned; rather, our projections are made onto other cultures, other ways of life and thinking. Satan may not be popular, but the Soviet Union, for many years, took its place satisfactorily. In modern-day Iraq and Iran, America is the new devil, the convenient embodiment of the terrible, evil Other.

It has been the habit of people in positions of power and influence, both in the past and in our own time, to discourage individual, unguided, and undirected exploration into the interior of the human psyche. The reasons given for such discouragement are many, and often based on realistic concerns. Among the more altruistic reasons given for limiting the means and forms of self-discovery is one which bears the stamp of truth: that this kind of exploration may well be accompanied by emotional shock and an over-turning of long-held and deeply cherished beliefs. We, too, believe that it should be attempted only by a person who has succeeded in developing a strong central core, a sense of Self – someone who has had the conscious experience of the awareness of himself as being – and with it, the awareness of the fact that he is aware of being.

This has also been called the “I am” experience, and was perhaps best described by the author C. S. Lewis, in a small, extraordinary autobiographical work entitled “Surprised by Joy.” Only such a person is equipped, according to this argument, to enter the uncharted land of his unconscious self and confront, with expectation of emerging mentally and emotionally whole, the

archetypes – both personal and universal – which he will meet.

They are not all dragons. Many of these energies and images are radiant and totally seductive, and it does indeed take practice and a certain degree of emotional and psychological maturity, as well as a strong center, to distinguish between equally luminous and inviting paths, to sense where and when one should go and where and when one should stay and reflect. In the mental health field, for instance, this concern is expressed in the statement that there are many people who cannot and should not undertake the self-exploration known as psychoanalysis.

All around us, we have seen the results of unprepared and unguided self-exploration. There have been unexpected eruptions of the unconscious energies in people whose inner core or sense of Self was not sufficiently developed to enable them to structure, control, or to gain understanding of the surge of imagery and force from the hidden side of themselves. Most of these people, in the past – as now – spent much of their lives, after such an eruption, in places of confinement of some kind. In modern times, these places are called mental hospitals. On some past occasions, they were put to death as witches; in a few cases they lost themselves in the radiant and loving archetypes, and spent their lives as saints or mystics, often just as unable to care for their own daily needs as were the demon-possessed.

These encounters with the interior world have given fuel to the argument that such knowledge is dangerous, and that those people who have insisted on exploring these unknown areas – especially if they did so openly – were to be regarded as threatening the peace and safety of their society. This view has merit. However, there is another side to the argument.

Societies are usually led by people whose focus and energy are fueled by the power-drive – what can perhaps be called the power archetype. It is an aspect of the self that all explorers of the psyche will meet, sooner or later.

The power aspect is able to make decisions and to formulate rules and systems; it structures and it drives to control. Without it, mankind would have perished long ago. The power-drive shapes our world. Kept in balance with its several complementary energies, it gives us form; it builds civilizations.

But when the precarious balance is shifted and too much energy flows from the power-drive, structure becomes constriction, control becomes dictatorship, teaching becomes admonition and threat, vision and intuition become dogma, and caution turns into paranoia. Communication with the loving and nurturing energy has been lost, and with it the ability to choose wisely.

When the power aspect is threatened or frustrated, and if it remains unconscious, it tends to ally itself with the destructive energy, the part of our human psyche which relates to its surroundings with a drive to contain,

incorporate, devour, and kill. It becomes, unconsciously and instinctively, the enemy of its creative counterpart, which is characterized by adaptability, communication, empathy, and transformation. Thus, the implications of individual self-exploration and self-knowledge are sensed as being immensely threatening by those people who have allied themselves with the drive to control.

Priests and kings, emperors and presidents, and all those who find comfort and safety within the structures maintained by the powerful, tend to be disturbed and therefore angered by those who insist on striking off in new directions, ignoring the guidance of appointed leaders. To those in authority, there is the unconscious threat of chaos, the shattering of what is known, familiar and safe. The response to this threat can take the forms of banishment, burning at the stake, imprisonment, or – at the very least – warnings to keep discoveries private, lest they provoke the self-protective anger of the established order and of those who maintain power through it.

This has been the history of human development on this earth, a balance maintained – usually with great difficulty and often with violence – between the urge to control and the need to change and grow. And this is the way that we should have been able to have it continue. But the technological growth spurt of the past fifty years has put into our hands a body of knowledge that forever changes the equation.

The great and ancient ways of self-discovering – meditation, love-making, music and dancing, singing, ritual and rhythm – are perhaps now not to be given enough time. The old ways of instructing and helping, by which one generation of insightful and wiser people has always passed on its experience to its children (perhaps with the use of psychoactive plants and chemicals or other teaching tools) may be denied us, if the balance shifts too far.

We are now at a time when, if we do not discover a way of acknowledging and accepting the existence of these primal energies within ourselves, we will not be able to learn how to live with them. Until we begin to know, consciously, what there is within our individual and collective psyches, we will be unable to choose wisely. We need to discover that we have centers, cores, I-Am's – whatever name you wish to use – and that this center in each of us has been given the truly incredible gift of choice. We must see that we can weigh, evaluate, understand – and choose. Not just once, but continually. Not unconsciously, but in full awareness. As one example, every time we open our mouths to speak, we choose words on the side of sharing, encouraging, energizing, constructing – or on the side of taking control, asserting power, directing, taking apart. We make use of all aspects of ourselves in everything that we do.

But we must become increasingly aware of what we are, and what those

energies within us are, and of the choices that are there to be made. And especially, we must be aware of what part of ourselves is actually making each of these choices. For, just as we act on those around us in ways that are loving or destructive, so do we act upon ourselves.

We are to ourselves both giver and taker, lover and killer. We fight desperately to continue living one more day, yet we grow within ourselves the seeds of our own punishment. The soul of every one of us mirrors the battle – or the balancing – between the yang and the yin. Consciously or unconsciously, choices will be made. Our own prejudice is strongly towards the conscious, the aware.

The classic arts of India and China present us with paintings, sculptures and myths which encourage us to face some complex and – to us in the Judeo-Christian West – disturbing truths:

That the images of blood and death within us present aspects of both terror and of bliss; that there is a yin and a yang, a light and a dark, a male and a female aspect to everything that lives within us, and in everything that surrounds us;

And, above all, that being human means being a soul that chooses – consciously or unconsciously – what it will become, what it will do, and what it will ally itself with.

It may well be that choices made by each of us, in full awareness, will be on the side of ending humanity, and cleaning up this corner of the universe.

And it may be that we will choose, with love and acceptance, to give the human species a chance to evolve and transform.

It is not possible for us to predict which decision will be made. We argue only for making that decision with as much awareness, as much conscious knowledge, as possible. Let us know just what we are choosing, when we make our choices.

Finally, we must begin now to develop our new vocabulary of the human soul, to build a new language with which to communicate this area of experience and knowledge, not only throughout our own society, but across the world.