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Transforming the Schizoid God

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The whole evolutionary process is thus holonic through and through. Each stage (of Ascent) builds upon and incorporates its predecessors—"the last is the result of the earlier; nothing is lost, all principles are preserved" (Hegel). What *is* lost is the narrowness of the predecessor, or its claim to be the Whole. Each stage incorporates its predecessor but negates its partiality.

This is a truly stunning vision, a profound integration of Ego and Eco, of Spirit descending into even the lowest state and ascending back to itself, with Spirit nonetheless *fully present at each and every stage* as the *process* of its own self-realization and self-actualization, its own self-unfolding and self-enfolding development, a divine play of Spirit present in every single movement of Kosmos, yet finding more and more of itself as its own Play proceeds, dancing fully and divine in every gesture of the universe, never really lost and never really found, but present from the start and all along, a wink and a nod from the radiant Abyss.

Ken Wilber
(1995, p. 489)

I see her body now—as if for the first time—for truly it has only now become available to me—to see, to touch, to sense. It is 80 years old now, wrinkled, skin dangling from her arms, veins and blotches clearly visible on her hands, forearms and legs. The one unchangeable is her nails—carefully filed and painted red. Her wavy strawberry hair, which resisted for so long, is finally giving way to grey. And her skin is so white and soft, especially on her stomach. I see the folds of flesh but what draws me is the whiteness and softness. It fascinates me—this body of my mother—a body that was never given to me in infancy. I see and feel it now—after 52 years—for the first time.

It is the body of an old woman and yet I cannot erase the sight of this body swaddled in white sheets and blankets from head to toe, eyes red and puffy, lips swollen (the only parts visible) as she was wheeled down from surgery. Never had an infant looked so helpless or vulnerable! Never had I felt so much compassion for her. In that moment she became both infant and old woman to me—and so has she remained. It is this that the whiteness and softness of her skin symbolize for me. It is both so very

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young and so very old. It is the beginning and the end—and this ending phase of her life has been a beginning for us.

At last we can touch: I can take her hand in mine as we are walking and she can throw her arms around me as I take my leave of her for a while. Such simple gestures and yet so foreign to us for so many years—all the years of my life. But I have to remember that it has been longer for her. for if she never gave affection it is because she never received any and thus didn't know how to extend it to her only child. I am well aware of her lonely history—only recently revealed to me. for my mother learned to keep everything inside long before I arrived on the scene. And, yes, she taught me well to do the same.

I was once asked why I chose this mother. I didn't know the answer then. Now I believe it was so that we could both break through our repressed lives and learn to more freely love and be with each other—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. All these years we have interacted without connecting on any of these levels. We were two bodies, like two pieces of furniture, who took up space in the same room, but whose lives never really met, never felt in tune with each other. Quite the opposite. Nothing in common was my most prevalent experience. And I know she felt it too, for she once commented that she didn't understand where I came from because I was like no one in her or my father's families. And yet we are so much alike. Could it possibly have been any other way?

For the past twelve years I have been on a psychological/spiritual journey that has enlarged my world immensely. And I have been aware that as I have been able to make strides in opening myself, my relationship with my mother has slowly improved. This tells me that in spite of our mutual feelings of alienation from each other we are intrinsically connected on some psychic level. Six months ago, when my mother learned she had colon cancer, our worlds truly converged for the first time. This is the story of that time, but also of our whole lives—and beyond.

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The message was on my answering machine late one night when I arrived home from a long day in the city. It said simply to call right away. Being from the friend my mother was visiting in Florida, I knew

something had happened. Initially, my mother had been taken to the emergency room that day because of an abscess between her vagina and anus that had burst. She was resting from surgery when I returned the call. The next day the surgeon informed us that he had done some exploring and discovered a blockage in her colon. He wanted to do some tests. Five days later the malignancy was confirmed. My mother could not tell me this herself. She could only cry. She was too devastated. Both her mother and husband had succumbed to cancer, and she had taken care of them. She knew the process. I asked her to come home to have the cancer surgery, and told her I would take care of her.

During the week that passed between this moment and her return, many emotions and thoughts flooded through me. My mother's whole life—or what I knew of it—passed before me, as did our relationship. I realized that I had never truly loved my mother, and had, in fact, abandoned her early in my life. This may sound strange but it is true. And yet the decision to care for her was instantaneous and very strong. I was compelled to question my motivation. Was this mostly a desire to maintain my “good girl” image? Or to be a “saint” again? Was this my oral need to take care of others rearing its voice once more? No, it was deeper than any of these.

My mother and I are both only children. My mother never knew her father. Mine was in the Navy during the first two years of my life. Her mother deserted her at age 2. Not wanting to be burdened with a child, she left her with a relative for 10 years and then came back when this relative no longer wanted responsibility for her. So my mother was three times abandoned within the first twelve years of her life. Is it any wonder then that she never expressed faith in anything? She always said she didn't know if there was a God, and it didn't matter either way if there was or wasn't. “You're born, you live, you die, and that's it. When they put you in the ground, it's all over,” I heard her say several times.

I have little recollection of those first two years with my mother. But I wonder if she was conscious that, although her husband left a few days after her child's birth to serve his country, she was essentially in the same situation *her* mother had been in—a young woman alone with an infant. My mother never physically abandoned me, but she wasn't psychologically or emotionally able to be there for me. At best, she was ambivalent about having a child, feeling that it was her duty as a wife. And suddenly she was all alone with a child she did not know how to bond with. How could she, given her history? But I didn't know her story when I was a child. All I knew was that emotionally, intellectually and

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spiritually my needs were not met. Deep longings within me for connection and stimulation remained unfulfilled. I early concluded she had nothing to offer me. And so I wrote her off. I abandoned her.

I became conscious of this for the first time during that interim week. I kept thinking: her parents left her, her daughter left her, and she has been alone since my father died 23 years ago. Someone needs to be there for her. I don't want my mother's life to end the way it began. On some level, I knew this could be a time of healing for both of us, regardless of the outcome of her surgery.

Over the past three years, my internal relationship with my mother has been shifting. Two years ago I realized there was a part of me that had always been waiting for her to die so that I could be free to live my life. It was as if her very existence hampered my soul's liberation. And I remembered, with much sadness, that this had been a lifelong waiting, for I could recall as a child fantasizing about my parents' deaths. Something in me always felt incapable of reaching completion as long as they were around, as if there wasn't room for all of us in this world and I had to wait until their exit provided the space for me to truly be who I am.

Then last year, while on a spiritual retreat, it suddenly became important that my mother be embodied on this earth. It came as such a strong image of her body, and I sensed that something could not be completed unless she was physically here. At that point there was no concern that she might be dying, although since this was only three months prior to her diagnosis, the cancer had probably already begun to grow inside of her. Perhaps that's why I experienced it so strongly .

All of these remembrances, thoughts and feelings flooded me during that week. For the first time I saw my mother as a basically lonely person, and began to feel empathy for her. In recognizing her aloneness I also recognized my own. There was deep sadness in this, and a longing to heal this aloneness within us both. I think this was the beginning of our coming together within myself. For the first time we were in the same frame in my mind.

So I packed up my bird and my computer and moved to her house. I would be there for three months. I know now that my mother didn't think I could take care of her; she didn't think "you had it in you to care for a sick person." The first two months went relatively smoothly, although I was aware that our relationship had been reversed. Weakened both physically and emotionally, she depended on me to handle everything for her. This was both simple and strange. Simple because it

felt like adding another person to the group of people I already took care of things for. even if some of the new responsibilities were more personal and intimate. Strange because my mother likes to control everything, especially in her house. Suddenly I was in charge, even of meals. I can't begin to explain how possessive my mother is of her kitchen, so to have her completely let go of it was a revelation about how vulnerable she was now. Internally, I felt empowered with my mother for the first time in my life. But it was a situational empowerment.

During those months preceding and following her cancer surgery' (which was successful) my mother learned that I could and would take care of her. Many times I heard her tell people that she could not have gotten through it without me. This was healing for both of us, but the most important healing came when she started feeling better and reverted to her old ways of relating to me, which were very disempowering. She began to complain that my food was taking up space in the refrigerator and that my garbage was filling her trash bag. The truth was that there was *one* container of my food in the refrigerator when she said this and I had only thrown a handful of papers in the garbage. But the effect of these accusations on me was devastating.

I immediately felt I had no right to exist—that I could only be there for her and not as my own person. My world turned black. I shrank inside myself, feeling overpowered and overwhelmed. But after several minutes I was able to recover, step back, and think: so this is what happened to me as a child. This is why I became so quiet, why I take up so little space, why I struggle to feel I matter and have rights, why it's been so difficult to find my place in this life, why I always wanted to be somewhere else. I felt I was reliving my childhood experience of my mother, only now, after the initial shock of her words, I could pause and review what had happened with the understanding of how these interactions had formed my character structure, how and why I shrank from existence in order to survive. Although these experiences were painful, the understanding I gained about how my predominantly schizoid structure was formed gave them meaning, and I ultimately lived them on a totally new level.

For most of my life, my reaction to life was to not want any part of it since my perception was that there was not much here for me. This is what Ken Wilber refers to as the schizoid god: a splitting off from this earthly realm in favor of a spiritual existence which is judged purer and better (1995). He speaks of the ascending path and the descending path, remarking that most people embark on either one or the other, and tend

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to trash the opposing path. The goal is to integrate them. 'The way up is the way down' is a phrase he uses, a phrase to which I have become attached. For sure, the two never met for me—until recent years when I have made great effort to move from a black or white framework into an existence of non-duality where both sides are viewed as pieces of the whole.

It is interesting to me that my mother was always a descender. Although she had little faith in the material, it was the only form of existence she allowed. On one thing we agreed: the opposite path was of little significance to us. Perhaps at some unconscious level we made a pact to disagree and deny the world of the other. Or perhaps we needed to take opposing paths in order to finally bring the two together. For they are coming together. Not long ago my mother handed me a bookmark and said, "I like this." On it was written the story of the "Footprints in the Sand." At the beginning there are two sets of footprints. But during the most difficult times, only one set. The author asks Jesus why he left during those hard times. Jesus replies, "I love you and would never leave you during your times of trial and suffering. When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

Within me, the ascending and descending paths began to converge in our relationship the day I was able to deeply feel and accept my hatred for her. It happened during the third month of her recovery. She said something that publicly humiliated me. My world went black again for an instant, but then I was flung into absolute hatred for her. It was a crucial moment for me. I had never allowed myself to feel this hatred before because it was not an acceptable emotion, especially toward one's parent. But that day it became part of my liberation—because it was okay—and in hating her I also finally found my love for her. I knew now that I had never loved her because I had never allowed myself to hate her. Now I could do both and it was not only okay, it felt good. I didn't have to withdraw inside myself to ward off the pain. I had only to allow my feelings to flow their natural course, and we would both survive and move on. The way up was truly becoming the way down.

More recently I have been wanting to move out into the country more. This has made my mother feel insecure, and she bombarded me—that's what it felt like—with pleading eyes filled with looks of betrayal at my desire to move to what for her was "the middle of nowhere," and farther away from her. Everything about her expression said "how could you do this?" Even though it was all non-verbal, the energetic force of it was tremendous, and I hated her for wanting to

control me in that way. But I did move to the country, and felt grateful that I could digest my mother's negativity and still move forward with my life and what is right for me. I can have my own empowerment and still be there for her. It doesn't have to be all one way or the other any more. There is room for both of us within me now, whether we agree or disagree

According to Stephen Johnson, the schizoid is the hated child (1985, 1994). I can well imagine there were many times my mother hated me when it was just the two of us, when there was no one supporting her motherhood. And I am sure I saw and both introjected and recoiled from that hatred. Perhaps that is why I could not tolerate the possibility of my own hatred for so long. I am also sure that my mother experienced this same hatred as an infant and child, and equally as sure that she has never acknowledged her own hatred. John Pierrakos says that cancer is the result of an inability to express the lower self and deep resignation about life (verbal communication, 1996). Both criteria describe my mother.

But I know that until the schizoid personality can find and feel the hatred that is inside, accepting and integrating it, the schizoid split will never be resolved—for this is the split. Call it love/hate or life/death, it is the same. One cannot be a container for hatred and death (wishes) without being literally eaten alive by them. To freely love and fully live, hatred and death must be confronted, embraced and integrated right here within this body of flesh and bones. The schizoid's task is to tolerate the feelings and transform them.

The schizoid does not have the heart to love in a world that is so unresponsive and alienating. Guntrip says that the schizoid "infant found his world so intolerable that the sensitive heart of him fled into himself" (1973). I know mine did, and I have no doubt that my mother's did, too, as a child. And yet we both yearned to love. It is curious to me that my mother uses the word "love" only for family. "You love your family," she has said. "Others you are fond of." I interpret this statement as my mother's great longing to experience familial love, to open her heart and find comfort and care surrounding her.

A week before I returned to my own place I had the following dream/experience. I label it this because it was so real that the following morning I asked my mother if she had experienced anything that night. She said she never has dreams or night experiences. This was mine:

It is night and I am awakened while sleeping at my

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mother's house by a strong wind that practically blows me off the bed. At first I try to resist it. Then I realize something is happening. This wind brings a misty aura with it. It wants my attention. I suddenly think of my mother and go downstairs to look for her. The whole house is filled with this aura, although the wind has subsided.

I find my mother in the kitchen lying on a cot at the far end. In the center of the room is an altar she has constructed on a low table consisting of three candles with a white cotton cloth that is draped over them, it is suspended there over the candles, forming perfectly square corners.

There is a window above where my mother is lying. I look out and see a mountain rising up before me. I look at my mother and say, "Something is happening." She nods. I go over and lie down beside her. We are facing each other. "It's the end of the world," I say. "I know," she responds. I lie on top of her and put my face next to hers. "I'm so glad we had this time together," I tell her.

She starts to say something but then stops. "What is it," I ask, but she doesn't respond.

The scene changes and I am sailing through time and space at great speed in a blanket shaped like a canoe. I am on my back, moving in the direction of my feet, passing through a magnificent light show which I am enjoying tremendously. Up ahead I see a white light in the far distance. I am very excited.

The scene changes again and I am in a train-like vehicle with other people, again traveling at tremendous speed through the brilliant lights. I don't recognize the people near me on this train, but I am not much interested in them either. I am excited about where I am going. Then a voice says, "Are you sure you want to leave the earth? Maybe you should go back and take another look to be sure." I instantaneously know that my mother is not on this train with me but on the earth. She's all alone there, I think. I can't leave her all alone. I know I am going back.

I awake from this dream/experience exhilarated. I know that something profound has happened within me and between us. My ascent has become my descent. I finally want to be fully part of both worlds. And I realize I can have both and love both. Life doesn't have to be either/or. I also know I have made a commitment to my mother on inner levels.

That afternoon we discussed my leaving and what she would

need from me in the coming months. She said she was sorry I had to go through all of this. I said, "You don't ever have to apologize for being sick." She began to cry. I went over and put my arms around her. She cried on my shoulder for ten minutes and then said in her impersonal way, "People don't want to feel they are a burden." "You're not a burden to me," I responded. She held me tightly and cried some more. After that, we held hands, mostly in silence for a long time. We were finally bonding, finally finding our love for each other.

We are both changed, but I recognize that some things about her will probably never change. And it's okay. She doesn't have to be perfect, for I can better withstand the hurts and insensitivities now. I can have my anger about them and let them go. They don't need to linger inside me anymore. My existence is no longer threatened by her presence.

But the essence of this time together will always live within me, through the years, past time, into the "radiant Abyss."

And comes to rest the Godless search, tormented
and tormenting... And gone the Godless destiny of death
and desperation, and gone the madness of a life committed to uncare,
and gone the tears and terror of the brutal days and endless nights
where time alone would rule.

And I-I rise to taste the dawn, and find that love
alone will shine today. And the Shining says: to love it all, and love
it madly, and always endlessly, and ever fiercely, to love without
choice and thus enter the All, embracing the only and radiant
Divine: now as Emptiness, now as Form, together and forever, the
Godless search undone, and love alone will shine today.

Ken Wilber (1995, p. 523)

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