

## Finding Our Core Self

*"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes."*

Marcel Proust



All spiritual traditions use awareness as a healing power. As told below, this awareness may come in the form of a disturbing dream, and at other times as a crisis.

*"I suddenly stand up screaming, 'Take me back; I lost my ring!' I am anxious, driven, determined to return and retrieve what I know I lost: my precious ruby red ring. But I am trapped, lodged in my seat on a big yellow bus going I know not where. The driver hears my ear-piercing screams, hears my urgent demands, my unease, but ignores me. He refuses to turn the bus around, he refuses*

*my demand to turn back to get my ring. Firmly, his hands hold the wheel on the road. He is steadfast! My ring is lost; I am lost! I am helpless."* Carla's words refer to a dream that greatly disturbed her. It turned out to be her powerful wake-up call, telling her that she must sit with her anxiety and continue her journey into the unknown: an inner search for Self – her core.

In our culture we are taught to view life and death as opposites. We strive for life, and fear death that is final, the end. So, endings can be terrifying. In fairytales, a *ring* may symbolize wholeness, or centeredness. Carla's dream shouts out her ambivalence, her fear change, of being pulled off center, and losing a valuable part of herself. She is conflicted: torn by a need to move deeply into her *knowing* self and duty-bound to return to a time of innocence when her *ring symbolized her identity*. The bus, a powerful container, "holds her." The wheel, circular like her ruby ring, indicates another centered, competent aspect of herself driven by a firm, steady hand. Carla need no longer bounce about in a sea of uncertainty and pain. Driven by an *inner authority*, she knows that something must be left behind; something must die. Carrying her *identity* within, she continues her internal journey in search of wholeness, Self.

Not everyone travels **Carla's road toward self-discovery**. For Ken, 46, married with children, it was a different path. His life was instilled with a sense of adventure, a can-do spirit, and a strong belief in pursuing his passions. A charismatic and direct guy, he appeared to have everything – his job offered the nurturing he missed in his childhood – status, validation, and a healthy income – so the idea of searching for his core was not a high priority. However, the stark reality of his inner life was that the challenges of marriage, children, and responsibility were overwhelming him. Unlike the roles he portrayed on TV, for his real life, he had no script.

Ken's work and success began to lose their fairy tale patina, leaving him feeling trapped beneath the heavy weight of responsibility. He was caught unawares in a destructive

spiral of anxiety and depression. Inside, he was dying though he didn't see that darkness coming. Nobody warned him. Like Carla, he was lost, off-balance. Unlike Carla, he was terrified to go back in time but knew he would never move forward without first looking back. Fortunately, hidden just below the surface, dwelled a wealth of insight and inner strength which enabled him to learn to deal effectively with the parts of himself that had been rejected or neglected.

Looking more closely, there is *life/ death /and life again*. The cycles of the seasons teach about the wheel of life *and* death: spring follows winter. What's important is that we face our fears and learn to move in concert with the cycles of life/death/life within the psyche. **A transition** from emotional death to life takes you to a deeper understanding and maturity. Psychotherapy offers the container for this wheel of life/death/life: the end of life as we know it, birth of what is hidden, and a new stage of psychological maturity and development.

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