Transformation
Emergence of the Self

Murray Stein

Foreword by David H. Rosen

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY PRESS
COLLEGE STATION
FOREWORD

Transformation: Hymns in innerness, dance before
the ark, uproar and parade in the ripening vine.
—Rainer Maria Rilke

Murray Stein has written a book that, like Jung’s work, can help us
to transfigure ourselves, our society, and our global village. Transfor-
mation—a subject near and dear to my heart and soul—is the way
to individuation and self-actualization.1 Rilke put it quite simply:
“You must change your life.” Jung emphasized its divine nature:
“There are spiritual processes of transformation in the psyche.”2

As Jung did, Stein utilizes the butterfly (provided him by a woman
in a “big” dream) to symbolize transformation. In this woman’s
dream, which opens chapter 1, the metamorphosis of the caterpillar
is aided by two snakes which are placed into a dark cocoon by a wise
old man. The dreamer knows that she is the caterpillar, and after she
emerges as a butterfly, she miraculously becomes a woman, reborn
as her “true self.”

William James stresses that a sudden transformation, so accu-
rately portrayed by the conversion of caterpillar to butterfly, is not
the “miracle” it seems to be, but rather “a natural process.”3 James
also writes about “sick souls” who must be “twice-born” in order
to be happy.4 The “false self” must die and be shed or molted so
the spiritual change to one’s “true self” secondary to the Self (or Su-
preme Being) can be actualized. Stein describes a person’s authentic
self-image, or “imago,” as the individual’s unique mythic form that
must be fulfilled and realized. His credible contention is that this
most meaningful transformation is the task of the second half of life. Stein’s book is all about this natural transformation process. The woman’s butterfly dream embodies alchemy, which represents the art of transformation. Symbolically, transmuting lead into gold represents the death-rebirth process leading to one’s philosopher’s stone and authentic living, as Jung experienced at Bollingen where he was “reborn in stone.”

In chapter 1, Stein outlines how transformation develops and proceeds. He uses Rainer Maria Rilke as an example of transformation and healing the soul through creativity. It is the true story of the evolution of Rilke’s greatest work, the Duino Elegies. Stein also writes eloquently about Jung’s transfiguration after his break from Freud.

In chapter 2, he presents an example of transformation, focusing on the metamorphosis of William Mellon, Jr. In mid-life, Mellon went through a transformative experience of giving up his negative dominant ego-image and identity, “false self,” and “sick soul” to become a physician and healer of the poverty-stricken sick in Haiti. He named his clinic after Albert Schweitzer, the transformative figure who catalyzed Mellon’s transmutation and realization of his philosopher’s stone.

In chapter 3, Stein concerns himself with the role of relationships in healing and transformation. He stresses the power of the healing doctor-patient relationship. Stein meaningfully reviews the psychology of the transference à la Jung, which is well illustrated with alchemical pictures from the Rosarium Philosophorum. Throughout the chapter Stein comments significantly on marriage and its inner and outer manifestations.

Chapter 4 offers three portraits of transformation: Rembrandt, Picasso, and Jung. This chapter has telling images to accompany the text. Stein makes it very clear that these extremely creative individuals were involved in healing their souls and reflecting back to us needed visions of the essential nature of transformation. Rembrandt’s odyssey is a touching view of an evolving divine-self. Stein’s treatment of Picasso seems more accurate than Jung’s rather negative essay on Picasso. In fact, Stein presents Picasso as an icon of our century, who mirrors back to us a hundred years of world wars and
reflects our angst and quest for meaning as this millennium closes. Stein ends chapter 4 of this important book with Bollingen: Jung’s awesome self-portrait in stone.

Can we individually and collectively transform so the next millennium will be peaceful, allowing each of us to actualize our potentials as part of one human family in a stable and interdependent global village? In his epilogue, Stein stresses that “it takes a whole village to raise a child.” He cites Hillary Rodham Clinton’s book on this subject and says hers “is a voice crying in the wilderness.” Then he challenges us to get involved in our own transformative experiences. It is true that all transformation begins with each and every one of us. Recall the old adage: Charity begins at home. As Martin Buber stated: “There is meaning in what for long was meaningless. Everything depends on the inner change; when this has taken place, then and only then, does the world change.”

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Foreword (xv)