

# Metaxis and Recovery: Towards a New Vision of Health

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE HUMAN SITUATION

#### THE COMPLEXITY OF HUMAN LIFE

The person who reduces the complexity of human life to a single issue is unacceptable. Unfortunately, most of us fall in this category, or at least dangerously close to it. Our difficulty in understanding the human proceeds from the fact not only of its complexity, but also from our closeness to the human. After all, we *are* human. We are like the person who can't see the forest for the trees because he is smack dab in the middle of the forest! He can't get a panoramic view of its expanse over the land. He will have difficulty understanding that the forest is so much more than an array of trees. It is the dynamic interaction between the wild animals, the elements of wind, fire and water, and myriad flora that produce the living system we call a forest.

Perhaps the person wanders all about the forest, observing animals, cataloging the various plants, noticing the relationships and watching the changes through the seasons. He may find a hill in the middle of the forest from which he can survey the great expanse of the forest. He notices that when a fire destroys a section certain plants are the first to grow. If the section remains undamaged for many, many years it eventually turns into a forest dominated by pine trees after being a meadowland and then a woods. As the flora changed so did the fauna. He discovers that certain plants and animals are always found together, indeed depend upon each other for survival. Eventually (because our little forest dweller is very smart, quite observant and has lots of time!) he realizes that the forest is not just an aggregate of trees. It is not simply some place in which animals live. It is one whole dynamic living system. Its survival through time is dependent upon a delicate balance between all the separate parts, but in many ways the forest, its animals and plants, is one whole very complex thing.

All of reality is similar to the forest. So many interactions. So many different entities; quarks, neutrons, stars, planets, molecules, chemicals, gravity, space-time, inertia etc. So many human minds applied to see this universal forest. So many individuals looking for an entire lifetime at *this* little corner, *that* little interaction. Now, thousands and thousands of years after the human first began to question our physicists are searching for a grand theory of unification. An understanding that will allow them to see how all these separately observed interactions and processes interrelate to produce one whole very complex physical universe. From our position on a tiny planet in the boondocks of a relatively unspectacular galaxy, they hope to achieve an awe inspiring achievement--an understanding though that only a few minds will be able to comprehend.

We can direct our vision away from ourselves towards forests, galaxies or the strange world of the sub-atomic realities. We can also direct our vision inward towards the human and we find a whole other universe. We find interactions and processes just like what we find in the forest and in galaxies, but we also find some that are disturbingly dissimilar. Disturbingly so because we have no microscopes, telescopes, field guides or perches that enable us to get an over-all view. There is nothing even close to a unified theory of the human. We barely even have a partial understanding. This is not really surprising, after all, the area that would eventually lead to an understanding of the human universe--psychology--is only one hundred years old. Before the birth of psychology as we know it religion and superstition provided people with theories of the human.

There have always been attempts to provide a unified theory of the human, or at least people have displayed a propensity to elevate various theories to such an all-encompassing level. The various churches certainly do so. Freudian theory is a recent attempt to do the same. B.F. Skinner propounded that all human endeavor could be explained in terms of operant conditioning--the desire for reward and the fear of punishment. These are just some examples among countless others. All have fallen short of their goal. None has truly, accurately and legitimately accounted for all of human behavior and experience as a unified theory must do. The on-going attempt displays a remarkable desire in the human to understand and explain, to always question in the face of mysteries, to organize what can often appear as chaotic complexity.

Could we say that as nature abhors a vacuum the human abhors chaos? Recently we talked with a fellow whose childhood home was disordered and chaotic. He got in trouble and was sent to what was euphemistically called a "youth development center." He loved it! The order and ritual missing in his home was provided at this institution by its schedules and regulations. We organize our city streets according to the four directions and in descending/ascending numbers. We zone our space for residential, industrial and business uses. Some of us use the cliché "a place for everything and everything in its place." Some people even become obsessed by the need to make everything neat, ordered and symmetrical. They are compelled to line up their pencils in neat lines, print up. Obsessively they organize their desks and their lives. Their desire for order runs rampant, their search for order paradoxically wreaks chaos in the rest of their lives.

In one of its more sublime manifestations our desire for order and understanding results in science. Science has been profoundly effective in providing an understanding (and an ordering that results from that understanding) of the natural, physical universe. It has been less effective in its attempts to order-through-understanding of the human universe. Part of this ineffectiveness is, as we said above, because we are so *close* to the human, but another more difficult problem is that the complexity of the human universe does not totally mirror the complexity of the physical universe.

The human is quite complex, composed of multiple layers and dimensions. Some of these dimensions do operate under what might be loosely termed "natural law." For instance, our bodies are made up of chemical and physical interactions that can easily (well, *relatively* easily) be understood, manipulated and that correspond to

interactions we find in the non-human universe. Also, in a way similar to other animals much (but not all) of the human universe can be understood in terms of operant conditioning. It is when we attempt to bring ordered understanding to dimensions of the human such as love, justice, meaning, relationships etc. that we run into complex issues that resist our attempts. Our lives are complex and while our attempts at understanding and giving order to this complexity are certainly admirable they have fallen far short of including all dimensions of the human.

We do not pretend to provide in this book a unified theory of the human. We do hope to assist other minds to move in this direction. We must begin by admitting the full complexity of the human, by accepting the evidence provided by human life as it is actually lived and experienced, and acknowledging the limits of familiar scientific attempts to understand and order human life. Science has tended to dismiss and ignore certain basics of the human situation. Any progress towards health and recovery must acknowledge and take these situations into account.

## BASICS OF OUR SITUATION PART I: PAIN AND LIMITS

We begin our investigation with what all people, in every culture all through time have known. We all know pain. Now we don't necessarily mean here the physical pain that can be controlled by various drugs. Pain, for the human, takes on many different characteristics. In addition to physical pain we experience emotional pain, imaginary pain, chronic pain, social pain etc. In a sense, we are talking about *generic* pain. M. Scott Peck in his best seller *The Road Less Traveled* began his work with the sentence "Life is difficult." To actually have someone say this proved freeing for many people. It is something we often think, but can't quite admit. We try to put our best face on our difficulties. Peck said nothing new. This statement is the basis for the entire Buddhist tradition. Buddha's first of the Four Noble Truths is that to exist is to suffer. This is, in a sense, the bottom line of human life as it is actually lived and experienced. No attempt at an ordered understanding of the human can ignore this.

This suffering, difficulty or pain comes when we encounter any kind of boundary or limit in our lives. The greatest and most illustrative boundary or limit that we all encounter is the one of death, but we encounter boundary and limit every day. The little boy who is not good in sports, the first time a child is called "nigger," the girl without the latest fashion. The failed marriage, the death of a parent or child, the crumbled career. Boundary and limit is even built into our very bodies. After all, we can not see infrared as can some animals. Can't fly. Can't hear dog whistles. This may not bother you too much, but how many of us panic as our body ages? Now your boundaries and limits might be the stairs that only yesterday you freely bounded up and down. You get the point. Think back to your first failure, your first big disappointment, your first big encounter with pain and suffering, boundary and limit. In a sense you always are experiencing this. Any such encounters and experiences elicit the question of the meaning of human life.

"The Meaning of Life." Heavy. This is one of the "big questions." One of those questions we tend to ignore. We prefer not to search for an answer. We may even disparage its asking--leaving it to the youthful idealists unseasoned by life's harsh realities. Its kind of funny that for weeks at a time many of us in business will spend the majority of each day questioning how best to market an unnecessary consumer

product. We will rarely, if ever apply ourselves to any "big questions" with the same drive, energy and determination.

And yet, we all, *always* give ourselves, or accept answers to the questions elicited by times of suffering, pain, boundary and limit. No matter whether you believe the answer of the martyr or the suicide, you do have an underlying system of belief or philosophy that makes some kind of sense of the pain encountered during boundary or limit. Where have these answers come from? They come from our culture, our society, our family, our friends. Perhaps it is bad karma? Perhaps you didn't try hard enough? Perhaps its because of the color of your skin? Could it be your parents' fault? A chemical imbalance? Too stupid or too smart? Maybe it "just happens" because that's the way life is: unfair? Perhaps you were too rich or too poor? Was it God's will? What is the answer you give yourself?

We accept answers unthinkingly. We do not apply ourselves to the demands placed upon us by the "big questions." We have heard many people indicate that they are too dumb, they aren't intellectual enough. We disagree. Most people are really quite intelligent. They just don't use or exercise their intelligence. We tend to be lazy.

Well, perhaps this is a bit to harsh. Maybe it is really that we are too *frightened*. If, during a time of pain and limit, we seriously looked at the "big questions" these times elicit, and if we seriously acknowledged the answers we give ourselves, what would we have? Nothing! A question without an answer! This condition, especially when it is so serious of a situation (being bound up with pain and limit after all), is unbearable. Think back to when you were a child. Did you ever have an experience when you were told not to do something and when you asked "Why?" were told "Because I said so"? How irate were you? When we encounter a limit, even as children, there sure as hell better be a good reason for it. An answer to our question "why?"

How much more so for the cancer patient? Wasting body, crying family, lost hair, nauseous stomach. "Why?" she says. How about the man laid off from the mill? Tried hard. Good worker. Wife and kids. New car and mortgaged house. Gets retrained and can't find a job. "Why?" he says. A child dies. Love not expressed. Anger not resolved. Promises broken. Dreams unfulfilled. Achievements not recognized. Love lost. Violence inflicted. Who among us does not have, deep down, at the root, etched on their hearts that perennial human question?

Almost immediately we find our answers. Even a negative answer such as I am being punished by God, or that life is meaningless is better than dwelling within the ambivalence of not having any sort of answer. It is ironic, but accepting an answer that our suffering is meaningless *is* in itself an answer. It is when we come face to face with our not having *any* answer that causes us fear. It is also a demand to search for some type of answer. Searching is difficult. Accepting a ready-made answer is easy. We do tend to take the easier course.

Like everything else in the universe we are subject to the eroding force of entropy (with apologies to chemists--we are using "entropy" in a popular rather than technical sense). Entropy is what causes things to fall apart. A star explodes, a faucet leaks, a person ages and dies. There is a certain pull of inertia on everything in the universe. It

is this inertia that makes it difficult to get out of bed in the morning. It is what makes it easier to watch television all night rather than read that book you've been meaning to get to. Inertia encourages and leads to entropy. Inertia and entropy keep us from looking at "big questions." It keeps us from exploring the forces that manipulate us. Keeps us from getting the help that would make us just a little bit more free, a little bit healthier, a little bit closer to fulfillment. Inertia is what allows us to accept the answers we receive unthinkingly from our family, friends and society.

Our inertia, our lack of willingness to struggle with tentative nature of our answers to "big questions" causes us to *deny* that there is even any problem. At its most basic foundation this results in the denial of the ultimate source of pain, suffering, boundary and limit in human life: that is, death.

## BASICS OF OUR SITUATION PART II: DENIAL OF DEATH

Ernest Becker won a Pulitzer for his book *The Denial of Death*. In this book he shows how the denial of our death has guided the growth of civilization and culture, how it causes war, how it has produced obsession over money, how it ruins our chances for health and fulfillment. The denial of death develops because on the deepest levels of our being we see ourselves, to put it crudely, as "the god who shits." By this rather graphic term Becker is indicating an essential dichotomy within the human being. In one respect we are like gods. Our minds and imaginations soar to unfathomable heights. It seems as if there is nothing we are unable to accomplish. In spite of this we are *not*, in fact, gods. We are painfully vulnerable and limited. We have neither tooth nor claw nor fur for defense. Our minds soar, but our body crawls upon the ground. Finally, our body dies. Hence the interesting description.

We are the creature most aware of death, of our own inevitable non-existence. All creatures seek to survive. It is a basic drive. The human is not satisfied with mere survival. Why are we still unhappy even with enough food and a shelter? It is enough for other animals. Even with a surplus of food we are not satisfied, though we are certain of survival. We always want more. More of what? More *life*. More of the *power* that keeps us alive, surviving. When ancient peoples made a sacrifice they were attempting, in their own way, to maintain the flow of life power. When the ancient killed an enemy or an animal, and then wore the tooth or scalp it functioned not as mere ornamentation. It represented the life power, the ability to survive, a strengthening of their power to survive. It was an attempt to deny death and be immortal.

All of human life, all of history can be understood in terms of the denial of death and the quest for symbolic immortality. The "will to immortality" was the central construct in the writings of Freud's student Otto Rank. The human lives in a world of transcendent symbols--not just bodily materialism as do the other animals. We live in much more than the immediate situation. We live in a world, a galaxy, a universe. We live in much more than the immediate-now. We look back over countless eons and soar to the unimaginable future. We live not just with what is in front of our face. We posit invisible entities: angels and demons, quarks and neutrons, bacteria and black holes. And herein lies our dilemma. How can such a marvelous creature *not* be immortal? How could we possibly die? How can this creature, so like a god in creative symbolic imagination also exude smelly, gross *shit*? It is in this that the

human journey begins and from which it takes its energy. We are always trying to transcend death. To achieve some sense of immortality.

### BASICS OF OUR SITUATION PART III: CULTURE AND THE DENIAL OF DEATH

Shrouded within prehistory this drive to immortality gave rise to sacrifice and ritual. Both were ways of maintaining the flow of life power or vitality to the human. Rituals were techniques that would maintain the flow of life. Though they might not ensure the continuation of physical, organic life they could ensure continued existence in the realm of the dead. Rituals in those ancient times were not just symbolic as we today would understand it. For those people rituals were comparable to our sense of scientific techniques and procedures. Today we might call this "magical" thinking. In many ways this magical thinking continues to the present day.

Those prehistorical ritual sacrifices were to an invisible world of ancestors, ghosts and gods. How much better to have the god here, on earth, in the community? The hero--the one who faces death and survives, the one blessed by the invisible realm from whence comes life was made king--the god made visible. We would work and fight in the name of the king--our connection to immortality. We could know that the invisible realm was pleased with our sacrifices and rituals. To the king we would offer the fruits of our labors, the lives of our sons and daughters. The king is divine. The king assures immortality and continuation of life, at least to the community of which we are a part and from whence comes our individual identity. He is the physical, external manifestation of invisible, supernatural realities.

With what is the king identified? Why the sun of course--the giver and sustainer of all life. Without the sun we would surely die. And how can the divine sun-king show his favor, his bestowal of life? With symbols of his own divine being. Perhaps little sun-like circles of a durable, untarnishable (immortal?!) sun colored metal. Maybe with his picture stamped upon it. In other words, a gold coin. The more sun-like circles you had the more you were favored by the invisible, immortal realm. Visible testaments that you are a hero, that you have *more life*.

From this situation, as discussed by Becker, Ira Progoff, Otto Rank and others it is a short step to our present predicament. The sun-like circles became, obviously, money. Money, material goods, status are now our symbols of life, survival, and immortality. In some ways we are less sophisticated than prehistoric societies. At least they were honest about what they were doing--trying to get *more life*. Death was, for them, a *constant* threat and companion. It lurked around the next corner. It stalked them on the plain and in the jungle. It came from the sky and rumbled in the earth. Our lives are, by contrast, quite sterile. We have succeeded in denying our denial of death. Most of us see death "cleaned up" in the funeral parlor. We both sympathize and look away from the person who becomes hysterical at the funeral. *The person who's denial of death has been broken.* The person who feels the full pain and rage of the "god who shits."

### BASICS OF OUR SITUATION PART IV: TODAY'S SACRIFICIAL RITUALS

Through the pursuit and accumulation of wealth we feed our denial of death and maintain the illusion of symbolic immortality. Why does a Donald Trump accumulate millions of the "sun-colored circles"? Certainly it is not a question of mere animal survival, indeed the accumulation is at the expense of other's ability to physically survive. It is his denial of death! Donald Trump *will* survive. He will survive in the monuments to his power, his vitality, such as Trump Plaza. He will survive in the passing on to the next generation of his accumulated icons of vitality. *And we are jealous. He* has more life-power than do we. He is a success. He has survived. His name will be remembered. He has faced annihilation and triumphed. *He is a hero.*

Because we do not face our denial of death we fall prey to social rituals that not only make our own lives ones of "quiet desperation," but deny actual physical survival to others. Our careerism, lust for wealth and consumer goods is nothing more than an attempt at symbolic immortality. Any threat of boundary or limit, any sense that another may have more than I is a threat of death, of annihilation. If *he* has more goods, greater success he must have more life, and I have less life--*I must be dying.* My competitor's advance is my loss--*my loss of life.* The person with an accumulation of "sun-colored circles" has a savings account of life. My money, my career advance, my consumer goods *represent life.* Any threat to these is a threat to my life. Any accumulation of these protects me from death. Another's success is my diminishment.

Let us take an example. Two people, one rich, one poor go to a restaurant. The waiter over charges both ten dollars. What might the reaction be? The rich, with a surplus of money, a savings account of life, if you will, might politely point it out to the waiter. He is not threatened by the mistake. Indeed, he might not even notice the mistake. The poor customer may angrily accuse the waiter of "ripping him off." The over charge cannot be seen as a mistake, but a threat. Both the rich and poor expend life energy to get *more* life energy in the form of money. Their work day is similar to the prehistoric sacrifice. They give in order to get. If we give the life power we have by means of work we will gain a surplus in the symbolic form of money and consumer goods. Take away too much of that surplus and the person ends up with a deficit between life power that has been expended and what has been received. It becomes a threat of death in symbolic form. The hero, the person we admire has the surplus. It is the person who can expend vitality without threat of loss, without threat of death. To the rich person the ten dollars represents very little expenditure of vitality, to the poor it represents quite a bit of expended vitality.

Think, seriously think how differently you would spend your time and energy if you knew you would die next week. With what social rituals would you dispense? Tell off the boss? Drive at high speeds? Spend all your money? Would you suddenly "get" religion in an attempt to stave off death and be immortal? How did those social rituals *keep you alive?*

Admittedly, we have been a bit crude in this analysis. The point is merely to display our denial of death and some of the means we use to achieve a sense of symbolic immortality. There are countless ways besides wealth accumulation. Immature religion, artistic creations, procreation, ethnic identification etc. are all able to serve this need.

When we live in denial of any aspect of our lives we live with the illusion of an "answer" to the "big questions" of life. Life is always a searching, a questioning, a *journey* in every sense of the word. People are ambivalent, with mixed feelings. We don't *know*. Any claim to any sort of "answer" (other than as tentative and convenient) is a lie and a symptom of denial of one sort or another.

Denial closes us to knowledge, to input that might cause us to change. Change is always a threat. It always represents the possibility of death. Denial is a way we put things off to the side. Things we would rather not think about. But this is foolish. It is like the person who stuffs the monthly bills in a drawer somehow hoping they will go away. Well, of course they don't and the person is faced with even greater payments in the form of penalties and finance charges.

Denial produces two tendencies. The first is to break our lives into little compartments. The second is to sham ourselves. Compartmentalization is the way we take aspects of our lives and situations and stuff them away. Sham is just out and out lying to ourselves. Both of these are symptoms of denial.

## COMPARTMENTALIZATION

When we stuff parts of our lives into closed "compartments" we lose much of our vitality and we miss out on the richness of our daily lives. Compartmentalization is both a blessing, a curse, and a necessity.

It is a blessing because we are enabled to suppress and deny our less noble inclinations, desires and impulses. For instance, let us say a salesperson is meeting with a business owner on the sales route. They both absolutely loathe each other, but they compartmentalize their feelings. This is necessary for work and business. They do not deny or repress their loathing (suppression is conscious, repression is unconscious). They merely "set it off to the side" so to speak. But what happens if it is a husband and wife who loathe each other? Compartmentalization may be necessary for a number of reasons--for the kids, for the family etc. There is a chance though that the necessary compartmentalization may become denial and repression of the negative feelings. They may not believe in divorce, there may be fear of being alone or of financial insolvency. The negative feeling towards the spouse is connected to many other disturbing feelings. To acknowledge the "shit" or "shadow" of loathing the spouse is at the same time to acknowledge an entire realm of similar material. This can be intolerable and so the loathing of the spouse is denied and repressed.

Compartmentalization is necessary to keep society and our relationships running smoothly. However, it can result in denial and indeed result in most of our negative aspects. We see ourselves as a "god," not a "god who shits" because we deny and repress the second part of this description. This results in a failure to recognize the fullness of our often very ordinary lives.

## THE FULLNESS OF THE MUNDANE

Each experience we have, from the most mundane to the most extraordinary is incredibly loaded with dimensions. Each moment we bring our entire complex selves to the situation. Our "situatedness" is rich and deep. Every moment in our lives is

filled with multiple, inter-related meanings and influences. To neglect life's depth is to deny who we are--it is to engage in a sham.

It is interesting to do an exercise where you "re-live" a moment in your life. Take a memory. Now rather than think in the passive voice "I did this..." "I was thinking this...", try to *relive* the experience. Use the first person present: "I am doing this...", "I am feeling this...".

Here is one example. First we have a person relating an experience. Then we had the person practice *reliving* the experience.

Original memory: "It was a really rough night at work. People were driving me absolutely nuts. I couldn't wait to get off and have a beer. But I was thinking about my friend who just went into rehab for alcoholism. He was my drinking buddy and I wondered if I too was an alcoholic. When one of my co-workers offered to go on a beer run I said no, but I really wanted a few drinks after work! I got out in time to stop at a bar, but was kind of ambivalent. As I drove I kept debating whether I should get the beer or not. I hadn't really decided when I came up on the bar. Well, I just drove right on by."

We then asked this person to "re-live" this experience. This is what he gave us:

#### "DRIVE TO BAR" RE-LIVED

"I am a student working full time in a fast-paced restaurant. I do not see customers, only the waiters and waitresses who are not following the correct procedures tonight. It is a rough shift--lots of mistakes, noise, and chaos. I am tense, frustrated, and worried about balancing the books at the end of the night. One major mistake could cost me my job.

"I do not concentrate exclusively on my job, but am assailed by thoughts and fears. Instantaneous thoughts flit across my consciousness. Thoughts which in another situation I would pause and reflect upon. I am aware of my own ambivalence.

"My good friend is in an alcoholic rehabilitation program. I think of him in the hospital and miss him. Usually he would be at work on such a busy night. I am proud of myself for being instrumental in his quest for help, but what will happen upon his release? How will he change? Will we still be friends? If so what would we do since he will no longer be able to drink?

"I look up and see the face of one of the newer waitresses peering over the top of my counter. The wooden counter is high and for a moment her head appears disembodied, as if that is all she is-- the head that I can see. The moment seems to be on hold. I am aware of my loneliness. This waitress owns the newest "party house" where a certain group of employees often congregate to drink, smoke marijuana, and on occasion do cocaine. I don't care for this waitress. She is too loud, crass, and hyper. She appears somewhat unwashed, but how I yearn to be a part of that group! How I would like to hear "Hey B, we're all goin' to M's house. Wanna come?" And at the same time I am glad that I am not a part of their group, that no invitation is extended.

"With almost overwhelming sadness the realization of my social isolation strikes me. I have but one real friend and now that relationship is in danger. The most important part of my life, my studies, is locked inside of me. There is no one interested or able to discuss scholarly and academic issues. There is no one to share interests.

"Continuing with the job in front of me I manically attack the piles of checks waiting to be documented and cashed out. A ballet of sorts ensues wherein my fingers stab at the buttons of the computerized machine in time to the rhythmic "beep, beep, beep" accompanying each stab. The melody of this ballet are cacophonous demands all using my name as a preamble: "B, I need... change, a new book, a check transfer, a void, quarters, my tip tray, charge vouchers" etc. "B, how do I ...? B, will you...?"

"With anger I lash out. My face frowning, my voice harsh. Don't they know their mistakes could cost me my job? Don't they realize how ploddingly, inexcusably ignorant and uneducated they are? Is this my destiny? Are these the only people with whom I can associate? With revulsion towards my self and the situation dreams and fantasies of the future flit across my awareness. A future where I am happy, where my talents are beneficially put to use. Where there is love and comraderie and appreciation.

"I send out a prayer. Oh God help me. I am miserable and afraid. The talents and capabilities you planted are so much more than this hell. When will it change? But you provide the lesson in each situation. I must accept and work within my constraints. God, give me strength. Help me to become what I know I am.

"The evening is approaching its finish. How blissfully pleasant it will be to go back to the isolated security of my apartment. How indescribably delicious it will be to drink a six-pack of beer, turn on my stereo and fantasize about the power of the stage. With headphones snug against my ears I will be transported to another world. A world in which my heart pours itself out and touches others through songs both eloquent and powerful. But the pleasure of this anticipated activity is mitigated by a stab of anxiety. Dangerous habits must change if I am to escape this situation and move towards my dreams.

"Business has slowed down dramatically with the slow revolutions of the clock perched over my right shoulder. A waiter now off for the rest of the night offers to go on a beer run. People frantically place their order and give him money. My anxiety wins out; "No thanks." I feel only more uncomfortable.

"I do my check out and the books are balanced. Surprised that I am out early since it has been such a chaotic night, I realize that the bars are still open. I can stop at Carl's Tavern and take some beer home. With money in my pocket and the bar on the way home there will be no inconvenience. Relieved to be done with work, anxious to be away from the store and its inhabitants, I am looking forward to just being quiet and alone. Walking to my car the night is noticeably pleasant. Warm, quiet with a velvety smoothness some nights possess. It will really be nice to have a couple of cold beers, but there is a nagging stab of anxiety concerning my habits and the need to change them.

"I get in the car and start driving home. The urge for beer is strong. A debate rages within me. Torn and in turmoil I feel a great tension. There is a sense of detachment from myself, as if I am a spectator watching the debate. Sitting forward in my seat, my hands tight around the wheel, the scenery appears to be moving by me while I remain stationary. The car seems like a shell around me. In spite of the warm night the windows are shut tight. If the radio is on it penetrates not the slightest amount into my awareness. Oh hell, I think I'll drink anyway. No, I have to begin to change my habits *sometime*. If not now when? Why not now? Because I don't *want* to. But I *do* want to. I don't know what I want, what I think, or what I'll do. Thoughts are like a noisy whirlwind-- concerns about alcoholism, empty calories, time and money better spent, friends and love, past and future, fantasy and reality, death, sickness, God.

"Somewhere deep inside there is a recognition that this moment will never change. That if not faced now it will be faced again and again-- always the same.

"I am approaching the tavern and still do not know what I will do. The decision eludes me. There is an image of driving out of the tavern parking lot with a cold six-pack nestled in the passenger seat. Visually refreshing condensation already forming on the green cans.

"The yellow and white lights of the Midas muffler shop and the Sunoco gas station tell me that the tavern is next. This is it, my last chance to turn into the parking lot and get the beer. I do not slow down. Turning my head I see the tavern clearly through the driver's side window. There is a stab of poignance--a moment long and frozen in time. Feelings of loss, of opportunities come and gone, of a bitter-sweet melancholy flood through me as I see the tavern framed by the limits of the window. I drive by the tavern.

"Immediately I sit back in the seat. Calmly relaxed the drive home continues uneventfully. Heart and mind so noisy before are calm and smooth like the surface of a placid lake. At home I sit and smoke a cigarette and feel what? Not quite contentment, not quite satisfaction, but perhaps some permutation of both."

We bring our entire complex selves to each moment. It is unfortunate that we immediately forget so much of each moment of the day.

We see how full our experiences can be. When we compartmentalize much of our life just floats right by us. The depth and richness of our situation is lost. Our past memories, our current intentions, our future aspirations are all intermingled. It is only when we have the courage of the hero--to break through our denial--that we are enabled to open up to the fullness of our lives. We often comment on how boring our lives are, how monotonous are our routines. This is a symptom of denial and of overly compartmentalized styles.

We mentioned above that compartmentalization is necessary for the smooth functioning of society and relationships. It is also necessary for the smooth psychological functioning of our own selves. We often fail to recognize that in reality we are all capable of *anything*. We say "Oh, I could never do *that*" or "I could never live like *that*", but the truth is we *could* do that and live like that. This is one of the major lessons we encounter when we wonder about the Nazis. How could "good"

people have followed Hitler and committed, or at least acquiesced to such heinous acts? Well, "good" people *were* Nazis. People just like you.

We are really almost *trained* to compartmentalize our lives. We are told to not bring our personal lives into the work place. We learn to not bring our work home with us. We are programmed to show different parts of ourselves to our friends, families and lovers. Certainly it is true that "there is a time for everything" or "to everything there is a season," but when we take this to extremes we violate our very humanity. We violate it because we break apart what is really one whole thing--our selves. The human being is a unity, not an aggregate of parts. The multiple dimensions of our being: subjective, physical, social and spiritual, are in and of themselves quite complex with multiple levels and dimensions. These four main areas of our lives are not separate, independent parts of ourselves. They are intimately interrelated. We distinguish these four main areas more as a matter of convenience and as an aid to ease of explanation. They are not four independent, separate *things*.

Even business concerns are recognizing the essential unity of the complex human creature. Changes in the workplace such as flex time, job sharing, and recent concerns with the "mommy track" or employee assistance programs display an unconscious awareness that it is neither healthy nor desirable (at least from a business sense) to overly compartmentalize employees. This is a recognition of a basic component of the reality of our lives.

When we compartmentalize our lives to an extreme we create a situation where we can "close the door" on a certain compartment. That is, we can repress and deny aspects of ourselves. Particularly we repress and deny our own deaths among the myriad other unpleasantities of the "god who shits."

It is necessary that we compartmentalize our evil side, our shadow, the Mr. Hyde that lurks within each of us. This aspect that we all have *is* quite dangerous. However, while it would be dangerous if openly expressed and acted upon it may be even more dangerous (in a subtle way) when we deny its existence. It is one thing to acknowledge the presence of strong restraints on our "shadow" that keep it in check. It is quite a different matter when we deny its very existence.

Becker's term for this area we deny is admittedly crude, but effective. If it offends the more delicate reader this is good. It *is* offensive and we must conclude that Becker intends it to be so. The part of ourselves we so blithely deny *is* our "shit." It is dark, dank, moist, moldy, oozing, slimy part of ourselves. It is excrescence and body odor, it is despair and disillusionment and simply something we would rather not see, smell, taste, hear, touch or admit.

## SHAM

Compartmentalization, both as necessary blessing and as repressive curse is similar to what Jules Henry in *Pathways to Madness* identifies as "sham."

"One has to make a distinction--always fuzzy but always necessary--between black sham and white. Black sham is used to exploit and even to destroy people; white sham is merely socially necessary concealment and pretense. One uses black sham to sell a

person down the river or to beat him out for a job, and white sham simply to get along with others--even one's own mother."

Sham *is* necessary to some degree, however we must question to what degree sham is prevalent in our lives and society. We said above that we are "trained" to overly compartmentalize our lives. We fail to see the fullness of our everyday moments--the fact that we *cannot* leave our personal problems out of the workplace--even if we want too.

Recently, we heard a story of a person attempting to call a friend at the friend's workplace. The manager of the store had instituted a "no personal phone calls" rule. Now, of course, to a degree this is necessary. However, when this person called the friend he asked the employee who answered the phone if the store was busy. "No," she replied, "we're dead." This person then asked if he could quickly talk to his friend for a few minutes--that it was important. "No. There are no personal phone calls allowed" replied the employee. Now this employee did not laugh, or express any other sense that the rule was foolish--especially when the store was "dead."

We think this is clearly an example of over-compartmentalization and of what Henry calls "black" sham. It is an example of violence to human integrity. Clearly this situation is somewhat ridiculous. We can picture the store's employees standing around, probably kind of bored, waiting for a customer. The person to whom the phone call was directed may have been standing not five feet from the phone, yet could not receive the call. The reason for the manager's rule is not present--a brief, personal phone call would not have interfered with the store's business. Here is compartmentalization in the extreme. When the employees are working they effectively are given the message that the rest of their lives no longer exist. There will be no intrusion into the "work" compartment on the part of the "personal life" compartment.

Henry writes; "[W]hen sham breaks loose, runs wild and contaminates relationships instead of protecting them, one is sick and makes others sick." The employee who answered the phone, and possibly the manager (if indeed his intent was so strict) have been made sick by sham/compartmentalization running wild. The employee thought it was the right thing to do, and seemed to have some pride and satisfaction in carrying out the manager's directions. The manager, if his intent was so strict, crossed the line from the "white" sham necessary for the smooth running of his business into "black" sham. He committed violence to the integrity of the humanity of his employees. This is not necessarily an isolated incident, or an example totally unfamiliar to most people in the work-a-day world.

Sham is a result of fear and distrust. The employee who answered the phone and engaged in "black" sham is operating out of fear. After all, if she relayed the phone call she could get "in trouble," "yelled at," or even fired from her job. She could not trust her manager to understand that since the store was not in the least bit busy his "no personal phone calls" rule was not necessary. Sham, both "black" and "white" is a function of the compartmentalization of our lives. In one it is necessary, in the other it does violence to the wholeness of our lives. In a later chapter we shall discuss societal meanings and dynamics in more detail. At this point we would simply ask you, the reader, whether our society encourages "black" sham to an unacceptable degree.

## SHAMMING OURSELVES

Sham is the opposite of truth.

"[T]he truth that involves our relationship to other people and to the human condition in general: to war and peace, to poverty and comfort, to openness or concealment, to care for others versus selling them down the river, and so on."

According to Henry the truth comes out in two situations: when there is nothing to be afraid of and when we want to hurt people. Both situations are related to the degree of compartmentalization and sham in our lives. Both compartmentalization and sham are functions of denial--our denial of death, our denial of our "shadow," our denial of what Becker calls...well, we know what he calls it! We can say that denial is present when we are afraid. Because we are always in some sort of denial--particularly the denial of death--any truth or breaking of denial will hurt or frighten people.

Sham is both social and individual. In the above example, sham was social--directed towards the employees of the store and to the person placing the phone call. Sham though, is even more insidious when it is directed towards our own individual selves. Much of our own pain and misery in life is related to individual sham.

Alcoholics Anonymous (and perhaps any 12 Step organization) is based upon the uncovering of sham. In *Alcoholics Anonymous* (called The Big Book) used by A.A. there is a passage, read at every meeting, that discusses honesty. The entire A.A. program is based upon an individual's ability and willingness to be "rigorously honest" with himself and another human being. That is, the person's ability to break through sham. To tell the truth. To be unafraid in the face of truth. Of course, this is painful. Part of what aids the liberation of the alcoholic from the addiction is the fact that his honesty concerning the "shadow" is not rejected by his fellow A.A. members.

The first step for anyone in a 12 Step program such as A.A. is admitting "powerlessness." In other words, acknowledging that the "god" part of us is always paired with that other, less appealing aspect. Our shadow side is the mark of limit and boundary in our lives. It is the "Mr. Hyde" that we cannot let into our daily lives, do not like to acknowledge, and often deny. It is our impending death and our potential for evil. We necessarily compartmentalize it, but it is especially dangerous if we sham ourselves into thinking it does not exist, or is totally under control. It is then that the monster within is most cunning, most deceitful, most powerful. It is powerful when we are afraid of its power to hurt us.

Our fear and denial lead us to "black" sham and over-compartmentalization of our lives--especially with regard to the shadow side of our lives.

## THE HERO

Otto Rank was able to understand history through the idea of a "drive to immortality." The human, like any other animal, wants to survive. At the same time it is aware that at some point it will die. Beyond mere survival it seeks "more" life--sort of like a savings account. It is the hero who faces death and yet still lives. It is the hunter who triumphs over the jungle cat. He faces death and wins and so incorporates the vitality

of the cat. He distributes the meat and so brings the life power to the community. He is a hero. It is the warrior who triumphs over the death dealing enemy. He and the community both survive, both triumph over the threat of death. He is a hero; decorated with scalps and skulls that represent his potency for survival--later in history decorated with colorful ribbons that essentially communicate his life power over the power of death. A life power that extends to the whole community when he triumphs over the enemy. The symbols of immortality. It is the gods who are killed and resurrected--cosmic heroes, the deniers of death, the keepers of the promise of immortality.

It is the heroes who keep our denial alive. They face and triumph over death so we don't have to. We have played subtle games with ourselves in order to deny death and secure a belief in immortality. We gain symbolic immortality through our children--we survive and live through them. We gain symbolic immortality through anything that is bigger than us--nation or religion. We might die, but the nation of which we are a part will survive and triumph. We might die, but the business we built up will carry on. We might die, but the wealth we accumulated will be passed on to the next generation. We die, but the Reich is forever. Nothing more than symbolic immortality and the denial of death.

Why is Oliver North a hero to some? After all he was a renegade, he broke laws. But he manipulated, in his defense, the nationalism that for some is their denial and their hope. He manipulated symbols that many of us desperately hope will not ever fall under the assault of death's scythe. We deny our own death through something upon which we base our individual self-identity that will continue beyond our death: symbolic immortality. If we *are* American, and if America survives, then we too survive, what we *are* survives. And so Ollie is a hero. He maintained for us those American values with which we identify. He faced the threat of death to those values. He stood tall and firm and courageous in the face of that threat--and *triumphed*. He faced a threat to all our lives, risked his own life for ours so that *we* could continue to have life undiminished, unthreatened. He is a hero. He risked his own life for the good of the many.

#### LIFE AS JOURNEY: THE HERO, SURVIVOR, CREATOR

How many dreams die on the vine--never to be plucked and savored? How many lives are full of regret? Regret of lost chances, opportunities never accepted, risks never taken because of the fear of the journey that is the life process? Dreams die because of a lack of the hero's courage. When we deny death we live in a "false" present moment. It is a present that deep down we think will never change, will never leave. Not true! It *will* be gone! If you do not act today then when? The present moment is a moment of the small accomplishment--not the great feat. "A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step." The hero in someway realizes this.

Life is not maintained or lived to its fullest being passive, or numb. This is the attitude that develops out of the "denial of death." Yet death captures even the person who through complacency does not engage life in all of its pain and ambiguity. Life can become a living death if we fail to choose *active involvement* in being a creator or survivor. Life is not maintained by retreat--death will only chase and capture you.

Some people like to think that rock music has little redeeming value. Here are some lyrics to a popular song by a group called Pink Floyd:

"Every year is getting shorter, never seem to find the time. Plans that either come to naught, or half a page of scribbled rhyme. Hanging on in quiet desperation is the English way. The time is gone. The song is over. Thought I'd something more to say."

Today's hero says what she has to say. Today's hero finds the time. The time to dream and the time to struggle to make a dream a reality, bit by tiny bit. Step by step, journeying through life the hero goes. Today's true heroes carry paint brushes, baseballs, pianos, notebooks, sail boats, diplomas, pets, hammers and nails, or even their love for another person.

### THE WILLINGNESS TO CHANGE

If we have the courage to look at our own lives as they really are we find at the root of our behaviors and life styles the denial of death. If we are truly courageous we will face our fear and terror and cut through the denial. In this way we come face to face with the foundation of human reality. We can begin to truly grow in a distinctively human way rather than mimic parrot-like the meanings and values unreflectively incorporated from our society. We will no longer be able to fool ourselves into a false complacency by making "heroes" out of sports or political figures. We will have to discover the hero in ourselves. We do this by looking at other heroes--those who face boundary, limit, disease and death. Those who maintain an affirmation of life, do not give into despair, who look death in the face, turn and embrace life.

What kind of qualities might a hero have? Well, if they have worked at breaking through their denial of death they might very much be aware of the importance of *today* being well lived. Something along the lines of "Let today's sorrows be sufficient for the day." If this is so our hero might be aware of the hold memories might have over our ability to enjoy the present day. The role of memories in our decision making and behaviors is powerful. For instance, a woman who was sexually abused as a child may, as an adult, have difficulties relating to men. She is controlled by her memories. Strong and powerful memories are able to limit the small degree of freedom we possess. However, memories can also be used as a foundation from which we can grow. The person who is open and accepting of their memories is able to break their control over life. We talk of the "healing" of memories--especially those that are painful to recall.

We are told that those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it. This is true not only of great historical events but in our own family histories. Patterns begun three and four generations ago can effect our lives today. Can keep us in denial. Can keep us from living life *today*. We must, with the courage of the hero face our own pasts. When we acknowledge and forgive those who have hurt us than the power of that hurt is no more. No one means to imply that this is easy. It takes work, but there are countless organizations and people willing and wanting to help. "But" you say, "I don't have the time, the money." "I'll do it later," "Tonight is my favorite show." A change is demanded if you are to be a hero. A little taste of death. A little courage.

We do not like the parts of ourselves we deny--our shadow, our mortality. Because of our denial we desire to be "like gods," to act as if our life was perfect and would last forever. We fail to recognize our boundaries and limits--that though our creative abilities soar to great heights we are still intimately bound by the sludge of the earth. The media hooks into our most basic, primal denials of natural boundaries and limits. We tend to act as if any limit in our lives is not really a legitimate cause for concern.

Headache? "I took Excedrin and its gone!" Arthritis acting up? "I haven't got time for the pain." Showing the natural effects of aging? "Discover the secret European women have known for years." Lonely? "Want love? Get Close-Up." I think we get the picture. Though we know these slogans are just hype we *do* unconsciously believe such messages. We believe them until we break through our denial or until our shadow strikes us down, but then we may be unprepared or incapable of responding in a life-affirming manner.

If we accept that we are constrained by boundaries and limits then what? How do we respond to this condition? We must of course avoid over-compartmentalizing our experiences. And certainly, we cannot allow our Mr. Hyde-like tendencies to run rampant, but we cannot do this through repression or denial. Otherwise we may be driven unconsciously. Certainly we want to be able to accept and develop our more noble, god-like potentials--that secret yearning you may not have even told your spouse--to paint, to write, to start a little business--whatever. Otherwise where is the joy of life? Where lies the possibility for feelings of fulfillment?

There is a danger that having recognized the shadow, seen it lurking in our daily lives, that we then deny not the shadow, but the "god" part of ourselves. We fail to recognize, appreciate and develop the truly joyful moments of our lives--the things that make our lives truly worthwhile. Couples that lie between cool, sun-dappled sheets basking in the afterglow of love. The grandmother's gentle, age-spotted hand caressing and giving benediction to her grandchild. The open and loving glance between friends as they laugh at a shared, secret joke. The quiet and proud satisfaction that fill the artisan as he sees his own vitality in a completed project.

#### THE IMAGINATIVE HERO: THE ARTIST OF LIFE

In past societies it was sufficient to have a few exceptional people who could ward off the threat of death whether that threat was from other groups of people or from the vagaries of nature--animals, starvation and such. As said above, these were the heroes, the people who ensured life and survival for the community. Today we are no longer threatened by wild animals, and are rarely threatened by wild warriors. It is now demanded of us that we each be the heroes of our own lives. That each individual face death and triumph. Now, of course, this becomes an increasingly symbolic confrontation and triumph. Symbolic in that we face death through breaking our denial, rather than killing the charging tiger. Through acknowledging our own imminent and unavoidable demise we alter the entire structure of our lives as they are lived.

Today's hero does not let the past manipulate the present. The hero has courage to seek out those who can help, and helps those she can. The hero recognizes and fights against ever present inertia and entropy. The hero *acts*. The traditional war hero

knows that to stand still on the battlefield is to invite death. The hero facing death on the battlefield knows to always keep moving--no matter how difficult, how scary. We "ordinary" heroes can learn from this. Human life is dynamic, in flux, always in movement.

This movement implies the familiar idea of life as a journey. Our life is always an ongoing search for the proper balance between compartmentalization and sham as both blessing and as curse. We are always in a movement between the fear that motivates our continuing denial and the courage that allows us to face our lives as they actually are. Our life is always a journey towards greater balance, what we call "metaxis" between the four main areas of our life: social, physical, psychological and spiritual. Each of these areas are prone to some type of denial. We deny our physical death. We compartmentalize our psychological shadow. We use sham in our social relationships. Contemporary spirituality is in such sad shape that we shall discuss it at length throughout this book. Human growth *is* this never ending movement.

The means of our movement is through the reinterpretation of meaning. We are victims of our memories and the meanings we give to our experiences. Concurrently, it is through changing what these situations mean that we gain a healthier balance in our lives. For instance, the meaning of death for some people is the state of non-existence, for others it is entrance into paradise. Dependant upon what death *really* means for you (as opposed to a merely intellectual assertion of meaning) will determine much of your behaviors, feelings, satisfaction and healthy balance in your life. The growth that results from changing what things mean demands the development of qualities we often associate with artists and other creative types of persons. We too are called to be the artists of our own lives, but rather than using chisel and stone, or pigments and brushes, we use *meaning*. As we journey through time we in many ways create ourselves through what things, people and our experiences mean to us. Rather than painted pictures or sculpted marble we use our own life experiences. Remember, we cannot be passive, we cannot give into the forces of entropy and inertia that always produce a drag upon us. We must be active--looking creatively at our past, our world, our experiences and "excavate" them for meanings and insights.

#### EXCAVATING MEANING AND INSIGHT: THE ROLE OF IMAGINATION

To a large degree, the symbolic meanings and interpretations upon which we act are given to us through our society, friends and family. Our lives are guided by a shared cultural system of symbols. We are always socially conditioned. Our social conditioning is in some ways inescapable. We cannot deny the communal traditions and individual historical experiences that have shaped our lives. For instance, if you were abused as a child this history will effect your life and cannot be denied. Healthy change is never the result of a denial of the past. Healthy change is a courageous turning to face the forces that have shaped our unique selves. We have a degree of freedom in how we respond to those forces.

A creative artist is often ridiculed or misunderstood, at least in his or her own time. An example would be the case of Debussy's *Le Mer*. This symphony has been described as a "tonal poem." It does not really possess a melodic direction as do most symphonies and popular songs. Today it is considered a classic. When it was first

performed it was quite controversial; blasted by the critics and disliked by the public. Debussy, as a musical composer, was familiar with the compositional structures of his day. He developed his abilities of apprehension of the musical world of notes, intervals and time signatures--looking at them and their interrelatedness in unique creative ways. He courageously indulged the unique understandings he "excavated" out of the familiar musical forms. He did not allow himself to be dictated to by the prevailing social sensibilities. The result was a masterpiece.

The journey of life calls us to make our own selves "masterpieces" through the development of creative imagination. This demands courage.

We develop our skills of creative imagination through the imaginative use of analogy and metaphor. We tend to think of imagination as pertaining only to our abilities at fantasy. For instance, the image of a winged horse is certainly imaginative in a fantastical kind of way. However, fantasy is not the only function of imagination. Certainly great artists such as Monet and Picasso would be called imaginative, but in a way different than the type of imagination that leads to fantasy. Imagination enables us to resist the tendency to be determined by common, received, institutional views of reality. Imagination allows the human to transcend historical facts and re-appropriate memories in a new context. Imagination increases the depth and breadth of our apprehensions. The journey of life demands imaginative thinking.

Edward L. Murray in his book *Imaginative Thinking and Human Existence* writes: "Imaginative thinking is just that: it is thinking, intellectual effort designed to move us towards an end." Imaginative thinking is different than logical thought. Both types of thought require active effort. Both are used to solve types of problems, but imaginative thought is free to move in directions not available to logical thought. This distinction is quite important for us as we attempt to move our lives towards ever greater harmony between the four main areas of life: social, physical, psychological and spiritual. Imaginative thinking allows us to deepen and broaden our abilities of apprehension through the recognition of analogy and metaphor.

The processes of analogy and metaphor are what allow us to apprehend creative and unique symbolic meanings. Metaphor and analogy encourage the development of *polysomy* which means "a multiplicity of meanings." Any single word or symbol (language is a symbolic system) has both *connotations* and *denotations*. For instance, the word "cow" denotes a certain type of animal, it connotes meanings such as "milk," "Wisconsin," etc. If you lived in a Hindu culture the word "cow" would have the same denotation, but would have different connotations. Development of apprehension through imaginative thinking increases polysomy or the connotations of our lived experiences.

## THE RISE OF THE EXPERT CLASS

We all have a longing for broader meanings in our lives, meanings that go well beyond our narrow mundane preoccupations. We seek to act in accord with the good. After all, we cannot let our evil side run rampant.

But we must proceed slowly and cautiously. Change in our lives can be both an enticing potential and a powerful threat. Growth involves painful reordering of our

lifestyles--it can only be instituted in small doses. We have all had the experience when we say "I will change *tomorrow*." We go to sleep the night before with grandiose ideas and images of the new self we will soon be. Of course, these fail. Change is slow and gradual if it is to last. The all-encompassing and dramatic attempts at change usually don't last. We want to maximize our good side, but this cannot happen all at once. We may desire to change for the better, but we know that our desire does not result in our waking up one morning a "new" person. It occurs slowly and in small doses. Both our potentials for good and evil--as "gods" and as "shadowed" must be treated slowly, gently, and bit by bit. How do we manage this? Why we turn to experts for help of course! We are dependent on what has been called the "expert class."

What do you do when you encounter physical limits in the form

of disease? You go to a doctor, an expert. If you are limited by "strange" behavior you might go to an analyst, counselor or therapist--another expert. If your marriage isn't providing enough joyful moments you might go to those same experts or another type of expert--the divorce lawyer. In short, in order to manage our evil side and maximize our good side we go to expert specialists. The ultimate expert is the scientist. It is to the findings of science that we turn to for help in managing our evil and maximizing our good. The time of boundary and limit, the time of personal suffering, the realities of pain and death are central to any science of the human.

Science is a human endeavor and so falls prey to compartmentalization, sham and denial. It is also often an expression of the height of human imagination. Our scientists--the experts to whom we all turn--are called to be not mere technicians, but creative artists.