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The Scapegoat Complex: Archetypal Reflections on a Culture of Severance

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ABSTRACT: In a time of global recrimination and polarization, the archetype of the Scapegoat arises from the depths of the collective unconscious to cast blame and demand retribution. When we project blame onto the *Other*, we shield ourselves from the potent revelations of our own dark instincts and memories. The secular enactment of the ancient Hebrew ritual engendered by the scapegoat myth is performed in our time on the personal, national and global stage. To establish a deep understanding of any psychological condition, we must know the myth that lives behind it and the ritual behavior it spawns. The human being performs ritual by nature. If we remove the transpersonal/sacramental element from our rites, we will still perform them unconsciously by way of our individual and collective symptoms. A symptom is a relational amnesia—a psychic forgetting of what is essential to our authentic nature and our connection to the world. In a time of extraordinary world suffering, we find ourselves in need of a living mythology that is relevant to our urgent inquiry into the psychology of the *polis* where myriad possibilities for creation and destruction are cultivated. These archetypal paradigms are revealed in culture and religion, where the dreams, customs, arts, rituals, and myths of all peoples are stored. In my exploration of the scapegoat complex, I use archetypal psychology to examine a formidable myth that informs our ritual patterns of severance—and offers a possibility for restoration in our time.

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Introduction

Troubled times bring us together under one tent. Within this canopy of nations we hear the sounds of revelry, the chants of war, the lamenting of our irretrievable losses. We bow to the mystery that brings us together because of—and in spite of our vast differences. We tune our hearing to the symphonic and cacophonous sounds of our many

voices. Into this collective reverie I offer my own small voice that has been honed in the tradition of archetypal psychology.

Archetypal psychology is a psychology of the soul. It is concerned with the primal forms that inhabit our personal and collective stories. These forms or archetypes are revealed in culture where the dreams, customs, arts, rituals and myths of all peoples are manifest. The archetypal eye looks for soul—not only in beauty and peace, but in the shadows: in melancholy, tragedy, loss, disturbance and death—in the destruction of temples, the fall of towers and in the terrors of the night. In an era of extreme polarization the archetypal psychologist becomes curious about the territory framed by opposite forces.

While many psychologies look at the symptom as a personal matter, archetypal psychology is interested in collective and global symptoms as well. While many psychologies are interested in the eradication of pathology, archetypal psychology is interested in what symptoms are here to say about the forgotten or forsaken material of the psyche. This is a perspective that invites a poetic encounter with the world in all its pathos.

I come to this conversation in the hope that we might approach a global discourse with a mythic rather than a literal consciousness—that we might throw ourselves upon the practice of hearing one another with a mind tuned to the poetics of expression. Let us set aside, just for a while, the strategic, evaluative mind, focused on agreement and disagreement, right and wrong, left and right, religious and secular. We may choose to unburden ourselves in this way, not because we do not honor these discriminating aspects of mind, but because our thinking and our conversations in the context of the polarizing atmosphere of the times, are critically over-weighted in this direction. I offer this suggestion not as a solution, not as a way out of our nightmare, not as a sentimental or transcendent spin on matters of grave concern, but as a way to enter more deeply, for the sake of soul, into the foreboding and grief we share as members of a species that seems to have its sails trimmed toward destruction. In defiance of that woeful trajectory we come to willingly occupy the forgotten corners of the global psyche. The American poet, T.S. Eliot, offers assistance in holding this quality of presence when he writes in the *Four Quartets*:

*In order to arrive there,
To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,
You must go by a way wherein there is not ecstasy.
In order to arrive at what you do not know
You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.
In order to possess what you do not possess
You must go by the way of dispossession.
In order to arrive at what you are not
You must go through the way in which you are not.
And what you do not know is the only thing you know
And what you own is what you do not own
And where you are is where you are not.*

It is my fantasy that in our sincere gatherings we might find a way to quiet our polarizing, political, literal discourse for the possibility that some new poetic might rise in our midst—At the same time it is helpful to remember that polarization is not an aberration, but an essential part of a larger process. In the ancient art of alchemy it was known as the operation of *Separatio*. Like the mythic separation of earth and sky, which provided a space for the growth and development of sentient beings, the alchemical *Separatio* evoked a psychological severing, offering space for the germination of consciousness. Edward Edinger echoes Jung when he says “one becomes conscious as one is able to contain and endure the opposites...” (p.187)

With this prologue in place, I present to you, the Scapegoat as a primary archetype of severance and polarity who is to be found center stage on the world theater. I begin with the myth.

The Story of Azazel

Azazel was originally a pre-Hebraic goat god honored by herdsmen. He was connected to nature religions, and so was bound to the feminine, to the instinctual, and to sensuous beauty. When he was first introduced into the Hebrew biblical rites, he was considered a companion or aspect of Yahweh. He had a particular affinity for mortals. It was believed that he provided women with recipes for cosmetics and revealed to mortals the secrets of war. These were two divine treasures not intended to be passed on to mortals. Aggression and vanity were the prerogative of the god.

The historic Yahweh was a complex god. He was both an angry and destructive deity *and* a god of compassion and faithfulness to his people. As Yahweh transitioned to an all-loving god, the myth of Azazel, by necessity, changed as well. Someone had to take the rap for the dark aspect of the divine. An old goat makes as good a candidate as any. As religions separated their divinities from aggressive and erotic instincts, associated with sexuality, seduction, weaponry and war. Azazel became an adversary of Yahweh, and was further distorted by Jewish patriarchs in much the same way that Christians mutilated the images of pagan figures. We can see here where the divine figure has been split off from a significant aspect of his nature. This signifies the projection of a patriarchal culture uncomfortable with its own identity. The god has lost his shadow. Azazel became Yahweh’s scapegoat and was re-storied as a rebel, and reduced from a god to a fallen angel, Now Azazel, like Lucifer, is a demon, and thus a split off aspect of the god.

Once the split between the all-good god and the devil was accomplished the image and story of Azazel was further embellished. Now he approaches Yahweh with disdain for Israel. “Why have you mercy on them when they provoke you so? Rather, you should destroy them.” The compassionate Yahweh replies, “If you would be among them, you would also sin.” Azazel takes on the challenge and descends to live amongst humans. He becomes prey to his own instincts, falling into lust, and is punished by being sent to the wilderness, living neither with god or mortal.

Here was an aspect of the god who represented all things instinctual, feminine, juicy, sensual, beautiful, a god of the herd, deeply connected with the earth. Now with the psychological need for an utterly good and transcendent god, Azazel, now split off, comes to represent the absolute demonic, the arrogant, righteous, condemning, critical judge of human beings, whom he holds to an ideal he is unable and unwilling to live himself.

The new myth now takes him far from the earth god who understood and championed the rootedness of human beings in nature and instinct—who actually gave the secrets of the god to humans, so that they might nurture their own impulses. He has become radically evil, and now stands on the other side of divine mercy. He is an accuser devoted to a simplistic and one-sided sense of justice. He has now shifted from the scapegoat to the scapegoater. He is dogmatic, perfectionistic, contemptuous, and sadistic – projecting his own appetite for libidinous instinct onto mortals.

Out of this story rises the ancient scapegoat ritual or Yom Kippur rite. Two goats are chosen. The first is sacrificed to Yahweh for the propitiation of Israel, and offered as a blood sacrifice to cleanse the ritual space. The blood appeases the god and atones for the transgressions of the community or state. It assures a return of the spirit and the sacred ideals, which sustain the community and its relationship with the divine. This is atonement by blood. The second is sacrificed to Azazel. The sins of the people are poured onto the head of this goat. It is then taken away and sent into the desert or wilderness, bearing all the evil and guilt incurred by the community. One might say that the guilt is ritually returned to the shadowland – or the unconscious. It represents everything that has been rejected or repressed by the collective: untempered impulses, greed, aggression, and sexuality. All that is unacceptable in the eyes of a loving god is projected onto Azazel. The community can then return to a blissful and one-sided state of righteousness. This is atonement by banishment.

The Scapegoat Complex

A complex is a cluster of emotionally charged material that gathers around an archetype. It is originally formed out of the conflict between the true self and the inauthentic, socially-determined self. It is then lived out unconsciously in the individual or the culture in which it was generated.

Looking at the scapegoat complex clinically we see an individual who carries the shadow material for the family. She is burdened with the split-off, repressed and devalued aspects of the parental psyche. Growing up in a bacterial pond of shadowy perfectionism, concretism, moralism and righteousness, she identifies with the punishing and isolating elements of exile. Not having experienced a compassionate and protective containment within the family she grows up longing to be adequately held, but the guilt she carries for the collective prohibits her from feeling worthy. To add further suffering, the family member bearing the scapegoat complex often has a vision attuned to the deeper levels of the psyche. This combined with her profound connection to the Shadow in particular make her dangerous to the scapegoating parents who must at all costs, keep this material

at bay. Hence some kind of banishment –physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual—or any combination of these becomes necessary.

She who carries this complex is not likely to have access to a great deal of her own memories because she has been flooded with the unacknowledged material of her forbears that will often appear symbolically in the dreamtime or in her unconscious brooding. Without an adequate therapeutic container or its equivalent, the scapegoated individual is likely to go through life recreating this family tragedy- which is now internalized in the depths of her own psyche.

Ancient rites and ceremonies of atonement were meant to excise the diseases and evils of the community to wipe away or purge sin through sacrifice, which would magically transfer the evil and guilt to another – an animal, object or person. Disposable guilt. The scapegoat ritual restored the sense of wholeness to the community and its relationship to a single patriarchal divine figure. Often it was the ugly or deformed person, the sinner or the criminal who was chosen to be sacrificed– always someone who possessed some strong attribute of otherness from the agreed upon aesthetic or ethical standard.

In family life and cultures, throughout much of the world, the scapegoat role has fallen onto girls and women. The feminine values they carry must be kept in the shadows if the patriarchy is to be sustained. Hence we experience in our culture and in many cultures throughout the world the banishment of women, the exile of the archetypal feminine to the underworld and the proliferation of a one-sided patriarchal view. The collective expels powerful feminine values, which are necessary for the proliferation of life: sustainability of cultures and food and water supplies, the freedom to collect seeds and to farm for ones family and community, the proper care of children and the elderly, fair distribution of medicine and medical care, expression in the arts and the very act of creation itself.

Because of this banishment of the feminine and the instinctual, many of our revered institutions have nurtured and embellished this one-sided approach to god and culture. The result has been a distortion and oppression of the feminine, crimes against girls and women, the proliferation of a multitude of wars, and a disregard for the animate presence of our natural world. An article by Peter Landesman in the New York Times Magazine entitled “Sex Slaves on Main Street” estimates that there are “30,000 to 50,000 teen age sex slaves in captivity in the United States at any given time.” He names New York, Los Angeles, Atlanta and Chicago as the “major sex-trafficking hubs” in the country. A senior State Department adviser on trafficking says, “We’re not finding victims in the Unites States because we’re not looking for them.” (New York Times Magazine, Jan.25, 2004) Now I ask you, what kind of homeland security is this? To banish and torture the children anywhere in the world is a grievous sin against the human spirit and the culture. It negates the power and the possibility of *eros* in the realm of the psyche and the world.

The enactment of the scapegoat ritual lives on, though secularized in the personal, familial, communal, national and global stage. Since it has lost its sacramental character it rises in the culture in the form of a complex. The Scapegoat complex has touched us all

at one or more levels. Some of us grew up in scapegoating families or communities. All of us have access to both the scapegoater and the scapegoat archetype, and it is certainly alive in the on-going history of politics and world conflict. It behooves us to examine it carefully. To establish a deep understanding of any complex we must know the myth that lives behind it.

Azazel may be seen as a psychopomp, that is, one who bridges the gap between mortals and their god or gods. The Hebrews knew they were not going to be able to overcome or suppress their instinctual impulses. Yet because of Hebrew law they would endure guilt. The sins must be carried away in order for the community to thrive. This is a task, clearly too big for mortals to assume. The original intent of the scapegoat rite was to send mortal guilt on to the transpersonal realm and thus to accomplish atonement. This was sacramental enactment, which is to say that it made an actual change in the energies of the individuals participating and transformed the community itself.

The wilderness is a transitional and initiatory space, in which the individual is stripped of the old persona, meets with other-worldly emissaries, is touched by transpersonal forces, takes on a new life direction and prepares to return to the community transformed. When entered unconsciously or unwillingly it is a curse, a wasteland, a place of profound alienation, rejection, and exile where the individual or community feels outside of the realm of acceptance—homeless. They long for the containment of community and a connection with the transpersonal. It is the realm of the dark Azazel. The scapegoater has stolen the scapegoat's authentic voice and the autonomy so necessary for an engagement in a creative life. This story is psychologically relevant for families, religions, and institutions, nations and their governments, especially those ruled by a strict sense of virtuosity and moralism, perfectionism and dogmatic justice. In these often deadening environments spontaneity, creativity, curiosity, experimentation, sensuality, expression and instinctual knowledge are banished to the wilderness. Compassion is often forgone. Under these conditions human instincts either go underground into repression or explode into aggression. The desacralization of ancient rites and the manipulation of the mythology behind them lead to distortion and pathology. So now we are left to excavate the pathologies in search of the original god or archetype. Jung said, "The gods have become our diseases."

The human being performs ritual by nature. He will always do this. If we remove the transpersonal element from our rites we will still perform them ritually through our complexes and our symptoms.

I suggest that the story of Azazel is a primary mythos of the global culture, and very particularly, the current American culture, so dominated by attitudes of righteousness, so ready to attribute blame—so unconscious of the need for atonement for its long empirical history. It is a complex gone wild in the European, American and Global psyche. It makes its way into every aspect of government, politics, and religion. It seeps into our educational systems, our day care facilities, our mental health agencies, and even into practices of birthing, parenting, and dying, once thought to be instinctual. Consider the

enormous range of current literature promising to teach us how to do these things right – and thus creating entirely new categories of guilt.

To cast or project blame is to protect ourselves from our own shadow. We stand in the place of righteousness, and fail to acknowledge those aspects of ourselves hidden in our own shadow.

The scapegoating of another person or nation allows us to feel guiltless, atoned. It inoculates us against blame. Now unburdened, we can turn to our ego ideal and reestablish our place among the chosen. We are then free to place goodness in one corner (ours) and malevolence in another. Only when we catch ourselves stepping into a righteous, one-sided stance are we in a position to begin to observe our own shadow. This is a very painful thing to do. Why would we do this? Because what we keep in the shadows, in a place of forgetfulness, turns to symptom. A symptom is an untended memory. It is the voice of a forgotten or banished part of ourselves. Much of the hype of this culture is intended to steal our memories. We are drugged by distortions in media, advertising, technology, science, politics, and religion. When the conglomerate corporate media speaks for us, who will speak in our authentic voice? Each time we are seduced into the consensus reality of forgetfulness, we are further removed from our own vital story—our own memory of something embodied—something primal. Memory is the medicine of the psyche- even, and especially when the memories are dark.

This symptomatic one-sidedness lives in America in the same way it lives in the individual. From an archetypal perspective it is greatly responsible for the dis-ease that is ravaging the body and soul of America. The current structure, put solidly in place at the very founding of our country looks like: right/left, liberal/conservative, rich/poor, war/peace, liberty/oppression, freedom/terrorism, democracy/ imperialism, spirit/matter, good/evil. Whatever side we are on, we know we are on the side of right and we deny its opposite. But if we look deeply into the soul of American Democracy and into our own souls we will have to see the imperialism that has always lived side by side with our generosity of spirit and our moral strength. Oppression and terrorism over others has always been at the heart of American liberty and freedom.

Just like the patient in analysis, a nation has no hope of healing its complex unless it turns its glance to its own symptoms and pathologies. We might then notice how quick we are to project our own individual and collective darkness onto other people and nations. Not until that awareness kicks in will we begin to do the difficult work of containing the tension of opposites.

The radical fundamentalists who attacked this country on September 11th came from a one-sided position of righteousness, projecting the face of the demon onto America. The tenor of our reaction has been radical, fundamentalist, one-sided and righteous—perhaps not as much because of the content of our decisions— but because we have not stopped to look at our own demons before projecting them back. In the post 9/11 heat of a jingoistic fervor over the goodness of America, we failed to hold in equal proportion the images of our own darkness.

A psychology of the soul is highly suspicious of the one-sided view and finds meaning in the multiplicity of experience and the intimate relationship of opposites. Our American political drama values the one sided approach. It requires certainty, taking a firm, unbending position - even a dogmatic or rigid one, disseminating the factual even if the facts are incomplete, incorrect, or untrue. The notion that one might stay in the question in a state of not knowing long enough to allow multiple possibilities to unfold is becoming more and more rare on the national and world stage. If you are a public figure and you don't have an immediate answer, you had better find one or make one up fast because we are rapidly losing our tolerance for ambiguity and not-knowing. The word ambiguity comes from the Latin *ambigere*, meaning "to wander about, to lead." Some of our great leaders in the past have understood this profound connection. Buddha and Christ, Mother Jones, Martin Luther King, Gandhi and Vandanna Shiva come to mind.

On the political stage, it seems that judgments must be made quickly and acted upon quickly. Any inclination to the contrary is seen as weakness. Hence we find ourselves making irreversible choices for the world without having used the traditional avenues of careful deliberation and consultation, collaboration, contemplation, self-reflection, and sustained consideration. As a nation, we seem to have lost our capacity to tend the question. We seem to be unwilling to explore the interior regions of our own collective psyche where we would surely find the putrid fragments of a dark history unattended.

In an era as deeply unbalanced as ours, we might turn to the wisdom of the poets. John Keats promoted an attitude of "negative capability" which he understood to be our capacity as humans to reside inside uncertainty, doubt, ambiguity, and mystery without reaching for the literal, the reasonable, the factual. If we hold opposing images and ideas long enough they will surely begin to speak to us. We know this from our own deep inner-personal work. Robin Morgan speaks of this in her truly groundbreaking work entitled The Demon Lover: the Roots of Terrorism where she exposes the link between militarism and the subjugation of women. As she approaches the end of the book, her writing becomes an induction—a calling forth of the banished parts of the individual, communal and world soul. She speaks from inside the mind of the collective archetypal feminine:

Oppression, she suddenly recognizes, always structures itself along the same monotonous pattern. Oppression is predictable.

What we are, she flashes, is unpredictable. Like freedom. And what we must dare become is *more* unpredictable

...So it is not merely the absence of war but the presence of peace, not merely the absence of tragedy but the presence of comedy, not merely the absence of hate but the presence of love, not merely the absence of ignorance but the presence of intelligence, not merely the absence of death but the presence of life. And it is not merely the absence of fear but the presence of trust. (p.341)

It appears as though the spirit of our times is inviting us into a renewed relationship to the opposites and a radical change of consciousness, the likes of which Christopher Fry describes in his 1951 war drama, *A Sleep of Prisoners*:

The human heart can go to the lengths of God.
Dark and cold we may be, but this
Is no winter now. The frozen misery
Of centuries breaks, cracks, begins to move;
The thunder is the thunder of the floes,
The thaw, the flood, the upstart Spring.
Thank God our time is now when wrong
Comes up to face us everywhere,
Never to leave us till we take
The longest stride of soul man ever took.
Affairs are now soul size.
The enterprise
Is exploration into God.
Where are you making for? It takes
So many thousand years to wake,
But will you wake for pity's sake!

Those of us who have been called to a vocation in psychology know how to sit reverently and tenderly with a patient. We know how to hold the shadow—to witness the confessional material, the ravages and ruptures inherent in a particular human story. Might we, then, find it in our hearts to sit in stillness with the soul of our shattered and beloved nations? Might we witness their brutality and kindness, their grief and their joy, their greed and their generosity, their neglect and their care, their inertia and their ingenuity, their sheer stupidity and their utter brilliance, their corruption and their integrity? Might we, by way of our collective memory help them embody their original dreams to accomplish something great on this planet?

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