

## The Unconscious and the Island: Fragments of Research on the Self

Sometimes the ideas and insights, the feelings and emotions are born by a new and abnormal element, as a *disturbance*.

Among these, the word “emotion” shares the root with another word just as beautiful: it is the word “movement”.

I believe that life is often dotted and crossed by emotions and movements. Emotions are *our* emotions, are those shared with patients in the consulting room, with people important to us, through meetings with new faces and eyes. The movements, however, we can roughly categorize into two types: there are *transverse* movements, the ones that make us change jobs, make us change clothes or change cities. There are, then, the *longitudinal* movements, that make us be born, grow, learn, grow old, get sick, heal, die and, maybe, even reborn.

Through symbols and metaphors, but also through concrete facts, whether physical or psychological, in this article we will try to put through words the *Journey* of the person who, at some point in her life, *feels* that the land on which she lived with more or less security, the conscious, the consciousness, is only a small part, the surface of something much deeper, more complex, more unknown, but also, we believe, more fascinating, as it enables us, or forces us, to contact, to confront our most hidden parts, our Shadows.

One of the “key” inputs used in this article comes from the famous novel *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, written by Jules Verne in 1864; extracting from the plot components metaphorically more akin to philosophy, analytical psychology, but also to mythology, alchemy, etc., the most poignant and emerging psychic traits are two places, two physical *moments* in the work of the French writer, geographically very distant but geologically and psychically very next between them; two Volcanoes: the Icelandic Sneffels and the Italian Stromboli. From Sneffels, in fact, the three protagonists of Verne’s “Journey” had immersed themselves into the bowels of the Earth and, after many adventures and surprising discoveries, risen to the surface of the Planet through the chimney of Stromboli, which is a volcanic island, part of the archipelago of the Aeolian Islands, located near the northern coast of Sicily. Stromboli is a volcano whose explosive activity has been almost uninterrupted for about two thousand years.

At this point, for Italians is appropriate, even essential, a slight digression: Mediterranean people and Icelanders have a *problem*, or perhaps a greater *opportunity* than other peoples;

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occasionally, the underground, the *unconscious*, is felt, it makes its incessant restlessness manifest itself in the form of earthquakes, active volcanoes, or emerging and disappearing islands, and as we delude ourselves that our Being, our existence, is *ended* in the *horizontal* of the surface, something, at some point, makes us feel and discover the vertical dimension, which is no longer directed only upwards, towards Heaven, but is also directed towards the core of our Being, too. On this point, American psychoanalyst James Hillman spoke about a "*feeling that there's a reason why my person, which is unique and unrepeatable, is in the world, and that there are things that I have to devote beyond the daily life and at the daily life give its raison of existence (...)*".

Translating what has been written so far, the analytical path can be succinctly so symbolized: there is a moment in our life path in which we feel the need to understand and discover what lies beneath the surface of our daily and horizontal existence. This is, in the terminology of Carl Gustav Jung's analytical psychology, the process of *individuation*, which was understood and sought already by alchemists long before modern psychoanalysis.

The central philosophical idea of alchemy claims that the first stage of the inner journey is the one in which the forces abandon the individual – the stage of decomposition, in Latin *nigredo*, in which there is a movement from an identified to a non-identified state; we can say that in this first step the ego offers himself to an initiatory death.

This stage is followed by one in which the individual, directed to the center of the earth, i.e. at the center of the Self, finds the roots of his own subjectivity: this is the *albedo* phase, without corporeality, *full of its emptiness*, according to the alchemists; at this stage the individual, although being a filled and present *object*, tests the paradoxical experiences of absence and emptiness. Just by facing and overcoming this stage, the human being can move up to a renewed light, towards individuation. This is the stage of *rubedo*, in which there is the materialization of the Spirit.

Similarly to the alchemists, Rabbi Dov Ber (or otherwise written Dov Baer), the main propagator of Hasidism, a current of Judaism founded in the eighteenth century, argued: "*We have to think about ourselves as nothing, forgetting ourselves*", meaning that each thing, every thought, in order to transform itself, must venture into nothingness, renouncing itself; only by denying ourselves and annihilating ourselves we can transcend time: "*He who arrives at the threshold of nothing, forget his own person and obtains a natural mind*".

The individual adult, the mature person, or at least the one that aims to become one (it's never too late!), should prepare herself for the meeting with their dark spots, by means of comparison with their own Shadows (Greek ?????, Latin *umbra*, Italian *ombra*), so as to begin

the process of individuation. Consciousness, moreover, that constitutes our daily life, needs its counterpart, the unconscious, and one component cannot be separated from its counterpart, as though adhering to a universal law: Light and Darkness, Day and Night, Full and Empty, Male and Female, Good and Evil ...

Contenting himself with living exclusively in the light of the sun, ignoring and disclaiming our less brilliant parts, exposes us to the risk of an incomplete existence, devoid of our more nuclear members, more genuine and more intimate, which, if not recognized and integrated into our lives, are likely to turn against us. Accomplishing this path requires a good deal of courage. C. G. Jung wrote: *"Whoever goes towards oneself risks meeting with himself. The mirror does not flatter; it shows faithfully the one which is reflected in it, and that is the face that is never exposed to the world, for we veil it by means of the Person, the mask of the actor. But behind the mask there is the mirror from which the true face shines. This is the first test of courage to face on the inner way, a test just to deter, scared, most people. The encounter with oneself is indeed one of the most unpleasant experiences, from which we escape by projecting all that is negative onto the world around us. He who is in a position to see his Shadow and bear the knowledge has already completed a small part of the task: the personal unconscious has just emerged to the surface"*.

Accepting our own Shadow, recognizing the personal unconscious, means dealing with the sense of one's own limitations and taboos; we believe this to be the paradigmatic aspect of the work of the analyst: the couple patient/analyst, their differentiation of roles, expectations, skills, desires, needs, etc.; this acceptance determines us to face the uncertainty of the limit, *peras* in Greek, which is a psychic place about which man has asked over the centuries many questions, yet finding no clear and definitive answers. Aristotle, in his *Metaphysics*, defines the limit as the extreme end of all things, beyond which there is nothing of the thing, and on this side of which the whole thing stands.

According to Homer, "over" is the *place* where *psyché* lies when man abandons it, if he loses consciousness or dies: it [psyché], breathed its last breath, it reaches Hades, which is the place of the non-visible (*Á-ides*), where it will dwell as a vain shadow, in a state of overwhelming sadness.

The religious feeling, before being directed towards Heaven, elected its specific region in the underground, the lower world, from which flowed life and where the man returned after death, in search of the *con-centration*, memory and ecstasy: *"Men die because they are not able to join the beginning with the end"*. It has psychic consistency, then, to realize that the primitive mythology devotes so much attention to those more disruptive geological phenomena and more related to the subsoil, such as earthquakes and volcanic events, which aroused (and still create) terror and wonder that are basic elements of the sacrum and the

supernatural. The supernatural, if it is ever universally recognized in the mountains, it is even more so if it comes from volcanoes. If the gods inhabit the peaks of the mountains, in the case of volcanoes their home is inside, that's why the crater is considered the entrance to the other world, the passage from which to reach the Center where "(...) *Archeus resides, the "servant of nature", that Paracelsus also called Volcano, identifying it with the Adech, i.e. with the "great Man"*.

In the mythology of the Mediterranean regions the Sicilian volcano Mount Etna, the largest in Europe, is the forge of Hephaestus, whereas for the Romans it is on Vulcano island (also belonging to the archipelago of the Aeolian Islands) that God forged thunderbolts for Jupiter and weapons for Mars. It is from the late Middle Ages that the word "volcano" has spread all over the planet to name the mountains made by fire. To finish this brief digression about the mythology of the Volcanoes, according to legend, Athena would force Enceladus (meaning "restrained voice", "interior scream") below the slopes of Mt. Etna, while another myth speaks about Zeus, who casts Mt. Etna against the monstrous Typhon, burying it, though some variations of the myth say that Typhon would be under the whole Sicily and, according to Pindar and Aeschylus, the area involved would be the entire volcanic Tyrrhenian region included from Etna to the Ischia island (located opposite the city of Naples), and this would explain, at least in terms of mythology, the correlation between the phenomena of Stromboli and Etna, which is flatly denied by geologists, whilst volcanologists have just recently expressed a symptomatic *yes* and *no* (e.g. Fumiciello R. & Billi A., 2003. "Etna e Isole Eolie: casualità o eventi connessi?" *Sicurezza Civile*, 3:8-11).

There are some phenomena, some psychic objects with which, during our lives, we are confronted almost daily and that, with their symbolic and archetypal mark and structure our way of life, we refer to; for example, darkness: it, when we are children, arouses our fears, our sense of vulnerability, but it contains as well an unspeakable, seductive value. It is in the darkness of the underground, in the unconscious, that we seek our less visible parts; sometimes they are, perhaps, less glorious and bright, they are our shadows, but they are that part of ours that is closest to the core of our Self, in which those components reside, sometimes surprising us, silently and subtly guiding our choices, our meetings, our fears, our desires, our work, our *being-in-the-world*; and here in the morning, awakening, a dream, just a stupid dream, predisposes us to a good mood or a bad mood or to looking for the lottery! It is not recent history, however: in ancient Greece there were some priests, followers of Asclepius (deity to whom was consecrated the science of medicine), who interpreted the dreams of people: the nightmares (*incubi*, in Italian), creating the so-called practice of incubation. The word comes from *in-cubus*, since the sleepers, after some rites of ablution and therefore "clean", lay down on square stones at the center of temples dedicated to

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Aesculapius, in its Latin form. When they wake up, they must tell the dreams to the priests, so that they can interpret them, so as to give directions to the person or sometimes to the whole community. For the Romans, the *incubus* was a spirit responsible for the safekeeping of valuable assets buried under the ground, while in the Middle Ages the *incubus* assumed the guise of a monstrous spirit that surprised the women at night, oppressing their chest with his weight or abusing them. The square stone, therefore, had a significant and catalyst function.

The descent into the darkness of the underground, in the realm of the Dream, the unconscious, leads us to a place devoid of psychic temporality, comparable to what the alchemists called *vas bene clausum* or *vas hermeticum*, i.e. an isolated system and hermetically closed so as to protect the good and growing part of the living world and the psyche. Devoid of sunlight, conventions and social rhythms, any notion of time can be dilated to excess or be reduced to a quantity point.

Continuing with geometric symbolism, the search of the archetype of the Center is a primordial need for man because the point, along with the circle and the sphere, is a "natural" figure.

The first image that the child conceives about itself is a round image. The figure of the circle is rooted deeply in the mind because it regards the first mental learning tension of the bodily self and its borders. As soon as the child is able to draw on the paper a sign that goes beyond the simple doodle, the first creative expression that performs the baby is a circle and this is the result of a long, evolutionary internal and autobiographical process. To approximate to the core of the individual, we must do it so in a "naive" (*ingenuo* in Italian) way, that is to say so natural and free (from the Latin *ingèenus*, which indicated those who were born in the same place where they lived and that had therefore certain birth, unlike the slaves). To search for the Self so naively means to predispose oneself to an inner journey without intellectual superstructure, in which the natural component is higher than the cultural one; and the reason is simple: reason has the need to objectify at any cost, so as to put a separation between self and other-than-self, between the observer and the observed. In order for it to discover and know one's Self, however, we must "be Self".

Marius Schneider wrote in *Kosmogonie*: "*in "normal" consciousness nature and human consciousness are not related, but as it is in man a more intimate conscience is forming, the world reveals the deep awareness as a supra-individual unit, in which man and nature live together and are intrinsically fused. Because man can experience the structure of the universe only in himself, he decides its structure from the essence of nature*".

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Descent into Darkness exposes the abandonment of certain habits, certain rules and certain “safety” structures guaranteed by the Light of the surface, i.e. by the consciousness and the “concreteness” of the earth on which we live.

Venturing in the Dark, in the region of the unconscious, is similar to offering oneself a new perspective, a new “possibility of existence” or, in religious terms, a new *grace*; but this trip, this waiver, albeit transient, of solar Light, has inherent the risk of loss of control and the *confusion* of the limit: madness. This is a fundamental point in psychotherapy, because it repeats the essential theme of balance and aid that the therapist must offer to the patient so that he, the symbolic Being and as such a mediator between the earth and the sky, can find his own way, with prudence but also with courage, i.e. the necessary courage to overcome a particular *impasse*, the likely cause of illness or disorder.

The encounter between the patient and the therapist is like a contest in which the apparent balance between the ones is broken by the patient’s demand. The dynamic that occurs is similar to the contention of judo; the word “judo” is formed by the JU ideogram, which can be translated as “soft”; the character “DO” represents the student accompanied by the teacher, but philosophically it is translated as “path” or “way of improvement”. Judo, therefore, expresses the “way of gentleness”. The student, the patient, addresses the question, the “problem”, to the therapist, the “master”, who is waiting for the “attack”, expects the “disturbance”, the “noise”. The therapist is not opposed to the attack, but he welcomes it and supports it, leading it to the logical conclusion and freeing the patient from that which is most likely a false social assumption, namely the risk of alienating the person from one’s Self.

What envelops and confuses man are, often, the rules and social demands that often conflict with the feelings and individual instances. We believe that the task of the therapist is to permit reconciliation between the dictates coming from society and the search for identification, thus safeguarding the integrity of the person. An aphorism says that a good doctor is one who entertains the patient while nature cures him.

Resuming the thread of the metaphor which we used before, i.e. Verne’s novel: the *Journey* begins and ends on two volcanic islands, the cold Iceland of Sneffels and the hot Stromboli. The island, psychologically, is an extra-worldly environment, surrounded by the incessant restlessness of the liquid element that wraps and surrounds it, whilst for being able to reach the island it is necessary to deal with the water, which can be unpredictable and dangerous. It is impossible to come onto the island accidentally, because the island is an “exact” goal, the island is *genius loci*: the landing on the island is allowed to those who accept the risk or have the talent to get there, as long as they do not fall into *hybris*, arrogance: in alchemical terms, the access onto the island is allowed to those who are in the grace of God, because

the Island is a *témenos*. The sacredness of the island, especially if it is volcanic, sanctifies the person that docks unharmed.

To dock on an island means abandoning a protected place to rely upon the *sea-utero* that surrounds and contains, on which, usually about the summit, there is a crater, the *omphalos* (*ombelico* in Italian), a term which in antiquity, as well as 'navel', distinguished a certain stone to which was attributed religious significance.

At the beginning of this text, we made a brief mention about the emergence and submergence of islands, about lands standing in the sea; we have, in the Mediterranean Sea, a very close and geologically recent example: Ferdinandea Island, off the coast of Sciacca (close to city of Agrigento), a little town located on the southern coast of Sicily, whose last emergence and disappearance is documented in 1831. The emergence of an island needs the participation of a fundamental key, it needs Fire, for it is by the combined action between the water and fire that the island can materialize itself, whose persistence in the superficial and aerial region and whose resistance, however, depends on the firmness of the bonds that must persist within the game of opposing forces exerted by the Wind, then from Air, and especially by the disruptive action of the sea-unconscious.

The geometric figure which can be associated with fire is the pyramid; Plato argued that the element of fire is marked by pyramids and that of all the solid figures contained the proper signs of fire, being their shape extremely pointed and with a minimum of a base; in addition, it seems certain that if a dead organic body is placed in a particular point inside the pyramid, which has precise proportions, the process of putrefaction freezes, allowing mummification, as if the fire inside of the pyramid could burn its temperaments (moods). In the pyramid there are just two specific principles including gender, i.e. the female, the four, the base, which mark the horizontality, i.e. the earth, the acceptance, complementary to the principle of three, i.e. the male, vertical, penetrating like a mountain. The uneven numbers, in the West and in the East, have always symbolized the male, while the even numbers recall the female: if we look at the Christian-Catholic dogma, the Trinity has male characteristics, apart from some rare interpretations, and just with the accession of the Virgin, sanctioned in 1950, and the subsequent formation of the Quaternary, the Trinity *also* includes a female component.

The Heart, thanks to the combined action of Water, Fire and Air, which was previously localized in the chthonic regions of Dream, erupts at the superficial region of awareness, changing its status from a magmatic, undifferentiated condition, to the solidity of the consistency of the lava emerged, materializing the island and, psychologically, making clear the conscience.

The emerging volcano-island, then, is the Self manifesting itself and that is opposed to what the psychoanalyst Erich Neumann called “psychic gravitation”, which is the centripetal tendency of the ego to return to the original unconscious psychic dislocation, and it is what happens to the Ferdinanda Island, which, failing to develop and strengthen the bonds necessary for its survival out of the water, is broken up and re-assimilated into the subterranean regions, the analogue of the unconscious.

The fire, along with water, comprises one of the most ancient and universal human symbols. In the cross itself, the horizontal line represents the water, the female principle, namely the surface, the descent and the depth, because the water penetrates by gravity through the rock; the vertical arm, however, is the masculine principle, namely fire, connected to rising, height and concentration. It is in the cross that the maximum energy concentrates, in the intersection of the two arms, that is, the *punctum indivisibile* (indivisible point), from which everything emanates and to which everything returns. Any attempt of separation or categorization leads us to the Centre, in this indivisible point where opposites, joining, coincide and form the identity. It is from the Centre, too, that the movement originates, symbolized by Man through the cross, with one of the oldest symbols of the graphic Indo-European culture, the *swastika*, an eastern representation of the solar disk, whose word seems to derive from an ancient Sanskrit formula of blessing, *su asti*, and this is the core of the *mandala*, the nature and origin of which cannot be treated in this article.

The volcano and the crater represent the sensitive point, the place of rupture, the portal through which the passage can take place, the communication between the underground, the unconscious, and the emerged regions, the consciousness. The crater, the summit or mouth of volcanoes, is the entrance gate to the kingdom of Hades and it is a place of transformation, of rebirth and enlightenment; to support the symbolism associated with the crater, we can connect to the sacrificial cup, that embodies the symbol of “Center of the World” or “Heart of the World”, in which the immortality elects his home. If we move from the ground up, we find that due to the peculiarities that Mercury has over other gods, he is the only god that is allowed to carry the souls in the opposite direction, taking them to Hades.

If we want to remain in the theme of Heaven, instead, an important astronomical discovery happened at Plato’s time. The planets – the Greek word meaning “*wandering star*” – had always been considered the celestial bodies that, unlike the others, wandered aimlessly. But a member of the Platonic Academy, Philip from Opunte, observed that the planets moved around the Earth with regular revolutions. Law and order ruled in the sky. An unprovable hypothesis was formulated, which nevertheless seemed convincing: the stars were animated and traveling along regular orbits by the will and judgment just because they were “*visible gods*”. In *Timaeus*, and likewise in the *Phaedrus*, Plato put his theory of the soul in relation

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with the stars: the soul comes from the heaven of the fixed stars, from the sphere of eternal things; from there it falls into that of changing things, until it comes to Earth, enters a body, from which it is delivered after death, in order to ascend again to the immortal stars.

In this short passage begins to emerge this “need” of man, already testified *inter alia* by Heraclitus (“*the way up and the way down are one and the same*”), to find a continuity, a junction between the underground, the Earth and Heaven. Many peoples, including Persians, believed that the sky was made of stone and they used the same term for the concepts of “heaven” and “stone”: *Asman*. There is a Greek word, *akmon*, which has the same origin and means both “heaven” as “anvil stone”. The fragments of the meteor falling to Earth led the first men to believe that the sky was made of stone. That’s why the ancient men imagined the universe as a giant cave and, consequently, the caves in which the followers of Mithra met to perform their rites, for example,, were regarded as reproductions of the cosmos.

At this point, we hypothesize that *Journey to the Center of the Earth* represents Man’s desire to return to the original and primordial center; in alchemical literature it is defined as “*regressus ad uterum*” (return to the womb), and the three explorers of *Journey to the Center of the Earth* will find a sea-utero at the end of their underground journey.

Jung writes: “*In the myth of the hero, the purpose of the descent is universally characterized by the fact that in the danger zone (deep water, cave, forest, island, rock etc.) there is the ‘treasure hard to reach’ (jewel, virgin, elixir of life, victory over death etc.). The fear and resistance that every natural man feels when digging too deeply into himself, are ultimately the fear of the journey to Hades. If we try just resistance, the thing would not be so serious. In reality, however, from that psychic background, so just from that dark space, unknown, exudes an attraction, a fascination, which threatens to become even more overwhelming the deeper one penetrates in it*”.

The *vas* (vase in English, *vaso* in Italian), the *antrum* formed by the crater from which you can access to *Chthon*, however, is also a cave; the cave, like all the archetypal objects, is naturally ambivalent: it is a place of change, and the change takes place as withdrawn, precluded at the uninitiated and protected from external light. It is a place of burial, which marks the end of life, but it is also a place of initiation and birth (in a cave or a grotto were born Jesus, Zeus and Mithra, and we can also remember the adventure of Jonah).

Now let’s try to do a little exercise chart: the overlap between the graphic representation of the cave and the mountain is the shaped of the symbol called the “Seal of Solomon”, whose figure, full of several symbolic references, condenses the meaning of the macrocosm: the triangle with the point at the top, which is a symbol for Air and Fire, is the male principle;

the one with the tip down, a symbol for Water and Earth, is the female principle. The hexagram thus formed and circumscribed form the Divine Principle, the androgynous being, the perfect balance. We find a drift into this principle in botany, where there exists a plant, the *convallaria polygonatum*, called "Seal of Solomon", whose roots are used in white magic, placed at the four corners to protect the house from any evil influence.

Beyond the direct will of the grapple in the discovery of the unconscious, we believe that it is necessary to accommodate this sort of "gravitational captivation", living it as an opportunity, rather than to suffer it: the opportunity to discover and re-acquaint oneself, making use of the image that not by chance we can associate with the concept of "idea", inasmuch as "idea" and "image" have the same etymological origin, *eidos* and *Eideo*, which in Greek means "to see". Hence also the Latin word "video" and the Greek word *eidolon*, idol, which means "image" too.

The most frequently proposed or celebrated appearance of what is defined as "postmodern condition" is its reliance upon the superficial image. In contemporary culture, we are surrounded by a fast flow of images that pile up in a succession of news, advertising and TV series in which it is no longer clear whether that image belongs to the so-called "reality" or not, in a semantic and iconic confusion that requires proper space-time placing, a translation and interpretation, until the short-circuit occurs, i.e. the paradox in which, according to research, it is discovered that approximately up to 11 years of age, most children are not fully aware that the images and verbal messages of advertising are constructed to lead us to the purchase of products.

Arguing about the image, we use the example of the photographic image: it predominates in the determination of the reality, especially for the urban contemporary psyche. This is so true that those images that start as a representation of reality, become representations without any "reality" behind them. According to French philosopher and sociologist Jean Baudrillard, the image, in the postmodern conception, can be summarized in four types:

- 1.The image is the reflection of a deeper reality
- 2.The image disguises and perverts a deeper reality
- 3.The image disguises the absence of a deeper reality
- 4.The image has no relationship with reality: it is a mere simulacrum, intending for

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simulacrum an appearance, an image that, contrary to the icon, does not refer to any reality lying under.

Here, then, what is the challenge and the opportunity that we believe may be contained in a search path toward the center, toward the Self: the chance to “take a look” beyond the superficial appearance, which is likely not to forward to a non-lying-under reality and confining ourselves to the illusion that “it’s all here,” opening, to those who want, a series of questions, one of which could be the following: “is that world, the unconscious world of each of us existing prior of our discovery, an *a priori*, or is it embodied just as a result of our investigation, which we call psychoanalysis”?

Life, existence, is much more than a series of behavioral patterns more or less tested - *by others* - to inspire us and on whose footprints we repeat something already done said, seen and thought. The uniqueness of our Being, however, is attested continuously by our unconscious through a lapsus, with premonitions, forgetfulness, or with dreams that every time, at every age, in every culture, never cease to frighten , inspire, amaze with their absolutely and absurd originality.

Why, then, this sense of horror that emerges in the stories of mermaids or in dreams of mermaids, which is never a pure horror but is almost always flavored, accompanied by a component that is unspeakably attractive? Why this discomfort? My interpretation is that their physical proximity to Man, as well as their mental one, leads these dis-human beings - *but not too much* - to makes us feel a certain commonality, an affinity that, in many dreams, result in a much greater terror than, say, a meeting with a monster-*monster*. The meeting with the Mermaid, but also with the Centaur, the Chimeras, forces us to accept our submerged parts, not human or not yet human, revealing how fragile may be the distance separating from reason, the logic, full consciousness and our Shadows, our instincts, our being animal.

Concluding, I would like to remark that the point of view inherent in this short article should be interpreted as an opportunity for trying to change perspective, to change the lenses with which we look at the world we live in, for becoming “world” ourselves too, daring, if it is the case, even to make choices that are less conservative and yet more sacred, both for us and for the universe. There is a Japanese short story about a farmer who, alone, cultivated his field on the hill above the village in which he lived; suddenly, watching the sea on the horizon, he saw that a huge tsunami wave was fast approaching the village. The farmer was shocked by what was going to happen; without wasting time, he did something seemingly

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absurd and seemingly antisocial: he set fire to all the fields close to his. The other farmers rushed to the village to save their harvest, but precisely at that moment they understand that, by means of an apparently criminal gesture, the farmer had saved their lives.

We believe that this very short story contains part of the meaning of the “journey” toward the center of our self, that is, if this journey is done with awareness, it is an opportunity to try to see things, life, our existence in a seemingly circular path, just as the three travelers of Jules Verne’s *Journey to the center of the Earth* do. As admirably summed up in an alchemical aphorism: *“for those who are not on the path of knowledge, a tree is just a tree; for those who are on the path, a tree ceases to be a tree; for those who have attained knowledge, a tree again becomes a tree”*.

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