

# Chapter 1

## What is the Great Work?

### 1.1 The Great Work

The Great Work was and still is a term used by alchemists to describe the manufacture by the alchemical arts of the philosopher's stone. The philosopher's stone is said to be able to turn base metals into gold, and so is a source of almost limitless wealth, and everything this entails. The philosopher's stone is also said to be able to cure every ailment that besets the human condition, and to prolong life to the limit of what is naturally possible. Yet the manufacture of this wondrous substance cannot be accomplished, it is said, without the aid and assistance of the Supreme Being, and to be successful in its manufacture, requires the alchemist to purify his own consciousness. In so doing, one makes him or herself attractive to the Supreme Being, so that by Its inspiration and grace, the proper alchemical operations can be completed. In traditional alchemy, the Great Work, is not simply a matter of physical chemical reactions, but of harnessing and capturing the vital essence, the spirit that inheres in all matter, and creating the conditions required for it to manifest its perfection within the physical world of matter.

As you read through this book, it will become clear why I have entitled it the Great Work. It is the task of each of us to capture the vital essence that underpins our very existence, and create for it the conditions in our life in which it can manifest its perfection. In keeping with the alchemical parallel, I believe that such an approach to life ensures fulfilment and happiness, to a degree that no other approach to

life can match. To allow our vital essence, or our Soul self, to manifest its dreams and aspirations is, like the philosopher's stone, the cure for all ills. For to thwart the Soul self, which so much of life and education seems designed to do, leads to the pining of the vital essence, which manifests as depression, lethargy, hopelessness, and all manner of subsequent physical ailments. On the other hand, to encourage the Soul self, and allow it to manifest its perfection, leads to boundless joy, health and happiness. That is not to see that all disease can be cured, or all illness overcome. But it is to say that much disease and ill health can be cut off at its very root. Also, like the manufacture of the philosopher's stone, to manifest our vital essence to its perfection requires the active Grace and inspiration of the Supreme Being. In fact, it involves a subtle but powerful change in the way we see ourselves - from an individual, with an individual's dreams and fears, to an organ of the Greater Being, open and responsive to Its communications, and prepared to undertake the work required to marry together the individual self concept, and the reality of participating in the collective intelligence and consciousness of life. In the language of the alchemists, this is the Grace and Inspiration of the Supreme Being.

While the alchemical tradition I refer to above is the Western Alchemical tradition, alchemy is also part of the cultural background of Arabic, Indian and Chinese cultures. Many of the ideas presented here have their parallels in Indian, Chinese and Middle Eastern philosophy and spirituality, and no doubt in spiritual traditions throughout the world. However I will present this material from my own perspective, as my inspiration guides me, and, I pray, as the grace of the Supreme Being permits. That perspective is from a western esoteric tradition, which it has been my duty and pleasure to explore, and to re-create within the crucible of my own life and experience.

## 1.2 A collective undertaking

From my own perspective, the Great Work is a collective undertaking by the greater consciousness of which each of us forms a part, to perfect Itself, and to experience health within and throughout each aspect of Itself, and in Its wholeness. I shall refer to that aspect of the Great Work entrusted to each individual as the True Work. The True Work, in other words, is the expression of the individual Soul in creation of those

arrangements and conditions which are fulfilling, pleasing and in alignment with the Great Work. An analogy which is by no means original, is that each of us is like one of the cells in the body. There are liver cells, skin cells, blood cells, bone cells, and so on. From the cellular point of view, each individual cell experiences life within its environment, and conducts its individual life, with little or no reference to, or knowledge of, what other cells in distant parts of the body are doing. Yet somehow, the orchestrated whole makes up a thinking feeling human being. However the thoughts and the feelings of that human being are unknown to any particular cell. In order for that human being to be healthy, liver cells must do what liver cells are meant to do, brain cells what brain cells are meant to do, and so on. When cells in some region of the body forget their True Work, so to speak, and begin reproducing without regard to their appropriate function, a cancer results, that eventually threatens the health of the entire organism. In the same way, I believe, each of us is a cell in the greater organism that makes up the biosphere of this planet, which in its turn is a cell of the totality. When each of us, including the animals and plants, remember our True Work, the greater organism is in a state of health and inner balance. When we forget our True Work, then the health of the greater organism suffers, and like a cancer, particular cells multiply out of all proportion. If we look at the world today, we see that human beings have indeed multiplied out of all proportion, and are creating a toxic overload through their waste products and over utilisation of the resources of nature.

### **1.3 A work of healing**

The Great Work, during this period of history, is a work of profound healing. The healing is both for the greater organism, and for each of the cells within it. To begin on the True Work is profoundly healing for any individual. Yet we cannot be seduced by the illusion of individuality. Healing for any individual cannot be complete without also a profound healing for the greater organism. This provides hope, direction, and caution to the practitioner. The healing for the greater organism involves ensuring that the vast bulk of its constituent organisms are themselves involved in their own True Work. This cannot be a matter of converting people, or forcing them to take up the Great Work, or even trying to convince them of its necessity. No such measure can be effective, for

these measures involve an imposition upon a person. Such an imposition is an attempt to use power over others. The True Work can only be undertaken by individuals who are themselves empowered, whose locus of control is internal. It is something each person must choose to do in their own hearts and minds, and entails a very personal understanding and a personal way of aligning with the consciousness of the greater organism. No one way is right for all. Yet certain methods and approaches can be suggested, and if these find resonance with others, then they themselves may take them up.

## 1.4 Unselfish and powerful

The Great Work is an undertaking that is not pursued for any personal gain, but is an expression of the desire to serve something beyond the little self. It may be thought of as service to humanity, service to the Gods, or service to the Holy Spirit. The important thing is that it is not primarily a self serving undertaking. Yet there are unquestionably personal rewards that accrue to those who undertake the Great Work, rewards along the lines of satisfaction and fulfilment, personal growth, and the rewards that come from helping others. A less tangible reward arises from the fact of becoming powerful in the sense of knowing one's self, and being able to focus one's energies on that which is important. Not, I hasten to add, powerful in the sense of being able to control the behaviours of others, or to manipulate events and people to one's will. But rather, powerful in the sense of knowing one's meaning and purpose, of being content and happy with it, and taking appropriate actions to fulfil associated aspirations. When I say powerful, I am talking about the power to draw together the disparate parts of one's life and personality, to overcome the pain, suffering, guilt, shame and fear that prevents us from acting in accord with our True Natures, and the power to align oneself with the higher consciousness, and by so doing engage its assistance in one's activities. I mean also the power to see the truth about one's self, and the people around one, and to act in accordance with it; the power to be free of the expectations and limitations imposed by family, friends, and work associates; and the power to live life according to one's own purposes, rather than the purposes of others. This power may be described as moving one's locus of control from an external focus to an internal focus. This is the first great act of power of those that

aspire to the Great Work, and the precondition for all else. It is both very simple, and very difficult. It can be effected by a resolutely made decision. Yet so much of our modern life, including work and family relationships, is based on pulling the locus of control to an external position, where we must devote our time and attention to tasks and pass-times according to the will of others.

We shall come back to this idea in a different guise, when we consider the Wound. Part of our woundedness, is that our locus of control is externally placed, and the first step in overcoming our woundedness, is to return the locus to its proper place, that is within our own heart and mind. To put it another way, we must begin to take responsibility for creating our own life and circumstances, based upon our own perceptions, and in accordance with our deepest nature. This begins as an inner resolution, which places us in opposition to the usual run of life and society in these times. Through this opposition, character and inner strength have the opportunity to develop, and this inner resolution gradually transforms our life. Through the course of this transformation, one may know no rest or happiness. The satisfactions of the ordinary life become hollow and provide little joy. However one must persevere in the sure knowledge that this dissatisfying condition, which may be accompanied by indescribable anguish, will pass if one stays true to one's inner resolution, returning to it after each setback. This process profoundly challenges one to rise to one's power, and I know of no other road that may be travelled to fulfilment and awakening. As I hope we shall see, to follow this road provides the opportunity to profoundly fulfil ourselves, and in so doing, bring healing not only to ourselves, but to the collective of all life.

## 1.5 To know thyself

The Great Work begins for each person with this first great act of power, that is to say, in internalising one's locus of control. This does not mean that one should refuse to follow the instructions of employers, or ignore requests or suggestions from family members. It means instead that we may choose to act on such instructions or requests when they accord with our own choices, purposes and goals. When they do not, we have the power to decline, and to accept the consequences. We have the choice to place ourselves in situations where instructions or requests are in

alignment with our own values and choices. This kind of personal power relates to how we respond to the outside world, and the relationships we have established with it. It might be described as integrity in our relations with others. However, it is only one aspect of the first great act of power. Just as important are the choices one makes concerning the work of one's true nature. For this speaks of integrity in relation to our self. To be able to choose to instigate and pursue this True Work, one must know what it is. Thus integral to shifting the locus of control to an internal position is the old adage, "know thyself". This is more than developing a check-list of competencies, or likes and dislikes. This is coming to know oneself as a spiritual entity, with a soul task, which I have referred to as the True Work. Acceptance of this is not easy for many people, who don't like to put on airs and place themselves above others. Nor is it easy for others who feel themselves naturally superior, and who regard all their actions as divinely inspired. Both are living in an illusory world. Any such illusion is a barrier to the clarity required for the development of true spiritual power, which is always founded in truthful perception. So knowing one's true nature is an important aspect of this act of power, which places responsibility and control for one's life and circumstances within one's sphere of influence.

An important aspect of knowing one's true nature is the ability to experience and integrate the many different facets of being that make up the Greater Self. Normally, our sense of self is thoroughly bound up with our rational self identity, with our beliefs about the person we are, with our conclusions about ourselves based on our experience, with our sense of everyday individuality, and with the roles we are accustomed to playing. This sense of self identity is reinforced by our internal dialogue, and our interactions with others and with society at large. However there are many other important facets of being that this individualised rationalistic focus ignores – such as intuition, inspiration, instinct, the soul self, the animal self, and others that we will discuss in due course. These other facets are typically not encouraged by the education and socialisation we receive in western societies, and eventually, what I will refer to as the horizon of self identity shrinks to the point that these facets of being are interpreted as being outside of the self. When they become activated, as sometimes happens in spite of our training, it is as if an apparently external influence is at work, which can be conceptualised in any number of ways, from spirit possession, to the influx of the Holy Spirit, messages from the dead and so on. However in most cases, the

phenomena at work is a facet of our Greater Self, that through the shrinkage of our horizon of self identity, only appears to be external to our experience of self.

I will use the term “locus of self identity” to describe the way that we interpret our identity in relation to these many facets of being. By moving our locus of self identity away from the rational faculty, and situating it temporarily in the faculty of inspiration or intuition, for example, we make available to ourselves an additional mode of interacting with both our deeper natures and the greater life they are intimately connected with. More subtly, the experience of self changes when the locus of self identity is situated in one of those non-rational faculties. To know thyself, then, is much more than a rational appreciation of one’s skills and abilities, but the ability to allow one’s locus of self identity to temporarily occupy each of the many seats available to it, besides the usual one of the rational self identity. This ability necessarily entails the broadening of the horizon of self identity, to embrace these different seats, and the sense and experience of self that each entails. These different seats which we may come to embrace are less individualised than the rational self, and link us more intimately with the greater organism. From each of these different seats, we may gain an important perspective on our True Work. The locus of self identity, and the methods by which it may be placed in the seats of the non-rational faculties and the consequent broadening of the horizon of self is fundamental to the approach taken in this treatise. We shall return to this theme many times in subsequent chapters.

## 1.6 The secret of happiness

It is taken for granted these days that all have the power to control their responses to external acts and situations, and that this is the way to maintain happiness and equilibrium. But it remains a mystery to most how this may be achieved in any situation. The secret of those who undertake the Great Work is that happiness and equilibrium is a direct result of knowing one’s true nature, the work appointed to it, and acting to fulfil that True Work in some way each day. This is the inner well spring of happiness and contentment that eludes so many people who seek it through sex, drugs, money, fame, external power or possessions of one sort or another. Happiness can never be possessed, or brought

into oneself from outside. It is the result of inner alignment with the True Work. Simply knowing the True Work however, is not enough to bring happiness. Knowledge must be accompanied by aligned action in order for happiness to ensue. Otherwise the Soul pines, and feelings of hopelessness and despair inevitably result.

I don't expect that everyone will agree with this position. But those who find themselves reading these words can test it out for themselves. Let those who find themselves unhappy or despairing or depressed seek earnestly for their True Work, and then do something each day to further it. In so doing, they may judge for themselves whether this cures their depression or unhappiness. This seems incredibly simple, and it is. Nothing further is required for happiness and fulfilment, assuming that basic needs of food and shelter are being met.

## 1.7 The True Work nourishes

As simple as this recipe is, many people find it very difficult to get in touch with their true nature, and identify a way for their True Work to manifest within their current life circumstances. The following comments may provide some help in this undertaking. You probably already know what your True Work is. It is probably the thought that came to mind the first time you read the phrase "True Work". It may be related to the thing you have always dreamed of doing, or the occupation you always wish you had taken up. It may be related to dreams of youth or childhood. You will know it because it seems right to you, and it is an activity that you find energising and nurturing, rather than draining and tiring. These are all clues to the nature of the True Work. One can pray to one's Gods for inspiration or guidance in finding one's True Work. One can meditate on it, dream on it, or seek it in oracles of one sort or another. However, one will probably not find an advertisement for their True Work in the job section of the Saturday papers, though some may be so fortunate. One's True Work may be a vocation that involves earning a living, or it may require one to work in an ordinary job, while it is pursued after hours.

As a subtle point here, I would like to point out that the True Work for any individual has an infinite variety of manifestations. So it is not as if the True Work constrains or limits one in any way. The True Work is more like a template, a direction, or even a style. There are many

possible ways that their True Work can be manifested by any particular individual. Likewise, no matter what a person's situation or occupation, there is scope for the True Work to be manifested within it to some degree. This is where everyone must begin, to discover how the True Work may be accomplished within the framework and circumstances of one's life as it is at the current moment.

The single most important element of your search for your True Work is the intention to find it, and once found, to pursue it. If you clearly articulate this intention to yourself, and hold it firmly in mind, then you will be successful in your search. This search may take you many months, or even years, and lead you through many different experiences, but if you hold to your intention, the search will be fruitful. This search is an aspect of the Quest, the study of which will be taken up more fully in a later chapter.

## 1.8 The magic of momentum

Once one begins to devote regular time and energy to the True Work, one will surely find that its magic begins to come into play. Opportunities will arise that allow more and more of the True Work to manifest. However it takes time. The more of the True Work you do, the more it will allow you to do. And so a reflection of one's development and attainment of power is the percentage of one's time that is devoted to the True Work. When one's every waking moment is devoted to the manifestation of the True Work, then one is surely a rare individual who has attained a significant level of mastery. It is not easy to get to this point, in fact it is a lifetime's effort for most people who take up the challenge. However, with as little as half an hour a day, three or four times a week, one can make a beginning on the True Work. This beginning will establish its own momentum. When effort is aligned with the True Work, then the magic will begin. You will most likely feel happier, more content, less angry, less depressed, and less upset in general with life. If this is not the case, then you may well be working on something other than the True Work, and you would be well advised to contemplate more deeply on the nature of your True Work.

As the momentum of the True Work builds, you will find very naturally that you will want to devote more time and attention to it. It will be a delight and a recreation for you. And should you show yourself

capable of sustaining this level of commitment to the True Work, then invariably a way will be found for you to devote even more of your time and energies to it. When I say a way will be found, I don't mean to suggest that providence will act without any direction or planning from yourself. Rather, that the alignment of consciousness that this sustained effort produces will allow the magic of that alignment to manifest. It may well involve planning on your part, for example, with respect to maintaining adequate finances. But whatever plans one makes, they will be assisted by the unseen hand.

## 1.9 Surrender and communication

This brings us to an important consideration about the Great Work. It is essentially, a collective undertaking, rather than an individual undertaking. We may choose to fulfil our part of the Great Work, but it is only a part. For the parts to mesh and meld in the perfect harmony characteristic of the aligned consciousness that performs the Great Work, each participant must be open to the aligned consciousness, which introduces both an element of surrender, and a means of communication. These means of communication include intuition, inspiration, dreams, and communication with spiritual entities that themselves are more perfectly aligned than we ourselves. The successful prosecution of the True Work then involves the cultivation of one or more of these means of communication. There are many ways available for cultivating these non-rational aspects of self, and everyone will have their own proclivities and preferences in this direction. The important thing is to choose such a method, or several that appeal to you, and to pursue them, for example through meditation classes, working with one's intuition, or keeping a dream journal.

It is the nature of the lesser self to want to monopolise the locus of self identity, and to exclude all other aspects of the self. This nature is encouraged by the education and socialisation we provide each person in our society, to the point that the Greater Self appears as a dangerous stranger. Surrender to a dangerous stranger is unlikely to take place, so we must get to know this Greater Self. We must expand the horizons of our self identity to embrace this Greater Self. We must allow our locus of self identity to move easily from the rational self identity, and situate itself within each of the faculties of the Greater Self. When these skills

and habits are established, one finds that surrender is neither fearsome nor threatening, but the epitome of sweetness and nourishment. For one sees that it is not the self surrendering, but merely one aspect of the Self, the rational individualistic identity, through which surrender, the Greater Self is allowed to express and experience itself. We will take up this topic again in a later chapter.

## 1.10 A practical philosophy of hope

While it may take many thousands of years, the Great Work is essentially a doctrine of hope that a better world may be achieved, and that people may live in fulfilment and happiness. It is a practical philosophy, in that actions can be taken in light of it, which lead to a greater sense of happiness and fulfilment for both oneself, and in the long run, for all life. However this is combined with the challenge of living with integrity and pursuing one's True Work in a world where survival, selfishness and greed often predominate.

There is, of course, no guarantee that the Great Work will ever be achieved. However this is no reason to ignore it. The nobility of one's inner nature, regardless of religious or spiritual proclivities or lack thereof, demands the performance of the True Work. The coin of the material world is no substitute for the rewards of the True Work, both in each person's lifetime, and in that far off time when the greater organism is awakened, whole and healthy. The quality and nature of life experience will then be quite transformed in presently unimaginable ways. While it may be tempting to do so, the Great Work should not be seen in terms of some great, glorious and inevitable destiny for human kind, nor as the mechanism of an implacable progress towards the greater good which gives meaning and purpose to all human affairs. The achievement of the Great Work is but a possibility and potentiality inherent in creation, awaiting actualisation, which if it comes, must come through the aligned efforts of all.

## 1.11 Individualism and externalisation

The part that each of us plays within the Great Work is a perfectly natural undertaking for us, for it is part of the very fabric of who and what we are. Modern life, and the beliefs of the technological age, however,

conspire to keep us from knowledge of the Great Work, and the part we could play within it. The world today is dominated by rational individualism, and there is little room in the typical modern mind for notions of a greater organism whose consciousness conceives of and undertakes the Great Work, and whose very consciousness and existence is created by the collective existence of humanity in combination with the other life-forms inhabiting this planet. This greater organism is not to be confused with some supreme Deity – it is not God, or even a God. It is an organism, like us, which had a birth, is growing and developing, and in its turn will die, though one may argue that there is no death for the Spirit.

From a young age, children are taught the reality of separation and individualism, and the desirability of externalising their abilities. Consciousness is constructed after a very rational-centric, individualistic style, so much so that few people have any idea that there can be any other style of consciousness. Yet, try as it might, the modern world cannot completely wipe out such notions as artistic creativity, gut feelings, intuition, and non-ordinary states of reality that were, in a less technocratic age, much more accepted as states of being. Just as it is perfectly natural for bees to swarm together, and cooperate instinctively in the life of the hive, so it is natural for people to be involved in the Great Work. Just as it is perfectly natural for birds to flock together, and fly in groups, so it is natural for people to undertake their True Work. Just as it is natural for coral polyps to cooperate together to build their homes of coral, so it is for people and the Great Work. People who are not involved in their True Work feel like something is missing from their lives, but they are not sure what it is. People who are not involved in their True Work must surely have stopped listening to a deep part of themselves that tells them exactly what their True Work is. People who are not performing their True Work have chosen to ignore an important connection with the greater organism. I don't criticise these people, or hold them to blame, for this is what we have all been taught to do in this modern age. Those who do otherwise are often seen as outsiders, threats, crazies and so on, even in this supposed age of tolerance.

Involvement with the Great Work inevitably brings one into close contact with those others, who whether they know it or not, are themselves involved in the Great Work. For one can indeed be doing one's True Work without even thinking about it, or having any idea of the Great Work, or even any interest in anything esoteric or spiritual. This

is because it is such a natural process for us, as human beings. It is our instinct, and a fundamental part of our fabric of being. How ironic then, that our systems of education and cultural norms unwittingly seem to be constructed so as to alienate us from this ability. In this process of alienation from our true nature, and our True Work, we acquire a disempowering wound. We shall discuss this wound and its consequences in a later chapter.

Currently, western society is in a phase of historical development in which we are externalising our powers and abilities. For example, our native intuitive ability to communicate mind to mind across great distances, has been replaced by the telephone and the television, and this native ability survives only in vestigial form in most people, who occasionally surprise themselves by knowing who is on the other end of the telephone when it rings, or thinking about someone just before they visit. A concomitant of this externalisation, is the devaluing of internal powers and abilities, in that the unspoken assumption is that the telephone is better, more practical, more reliable, and therefore it is not worth the effort to cultivate and preserve innate talents that can prove fickle and hard to integrate with a predominantly rational-centric orientation. This process of externalisation runs through western history, and is sometimes indistinguishable from the notion of progress. Another example is the plethora of gadgets that replace a person's own memory, knowledge and abilities with supposedly better more efficient externalised forms. A simple example is calculators, another is computers. Not that I want to take up any kind of crusade against technology per se, as I sit writing this on a computer, but I think it is important to recognise that the so-called advances we are making these days are in many cases externalisations that replace or make obsolete some aspect of the internal life. Such aspects might include the cultivation of memory, including the ability to remember and tell stories. We see also the externalisation of decision making, which these days is supposed to be made on objective criteria after researching the scientific findings. This also represents an externalisation, a movement away from alignment with the greater consciousness that promotes through intuition the decision that serves the highest good of all. Without wishing to address the issue of science and technology, suffice it to say that the Great Work is capable of embracing all human activities, including the scientific pursuit, but science, per se, is not of itself the Great Work. For the Great Work is fundamentally a way of re-internalising our power, and re-actualising

our abilities to act in unconscious and conscious concert with the will of the greater organism. Unconscious because we cannot comprehend the greater mind, even though we can participate within it. Conscious because we ourselves knowingly undertake to do just this.



## 1.12 Hold beliefs lightly

The Great Work is not something that is confined to a particular cultural or esoteric tradition. While this treatise and its associated understandings are based on western traditions and cultural history, it is not the only way to understand or talk of the phenomena, and our relationship to it. Eastern traditions such as Buddhism, for example, talk of enlightenment and right action, and one who investigates these teachings will see that there is something essentially very similar in these understandings. Taoist traditions talk of going with the flow, which would seem to relate to the concept presented here of aligning with the consciousness of the greater organism. Much has been written about the spiritual traditions of the East, and many indigenous societies, and the interested reader is welcome to research them for themselves. Many of them express the same underlying truths in their own particular ways. The result for any thoughtful person must be a necessary ambivalence about any particular set of beliefs, including those presented in this work. Beliefs work as a necessary structure to give form to the Divine mystery. Yet they also limit it, and our ability to understand it, and work with it. They can often also be destructive in some ways, while being positive and helpful in others. Therefore we must hold our beliefs lightly, and struggle always to be conscious of them, and how they might both empower us and limit us, and indeed, to choose and construct our beliefs according to how they may help or hinder ourselves and others. Many people fail to understand the fundamentally creative power of beliefs – that we tend to manifest in the world around us what we believe to be true, or what we believe we deserve, or what we believe the world to be capable of. This understanding of the creative power of belief is fundamental to the prosecution of the Great Work, and this is further taken up in a later chapter.

## 1.13 The rational-centric self

In today's world, we are accustomed to having our attention and sense of self thoroughly associated with the rational part of our minds. So much so that intuition and inspiration are seen, when they are recognised, as things almost outside of our sense of self, conveying messages from some vague external source or region. However this is an incorrect notion, in that we have been trained to shrink our sense of self down to the purely rational logical aspect. This is, by the way, the part of our nature that is associated with speech, and the reason why not speaking has been used as a method in eastern and western mystical training to re-expand the sense of self to embrace these non-verbal aspects. Normally, our attention is so focussed on talking, thinking about things logically, writing, and maintaining an internal dialogue with ourselves, that there is little room left for us to embrace any other side of our nature. By not talking, we loosen this attention on the rational/verbal sense of self, and allow room for attention to be placed on other aspects of self. These include the pictorial self, the feeling self, and the soul self. However not talking is only the beginning, as one must also learn to still the imaginary talking, the inner dialogue that typically takes up most of our attention most of the time. There are two methods of doing this, speaking very broadly. The eastern approach is to still the talking mind, allowing the attention to broaden and embrace the total self. The western approach is to strengthen the other self aspects, giving them opportunity for expression, and to train the talking mind to actively step aside while they do so. Methods for doing this include music, painting and other forms of creative expression that engage attention beyond the rational sense of self, as well as the exercises of various branches of esoteric tradition.

This underlines the important part that music and art have always played in the Great Work, for in bypassing the rational mind, such works are in some measure a creation and expression of the greater organism. These expressions and their vibrations are capable of touching others in a way that can awaken them to their connection with the greater organism, and inspire them to their own part in the Great Work. This is art and music at their best of course. They are not necessarily always at their best, however. There are plenty of examples of worthless but well executed creations which lack the spark of contact with the greater consciousness. However commercial and worthless such art is, however, the creative impulse lies buried within it somewhere, and is capable of

serving the greater purpose to some degree.

The Great Work is more attuned to the work of the artist, than that of the scientist. The scientist typically concentrates his or her attention on the rational faculties, tending to limit his contact with the greater organism, while the artist, ideally, seeks to loosen his attention from being logic and reason bound, to embrace deeper non-verbal aspects of self, which have a stronger more direct connection to the greater organism. However there are scientists who are artists, or who treat their work artistically, and these may be said to be more attuned to the Great Work. Likewise, there are artists who are overly cerebral or intellectual, in whom attunement with the greater organism suffers.

## 1.14 Concluding remarks

So we are now beginning to paint a picture of the Great Work, the True Work, and how an individual may participate in them. To sum it all up in a few lines, we might say that the Great Work is the waking and nurturing of the greater organism, and allowing its conscious expression through the life of the individual. The True Work is that aspect of the Great Work attributed to each individual, and which is an expression of their true nature, and of their conscious alignment with the Great Work and the will of the greater organism. Fulfilment and satisfaction come from one's pursuit of the True Work, and anger, depression, and a sense of worthlessness and futility come to many of those who prevent themselves from pursuing it for whatever reason. It is possible to keep these feelings at bay for many years, perhaps a whole lifetime, with distractions like success, money, possessions, and pass-times. But in one's heart of hearts, the denial of the True Work is always recognised, and in death there is regret. On the other hand, those who pursue their True Work will die with the satisfaction of having, through just the attempt, contributed to the Great Work. It is again worthwhile making the point that the greater organism is not God, but an aspect of creation like ourselves. The Great Work is a creative exercise, in that those involved are simultaneously nurturing and contributing to the conscious being of the greater organism, and opening themselves to cooperation with it, through intuition and other methods. Ultimately, the greatest good of all will be served, in that all may find fulfilment and satisfaction through expressing their true nature, as an integrated and

correctly functioning participant in the greater body. The Great Work is thus a counter to the scourges of hyper individualism, materialism, selfishness and hyper rationalism that are at this time causing untold hardship to many millions of people, and threatening the very existence of a multitude of plants and animals, as well as ourselves, and indeed the very fabric of life on this planet.



## Exercises for Chapter One

### Exercise 1.1 *Threads from childhood*

Take three deep and steadying breaths, and begin by saying out loud or in your imagination “May this exercise be blessed by [insert saint, deity, Divine manifestation of your choice], for the highest good of all.”

Write down in your journal all the things that you liked doing as a child, a teenager, a young adult, and at the current time. Perhaps make four headings down the page, and write brief notes under each one. When you can’t think of anything more to write, consider what you have written. Are there any threads that run through from childhood to the current time? What things have you stopped doing? Think about what the reasons may be. Write down whatever insights or feelings come to you from this exercise. Conclude with a gesture of gratitude.

### Exercise 1.2 *What is the Great Work?*

Take three deep and steadying breaths, and begin by saying out loud or in your imagination “May this exercise be blessed by [insert saint, deity, Divine manifestation of your choice], for the highest good of all.”

Take your pen in hand, and write your full name three times. Then say out loud, as if asking yourself, “What is the Great Work?”. Begin writing straight away, as fast as you can, writing whatever comes to mind, without stopping to judge or criticize in anyway. When the writing stops, read over what you have written, and consider it. Then write down any further insights or feelings that this exercise has inspired. This exercise can be repeated on another occasion asking “What is my True Work?”. Conclude with a gesture of gratitude.

### Exercise 1.3 *What is my True Work?*

Take three deep and steadying breaths, and begin by saying out loud or in your imagination “May this exercise be blessed by [insert saint, deity, Divine manifestation of your choice], for the highest good of all.”

Sit comfortably at a desk or table, and place a blank sheet of paper before you. Take a pen or pencil in your non-dominant hand (left hand, if you are right handed, right hand if you are left handed). Begin to doodle on the page, and as you do so, ask yourself out loud “What is

my True Work?” Continue doodling, and see what comes of it. When you are finished doodling, write down any insights, thoughts or feelings that came to you. Conclude with a gesture of gratitude.

### **Exercise 1.4 *Circle and dot***

Take three deep and steadying breaths, and begin by saying out loud or in your imagination “May this exercise be blessed by [insert saint, deity, Divine manifestation of your choice], for the highest good of all.”

Imagine in your mind’s eye a circle with a dot in its centre. As you breathe in, focus on the dot. As you breathe out, focus on the circle. If your mind begins to wander, or you begin to think about something else, just come back to the dot and the circle. Continue for five minutes at first, and gradually build up to no more than twenty minutes. Conclude with a gesture of gratitude.

