

THE TURNING TOWARD SERIES

Turning Toward the Subconscious

*Shining a light into the dark, asking why, and learning
to read the answer*

EXPERIENCED · OBSERVED · RESEARCHED



Jamison Todd Johnson

JULY 2026 · LEGIBLE TRACES

BEFORE YOU READ

If you are struggling right now

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline — call or text 988 (United States), any hour, any day.

Crisis Text Line — text HOME to 741741.

SAMHSA National Helpline — 1-800-662-4357, free, confidential, for mental health and substance use.

This series is philosophy and testimony. It is not treatment, and it is not a substitute for a professional who can sit across from you. Please let it be a companion to help, never a replacement for it.

This piece speaks from lived experience, from years of close observation carried anonymously and with care, and from study.

. . .

For the reader — the observer these words need in order to exist. You are the eyes that lift them off the page. Whoever you are, however near or far, thank you for standing at the door with me.

The Turning Toward Series

Turning Toward Mental Health

Turning Toward the Subconscious — YOU ARE HERE

Turning Toward Depression

Turning Toward Addiction

Turning Toward Suicidal Thoughts

Turning Toward Anxiety

Turning Toward ADHD

& further studies to come

ITALIC ENTRIES ARE FORTHCOMING · READ IN ANY ORDER, ONCE THEY
ARRIVE

Turning Toward the Subconscious

Shining a light into the dark, asking why, and learning to read the answer

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"One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious."

C. G. JUNG

As we turn the light into the shadows over these next several works, we're going to start unwinding the very fabric of the things that make us hurt in ways we can't explain. So I need to remind you again: my "theories" are not, in any way, a replacement for a clinical treatment plan from an actual doctor. I intend to earn my degree and begin practicing psychology, but that hasn't happened yet — so this entire series stays filed under *Philosophy of Psychology*.

I plan to spend the rest of my life offering deep analysis of Carl Jung's work as my primary focus. So as I write these pieces, I'll parallel his work directly in a lot of places, and I'll cite those sources so you can see for yourself that I'm not the only person who has thought this way.

These pieces are a deep dive into the symbology of the subconscious, the effect it has on the individual, and the work of self-managing the barrier between the "I" and the "Self." That's something better explained slowly, so we're going to *turn toward* one idea at a time, shine a light into the shadows, and see what wrinkles we can flatten.

That said, I'll open — as I always do — with the admission that some of my "theories" rest on the idea of an actual Designer. The "Simulation Theory," if you like: that we were made by some...

thing. And more than that, I hold a firm belief that this Designer is just, and good, and loving. *Light*, for lack of a better word — if for no other reason than the provisioning of these symbols that steer the conscious from the subconscious. These symbols are real in their *effects*. They surface again and again, across individuals and across cultures — even if "proof," in the laboratory sense, is the wrong instrument to bring to them.² How you apply them will always depend on the individual.

Here I should probably explain the difference between the "I" and the "Self," for those of you not yet well versed in Jung. In Jung's own terms, the **ego** — the "I" — is the center of the *conscious* mind. The **Self** is something much larger: the center *and* the whole circumference of the psyche, the totality that holds the conscious and the unconscious together.³ I want to turn this light on you, the reader, for a moment, in the hope you'll feel what I mean.

The "I" is the individual. That's you — the physical vessel wrapped around your thoughts. The "Self," in the way I use it, is the thoughts themselves — and not only yours, but a combination of every thought that was ever had. The *field*. The subconscious Self.

A note of honesty, since I'd always rather show you the seam than hide it: this isn't *quite* Jung's own division. For Jung, the ego is the seat of *consciousness*, not the body, and the Self is the totality that holds consciousness and the unconscious together.³ I'm bending his terms on purpose here — pinning the "I" to the felt, physical individual and the "Self" to the wider field — because that bend is exactly where his work and my framework meet. Watch for it. The place two systems don't line up cleanly is usually where the interesting work is.

Jung described carrying two personalities from childhood: one an ordinary man of his own time, the other, in his words, "more at home in the eighteenth century."⁴ He came to see this not as

illness but as something that plays out, quietly, in everyone — the everyday self shadowed by an older, deeper one that seems to reach back through generations. *I feel like myself, and a much older version of myself.* I believe that completely. "We are all one" carries a weight here that has echoed across the whole of recorded history.⁵

For me, this one realization snapping into place — while I was reading about the existence of the "field," the "Design" — is what made me see how much an individual can matter if they learn to manage the wall between the two: the I and the Self. Jung knew this too. He located the real work of healing in the individual's own psyche — the patient heals himself; the analyst only helps him learn how — and in his model that healing is a collaboration, the conscious "I" coming into right relationship with the deeper Self.⁶

Finding our way to the "peak" of our own existence is a terrifying climb, and more often than not we come crashing down a different side of the mountain than the one we started on. That's why the works ahead are arranged in a *personal* order — I experienced them all across different seasons of my life, for vastly different reasons.

I think about a time when I overcame depression and suicidal thoughts, only to wake up anxious about the future. I got that expansion back under control — only to be depressed and swamped by existential dread all over again.

I believe that particular terror is tied directly to the loss of the "I" during the realization of the vastly larger, more powerful "Self."

Is the Self the Designer? I can't say for certain. But I can tell you that being made in the image of the Designer is a *feeling* I can't fully put into words as I stand at the explanatory gap⁷ of my own life. And that feeling, too, is echoed across many of our oldest texts.⁸ It's almost as if the Self was separated from the Designer at

some point, and then spiraled outward, fractalizing into the reality we see today.

One thing I can say for certain: after reading about various people who have stood at their own explanatory gap the way I describe — Einstein, Sagan, Jung, Feynman, Tesla, Schrödinger — and then looking backward through time at the "prophets" of recorded history, I found they were very much the same. They all said the same things, too, just in wildly different ways. Rarely denying a creator outright. Testifying that the language of the Design is *loving one another* — that we are, somehow, all connected.

Therein lies the key. Once a person steps free of their own ego, they stand at the gate of collective human knowledge.

The feeling there is astonishing and terrifying at once — this part I can attest to through meditation. Often this "wealth of knowledge" arrives as something that feels divine, a sense of being *chosen* for the chance to stand at the gate and *see*.

Luckily for me, by the time I reached the gate I didn't have much ego left to shed. Life had stripped me of most joys except my family. But I wasn't depressed anymore. At the start of my own "awakening," the biggest hurdle I faced was ADHD — and looking back, I see it now less as a defect than as a kind of drain-stopper, holding back all my creativity. I spent so much time reading and not writing, learning and not teaching. (And that's the shadow's other face: Jung noted that what the ego disowns isn't only darkness — it can be creativity and vitality, too, waiting to be reclaimed.⁹)

But that's neither here nor there. The reality is that plenty of people live with far more severe forms of ADHD, and treatment is always an option when it's managed well.

So what of being suicidal? When the grip of the ego loosens — when the physical "I" stops feeling like the whole of you — the

thought of "leaving" can arrive in a fleeting moment and, just as quickly, be set back down. It is a thought, not an instruction. Naming it plainly — *that's not me* — is often enough to let it move on.

Sometimes you just have to *give yourself over* to the Design to really watch it work. If we *are* created, then we aren't perfect; we're always reaching toward it, always struggling. And "leaving the game early," so to speak, is certainly not the way to win — if winning is even a thing we can do.

I think we can win. Plenty of people I say that to tell me I'm a bit of a fanatic. I never said it would be easy, and I never said it would happen in our lifetime. It's going to take every individual within the Design turning to face our fellow humans and teaching them how to be happy, how to be kind, how to function in a society that has torn them up at every turn.

So where does individual mental health fit into all this? I have a very neurodivergent way of thinking here, but there's a real resemblance between the "triad" in my framework and the way the brain has often been modeled in threes.¹⁰ If that resemblance is even leaning toward something true, then we have to consider that there may be an actual "peak" of an individual's existence.

The illusion that this peak is a mere midlife crisis — a thing that can't be sustained — is, I believe, a myth. I think most people are capable of getting over their hurdles with the right medication programs, treatment, and a splash of care and hope. Those last two are the hardest ingredients to find in 2026. The list to see a therapist is longer than the list of things people are suffering from.

I know it isn't kind to joke about any of this. But when someone asks me how I made the thoughts stop, sometimes I tell them the truth sideways: *"Oh, I didn't stop them — I'm still 43,748,648th on the waitlist to see somebody. Twenty years in. I'm starting to think the*

waiting is the treatment." It's a joke about the system, never about the person. And for a second I watch them smile. I watch them push the dark to the back of the mind, just long enough to see that the Self lives inside all of us — that nobody is alone in these thoughts, no matter how many times they insist they're "okay."

Because even the kindest person can carry the darkest thoughts behind an "I'm okay." Jung had a name for that outward face: the **persona** — the mask we hold up to the world, which can hide as much as it shows.¹¹ (The crisis line, for what it's worth, actually *does* pick up — I put the number at the top of this page for a reason.)

Here is where the true power of the "I" lives. The *facing of Intent*.

Let me set the technical language aside for the non-science readers: the **intent of your existence**. I believe that if, in the very moment a dark thought arises, you can decide "*that's not me*," it will leave the conscious mind and return to the subconscious without a fight.

Sometimes it's as simple as finding patience. I've written about the "triad" before, and in my framework there would be an endless number of faces to that pyramid — endless edges to fall off once you become unbalanced. Depression and anxiety are the easiest to reach on the way down; deeper falls can end in real instability and perceived insanity.

Slide the center of subjective experience a little too far *outside* the brain, and meaning can seem to thin out. Slide it too far *inward*, and you meet the other failure mode — the "messiah complex," or the objectification of other people. "*You're all imposters.*" Or what psychiatrists call the **Truman Show delusion**¹² — a documented variant of persecutory and grandiose delusion in which a person becomes convinced their whole life is a staged production. In my terms, it's an "I" that has mistaken itself for the Self. That's a misconception I'll theorize about in later work.

Some of this is genuinely complicated, so let me close with something softer and easier to hold.

All of these things that stand between you and your happiness — you can think of them a little like computer viruses. Some need long-standing programs and professional care to clear out. Others need only the simple recognition that *you* are the one in control of the manifold.

That pressure you're feeling? It may not be the pressure of your own existence at all.

Consider, with me, that you don't quite exist the way you fear you do.

Maybe the pressure is trying to tell you something else entirely.

When I can't hear someone speaking, I move closer. Change the way you listen to your own thoughts, and maybe you'll finally catch your own quiet instructions for feeling better.

Maybe not.

But that's why I'm here — so I can show you mine, and add to it all the many other ways internal peace can be reached. Jung had a name for this posture, too: the *wounded healer*, the physician who works from inside his own wound rather than from above it — "only the wounded physician heals."¹³ I don't stand over you. I stand next to you, in the same dark, holding a map that's only a little older than yours.

The only thing I need you to leave at the door is doubt.

I'm not a PhD-holding physician. I can't diagnose you and I can't prescribe anything. What I *can* do is give you as many real-world examples of what I'm talking about as I possibly can — so the doubt of "*he doesn't know*" washes away in the understanding that "I" vs. "I" interactions will always end that way.

But if you know — if you *truly* know — the Self, then you already know the degree doesn't matter. Because knowing is inherent. And every single person within the framework of existence carries their own unique keys for feeling better, whatever those keys turn out to be.

You're just going to have to keep reading to learn about mine.

So — onward, into the dark, my friends.

These next several pieces may be some of the hardest things I've ever written. They may not be very easy to read, either.

Stop, if the darkness in my words starts to cloud your vision.

Keep going, if you can — whatever that means to you in this moment.

Notes & References

1. C. G. Jung, *Alchemical Studies* ("The Philosophical Tree," 1945), Collected Works, Vol. 13, ¶335.
2. On archetypes as recurring, cross-cultural patterns rather than empirically "proven" objects: C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, CW 9i.
3. C. G. Jung, *Aion*, CW 9ii (1951): the Self as "the centre... but also the whole circumference which embraces both conscious and unconscious"; the ego as "the centre of the conscious mind." See also *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, CW 7.
4. C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1963), on the two personalities (No. 1 and No. 2). The remark on "a collective spirit whose years are counted in centuries" is from the same volume.
5. On the shared psychic substrate: C. G. Jung, *On the Nature of the Psyche*, CW 8 — the Self "is as much one's self, and all other selves, as the ego"; and the *unus mundus* ("one world") developed in *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, CW 14, and in the Jung–Pauli correspondence, *Atom and Archetype* (1996).
6. C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1963): a physician can only teach a patient to heal himself once he can cope with himself. On the ego entering into the service of the Self: *Two Essays*, CW 7; *Aion*, CW 9ii.

7. Joseph Levine, "Materialism and Qualia: The Explanatory Gap," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 64 (1983).
8. On being made in the image of the Designer: Genesis 1:26–27 (*imago Dei*); with cross-tradition parallels in Advaita Vedānta ("Tat Tvam Asi" — "That Thou Art," *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7) and Meister Eckhart's *Fünklein*, the "spark" of the soul.
9. On the creative and vital contents of the shadow: C. G. Jung, *Aion*, CW 9ii, and *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, CW 9i.
10. The best-known "brain in threes" is Paul D. MacLean's *triune brain* (*The Triune Brain in Evolution*, 1990). **Note:** comparative neuroscience now regards the triune model as an oversimplification of brain evolution; I invoke it here as an organizing analogy within my framework, not as settled fact.
11. C. G. Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, CW 7, on the persona as the social mask.
12. Joel Gold & Ian Gold, "The 'Truman Show' delusion: Psychosis in the global village," *Cognitive Neuropsychiatry* 17.6 (2012). The Truman Show delusion is a culturally shaped variant of persecutory/grandiose delusion and a symptom of psychosis — not a standalone diagnosis. My use of it here is metaphorical.
13. C. G. Jung, "Fundamental Questions of Psychotherapy," *The Practice of Psychotherapy*, CW 16, ¶239: the analyst is effective only insofar as he himself is affected — "only the wounded physician heals." The motif draws on the myth of Chiron, the wounded centaur-healer, and Asklepios.

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