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# LPNQ

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The Life Planning Network is the leading association supporting professionals who assist people at this life stage. We intend to bring into everyday use proactive and purposeful planning for the second half of life. Learn more at [lifeplanningnetwork.org](http://lifeplanningnetwork.org).

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## The Call and the Spiritual Search

Awakened in our dreams by the inner voice

Harry S. Moody

**T**he Call is the moment when the spiritual search begins. There's a famous song by Peggy Lee that runs "Is this all there is?" There is no better summary of the Call than that question. Whether we have fulfilled our hopes in life, or realized that we never will, the question of the Call is still the same. "Is this all there is?"

The Call is the moment of awakening of our "soul," the first of the stages of the soul when this inward dimension comes to life. It is that moment when we "come to ourselves" and ask the perennial questions: Who am I? Where am I going? What is this life all about? These questions are painful because, as James Hollis puts it, by midlife what we have become is frequently our chief obstacle to listening to the Call.

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**"Only the man who can consciously assent to the power of the inner voice becomes a personality."**

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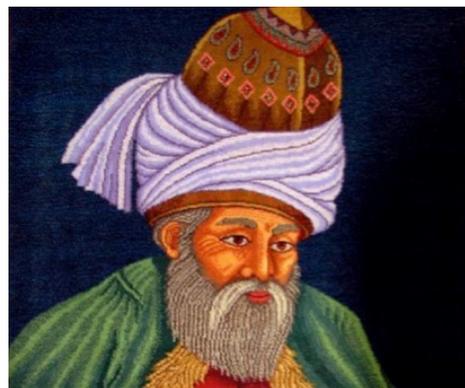
Yet this inner voice demands to be heard. As Jung put it: "Only the man who can consciously assent to the power of the inner voice becomes a personality." Yet this "still small voice" is hard to hear. Like other great mystics, Jalal ad-Din Rumi has compared our everyday life itself to a dream:

### The Dream That Must Be Interpreted

This place is a dream.  
Only the sleeper considers it real.

Then death comes like dawn,  
and you wake up laughing  
at what you thought was your grief.  
A man goes to sleep in the town  
where he has always lived  
and he dreams  
he's living in another town.  
in the dream he doesn't remember  
the town in which he's sleeping in his bed:

he believes the reality  
of the dream town--



the world is that kind of sleep

But there's a difference with this dream.  
Everything cruel and unconscious  
done in the illusion of the present world  
all that does not fade away at the death-waking.

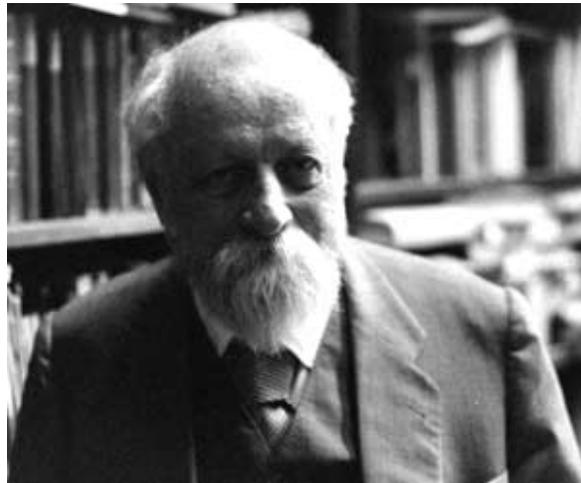
It stays,  
and it must be interpreted...

Humankind is being led along an evolving course,  
through this migration of intelligences,  
and though we seem to be sleeping,  
there is an inner wakefulness  
that directs the dream,  
and that will eventually startle us back  
to the truth of who we are.

The Call is that moment of "startling us back to the truth of who we really are. It is a wake-up call. Yet all too often, we do not wake up or hear the summons. Life carries us along, and habits do their work. There is no compulsion to listen to the Call: we can ignore it and dismiss it. It is like an alarm clock that goes off, waking us from the slumber of daily life. We always have the option of pressing our "snooze alarm" and going back to sleep, as Gurdjieff insisted, and then drifting back into our habits and ignoring the message received.

But if we ignore the Call, there may be consequences. For instance, in ancient Shamanic traditions, the Call was recognized as an opening to initiation into the world of the spirits. This Call of initiation could come through dreams. Stanley Krippner notes that in Okinawa, it was understood that spirits could communicate with a potential shaman in just this way, through dreams. Some who hear the Call try to ignore it, but at their peril: "Most shamanic traditions take the position that refusal to follow the call will result in a terrible accident, a life-threatening sickness, or insanity."

Is this warning just an ancient superstition? On the contrary, it is all-too-accurate depiction of what happens when an entire culture, a global civilization, turns away from the Call. Today, as we see the world around us plunged in all manner of collective insanity, we must wonder: how many around us have ignored the Call or dismissed its message? How many of have ignored our dreams?



The great Jewish theologian Martin Buber begins his book *Between Man and Man* by telling about one of his own dreams, a classic dream of the Call. Buber tells us that it was a recurrent dream that comes to him again and again, sometimes after an interval of years. In the dream he finds himself in a “primitive” world, in a vast cave or a mud building, or “on the fringe of a gigantic forest whose like I cannot remember having seen.” Or have we perhaps seen that gigantic forest in the “dark wood” where Dante found himself as he began his spiritual journey? Here, at any rate, is Martin Buber’s dream:

*The dream begins in very different ways, but always with something extraordinary happening to me, for instance, with a small animal resembling a lion-cub (whose name I know in the dream but not when I awake) tearing the flesh from my arm and being forced only with an effort to loose its hold. The strange thing is that this first part of the dream story, which in the duration as well as the outer meaning of the incidents always unfolds at a furious pace as though it did not matter. Then suddenly the pace abates: I stand there and cry out.*

Buber goes on to tell us that, in terms of waking consciousness, he might suppose that his cry could be joyous or fearful, depending on interpretation. But when he remembers the dream in the morning “the cry” is “neither so expressive nor so various.” Instead, he remembers that “Each time it is the same cry, inarticulate but in strict rhythm, rising and falling, swelling to a fullness which my throat could not endure were I awake...” The cry becomes a song, and “when it ends my heart stops beating.

Buber's dream continues:

*But then, somewhere, far away, another cry moves towards me, another which is the same, the same cry uttered or sung by another voice. Yet it is not the same cry, certainly no ‘echo’ of my cry but rather its true rejoinder, tone for tone, not repeating mine... so much so, that mine, which at first had to my own ear no sound of questioning at all, now appear as questions, as a long series of questions, which now all receive a response.*

A dream like this cannot be translated into rational discourse: “The response is no more capable of interpretation than the question. And yet the cries that meet the one cry that is the same do not seem to be the same as one another. Each time the voice is new.” Yet if the rational mind cannot grasp the meaning of this Cry, still Buber came away from the dream with a sense of certitude: “a certitude, true dream certitude comes to me that *now it has happened*. Nothing more. Just this, and in this way--- *now it has happened*.”

Martin Buber had this recurrent dream over and over again, until the last time just two years before he wrote it down in his book. In the last dream, "At first it was as usual...my cry died away, again my heart stood still. But then there was quiet. There came no answering call. I listened, I heard no sound."

Buber was surprised by this absence, and he waited, in vain, for the response. But then something happened to him, a change of awareness, as if his senses had suddenly become magnified. "And then, not from a distance but from the air round about me, noiselessly, came the answer." Rather, the answer was already there, was present even before his cry: "when I laid myself open to it, it let itself be received by me." What he received at that moment he received "with every pore of my body." Once again, he experienced profound certainty, "peeling out more than ever, that *now it has happened.*"

What Buber has so beautifully described in this dream is the powerful, overwhelming reality of the Call. It is what Rilke speaks of in the *Duino Elegies* when he tells of listening to the call of "the Angel," realizing then that to have lived on earth, "To have been here once, if only for this once, can never be cancelled." In essence, *it has happened*. The Call is a moment of certainty, but not a dogmatic conclusion that can be put into words. On the contrary, it is a hunger for the Infinite.

Rilke put it beautifully in his *Letters to a Young Poet*: "Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions."

The Call, then, is different from some intended or imagined "religious experience," or any sort of "conversion" that we might believe would give us clear or definitive conclusions. Quite the contrary. The Call is an encounter with emptiness, with longing, with our own deepest questions, questions no longer experienced as doubt but as certainty: *it has happened*. But to listen to the Call we must learn to listen to an "Inner Voice." The good news is that as our life goes on, even into old age, it is never too late to hear the Call.



**Harry (Rick) Moody** recently retired as Vice President of AARP. He edits the monthly newsletter "Human Values in Aging" and promotes positive and conscious aging in his work. He is the author of, *THE FIVE STAGES OF THE SOUL: Charting the Spiritual Passages that Shape Our Lives*, now translated into seven languages worldwide. He can be contacted at [hrmoody@yahoo.com](mailto:hrmoody@yahoo.com).

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**The Call is the same. "Is this all there is?"**

Psychotherapist James Hollis tells of a patient who came to him and put it in these words: "I always sought to win whatever the game was, and only now do I realize how much I have been played by the game. I played the game hard and willingly, always thinking I was winning something. But in the end there really was nothing to win, or what I did win really didn't matter in the end." James Hollis, *What Matters Most: Living a More Considered Life*, Gotham, 2009, p. 91.

**as James Hollis puts it...**

Ibid., p. 9.

**as Jung put it...**

Carl Jung, *Collected Works*, 17, par.308.

**The Dream That Must Be Interpreted**

Coleman Barks, *The Essential Rumi*, p. 113

**as Gurdjieff insisted...**

The spiritual teacher George Gurdjieff famously insisted that "Man is asleep:" that is, unconscious of "the terror of the situation," at virtually all times. For more on the Gurdjieff Work, see James Webb, *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Work of G. I. Gurdjieff, P. D. Ouspensky, and Their Followers*, Putnam, 1980.

**Stanley Krippner notes that in Okinawa...**

Stanley Krippner, "Tribal Shamans and Their Travels into Dreamtime," in *Dreamtime and Dreamwork: Decoding the Language of the Night*, Los Angeles: Jeremy Tarcher, 1990, p. 186.

**The Cry**

Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, New York: Macmillan, 1965, pp. 1-3.

See also Kenneth Paul Kramer, *Martin Buber's Spirituality: Hasidic Wisdom For Everyday Life*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2012.

*I love John Masefield's poem, "The Passing Strange," because it heightens mortality and the sense of passing time but concludes with the hope of legacy, what we leave behind for others. I believe doing our legacy work is an indispensable task of later life: for example, in the practice of making an "Ethical Will," which is something I'm working on myself right now – Rick Moody*

### **The Passing Strange**

John Masefield

Only a beauty, only a power,  
Sad in the fruit, bright in the flower,  
Endlessly erring for its hour,

But gathering, as we stray, a sense  
Of Life, so lovely and intense,  
It lingers when we wander hence,

That those who follow feel behind  
Their backs, when all before is blind,

Our joy, a rampart to the mind.