

# Archetypal Defenses of the Group Spirit in Russia and Ukraine:

## The Axes of Destruction

Thomas Singer





When confronted with the horrors of war in Ukraine or Syria or Iraq or Vietnam, we try to figure out what is happening and why it is happening. We piece together the bits and pieces of stories and images that come to us from many different sources in order to create for ourselves a coherent narrative, knowing that at best we can only get a fragmentary glimpse of partial truths. Our abilities to explain are as limited as our comprehension of the seemingly endless and massive capacity of human beings to inflict pain, suffering, and death on one another. After considering all the studied explanations that contribute to the outbreak and conduct of war, we are still left with the sense that some inexorable process has been triggered and that once the conflict is ignited, it becomes increasingly difficult to halt it until it has run its course, almost like a fever. Jung noted this when he wrote in his 1936 essay, *Wotan*:

Archetypes are like riverbeds which dry up when the water deserts them, but which it can find again at any time. An archetype is like an old watercourse along which the water of life has flowed for centuries, digging a deep channel for itself. The longer it has flowed in this channel the more likely it is that sooner or later the water will return to its old bed. The life of the individual as a member of society and particularly as part of the State may be regulated like a canal, but the life of nations is a great rushing river which is utterly beyond human control . . . Thus the life of nations rolls on unchecked, without guidance, unconscious of where it is going, like a rock crashing down the side of a hill, until it is stopped by an obstacle stronger than itself. Political events move from one impasse to the next, like a torrent caught in gullies, creeks and marshes. All human control comes to an end when the individual is caught up in a mass movement. Then the archetypes begin to function, as happens also in the lives of individuals when they are confronted with situations that cannot be dealt with in any of the familiar ways. (C.G. Jung, "Wotan," *Civilization in Transition*, Collected Works, Vol. 10. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, p. 189)

The focus of the two collages I am presenting here does not concern itself so much with the specific causes of the war in Ukraine, although specificity about who is responsible for what is always of great value when trying to understand such fundamentally incomprehensible events. Economic, geopolitical, sociological, psychological, and historical factors are all relevant and contributory. The stated causes for the war can be real, imagined, or manufactured or all three—it doesn't seem to matter much once war breaks out. In presenting these collages my goal is to picture what happens when a war gets started for whatever reason. At the core of this process, I imagine a basic dynamic in which the fundamental unifying vision or spirit of a country, often latent in the collective psyche, is touched and threatened. In the name of this unifying and threatened spirit, impersonal and potent defenses—sometimes hugely aggressive-- are activated. This process taps into enormous collective emotion along with the willingness to make huge sacrifices, dormant in a society until its core spirit is imperiled and rallied. The suffering, violence, and destruction endured by citizens and soldiers alike is justified by participating in a shared belief and a unifying vision of the nation or the world.

In response to the threat--just as happens in a single celled organism--the defensive response aims to protect the organism from annihilation. In this case, however, the organism is the nation state. I call these defenses mobilized in defense of the nation “archetypal defenses of the group spirit” after the pioneering work of Don Kalsched on the inner experience of individuals who are severely traumatized. However, in the extension of Kalsched's model that I have proposed the threat and trauma is not to the individual and what Kalsched calls “the personal spirit” but to the group as a whole and

its “group spirit”. The archetypal defenses that are mobilized to defend the threatened “group spirit” are primal, and are as potent, even identical with the very forces that bind a group together in its identity. Once the “archetypal defenses of the group spirit” are triggered, the careening violence of whatever comes in the path of the “rock crashing down the side of a hill” seems independent of the specific causes that give rise to the conflict.

In trying to select a set of images that illustrates this process, I find myself going back and forth between the wish to understand both the Russian and Ukrainian sides of the conflict and outrage at Putin’s Russian invasion of Ukraine. But the psychological reality that I am trying to speak about objectively is not so much about who is responsible for the war in Ukraine, but what underlying processes come alive once propaganda and war machines get rolling on all sides. There is something autonomous and archetypically horrific that gets activated in the collective psyche in which all sides participate, no matter who is right or wrong, good or evil, perpetrator or victim. Even if it seems clear to most Westerners that Putin is wrong, perhaps evil, and certainly the perpetrator in this conflict, there is an important Russian side to the story which I consider more in the commentary on Image 4 under Group Spirit.

I first began to explore the notion of “archetypal defenses of the group spirit” during the war between the United States and Al-Qaeda that followed the 9/11 bombings that ushered in the 21st century. I wrote two articles for the San Francisco Jung Journal, one in 2002 and the second in 2006. For the second article, Dyane Sherwood and Jacques Rutsky created a stunning collage as a way of illustrating and bringing alive in symbolic imagery the notion of “archetypal defenses of the group spirit”.

[The Cultural Complex and Archetypal Defenses of the Collective Spirit: Baby Zeus, Elian Gonzales, Constantine's Sword, and Other Holy Wars.](#) The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal 20,4 (2002): 4–28.

[Unconscious Forces Shaping International Conflicts: Archetypal Defenses of the Group Spirit from Revolutionary America to Confrontation in the Middle East,](#) The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal 25,4 (2006): 6–28





*Archetypal Defenses of the Group Spirit*

The original collage demonstrates in image form how a true “axis of evil” is created in a horrifying dance of destruction symbolized by the paired serpents of the archetypal defenses facing off against one another when the sacred spirits of the group are attacked—symbolized in this image by the crescent and the Mosque for Islam and by the candles of Western Christian and Jewish cultures. When core values are assaulted as in the 9/11 attack on America or aggression by Western troops in Islamic lands, the archetypal defenses of the conflicting groups, “headed” by the figures of bin Laden and Bush, generate the most terrible experience of mass and personal horror behind which lurks the ultimate symbol of modern destruction — the atomic bomb. Personal lives, cultural values and archetypal forces collide and compete in the collective psyche.

When the Ukraine war with Russia erupted, I began to think again about that original collage and wondered what a contemporary version of it might look like. Using the original collage as a template, I soon realized that the circumstances of the two wars were quite different and it would be foolish to try to make a new collage as an exact mirror image of the old one. At the same time underlying dynamics also seemed to have basic similarities with regard to the spirit of the group falling under threat and then attack, leading to the mobilization of ferocious defenses that result in horror and destruction. These defenses will use any strategy, device, manipulation, deceit, or brute power including the fodder of human lives to protect and preserve the ongoing life of the group.

Most creators of images do not like to tell their viewers what it is they are looking at. Artists much prefer that the creative process continue with the viewers bringing their own stories and interpretations to the image which can take on many different

meanings. This is particularly true of symbolic images because it is in the very nature of a symbol to be multivalent and not to have a single meaning. In this case however, since I am not an artist, I am going to upend that tradition and tell you what was on my mind in creating this collage. At one level I have created a diagram of a very specific set of ideas, but it is my hope that the flesh and blood reality of the multidimensional idea becomes much more vivid and alive through the imagery. Of course, the viewer is encouraged to bring their own visions and interpretations to the collage as well.

**Some Keys and Hints to the Design and Content of ARCHETYPAL  
DEFENSES OF THE GROUP SPIRIT IN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE: THE AXES  
OF DESTRUCTION**

Although the focus in this collage is on the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, its overarching theme is the notion that all groups, whether armed or not, are psychologically “hard wired” with archetypal defenses to protect their core spirit and being. This applies to nation states as well as Republicans and Democrats, white racists, black activists, anti-abortion Christians, pro-abortion women and men-- the list of groups threatened at the core of their being is endless.



*Image 1*

The ultimate archetypal defense crafted by human ingenuity to date is the nuclear weapon. For this reason, the image of a nuclear blast (image 1) is at the Satanic crown of these axes of destruction. The potential use of nuclear weapons has been in the foreground and background throughout the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Noam Chomsky puts this hovering presence in the simplest terms possible in *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump*.

“There are two huge dangers that the human species face. We are in a situation where we need to decide whether the species survives in any decent form. One is the rising danger of nuclear war, which is quite serious, and the other is environmental catastrophe.” *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump*, edited by Bandy Lee, St. Martin’s Press, New York City, 2017

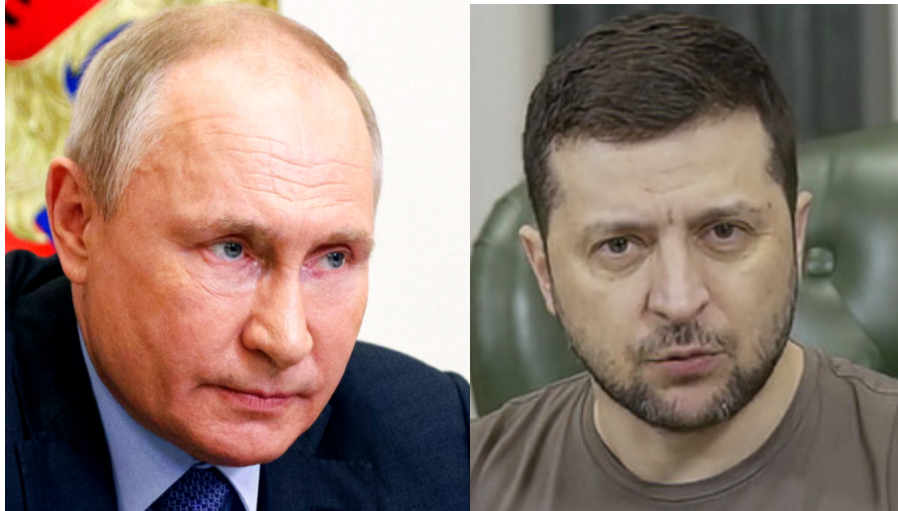


As I look at the collage as a whole, there are three intermingling axes of meaning that the images form. The first axis of images explores the relationships between the “spirit of the group” and the “archetypal defenses of the group spirit”. The second, overlapping axis of images explores the relationships between archetypal, cultural, and individual levels of the psyche as it manifests in the world. The third axis of meaning only emerged near the end of creating the collage when consultation with colleagues led me to thinking of the collage in terms of *The Mythopoetic Imagination: Gods and Demons Churn the Milk Ocean*.

### **FIRST AXIS: Where the Spirit of the Group and the Archetypal Defenses of the Group Spirit Intersect**

#### **Group Spirit:**

As I formulate it, the group spirit is akin to what Jungians might call the “Self” of the group. The “group spirit” forms the ineffable core beliefs or sense of identity that bind people together. Nation states have a “group spirit” and their citizens often magically and unconsciously participate in it — particularly in times of crisis.



*Images 2 and 3*

Putin and Zelensky as leaders of the warring nations become the individuals most visible and representative of the battle to defend their respective group spirits. Each draws his energy and power not just from personal strength and charisma but also as carriers of the spirit of the group.



*Image 4*

To Putin's left in the collage is an image of the huge statue entitled "The Motherland Calls". It can be thought of as symbolizing the Russian group spirit. "The Motherland Calls" has a height of 85 meters and sits in the center of a cluster of monuments named the "Heroes of the Battle of Stalingrad" in Volgograd Russia. The statue portrays Nike, the goddess of victory, calling her sons and daughters to resist and defeat the enemy. "The Motherland Calls" takes on even greater symbolic contemporary importance in carrying the spirit of mother Russia as we learn about Putin's preoccupation with a Russian exile, Ilyan, who died in France. Ilyan was a fierce advocate of a mystical belief

in Russia as a holy, Christian, motherland. Any means—including lying, manipulating, murdering—are justified in the restoration of a holy Russia in Ilyan’s view. Seen from that perspective Putin has launched an invasion of Ukraine in the name of defending the sacred land of Russia from the increasing threat of godless Western Europe in the form of an encroaching NATO and EU (European Union). We have learned that George Kennan, the architect of the West’s post World War 2 containment policy of the Soviet Union, warned about expanding NATO after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Kennan was acutely aware that an expanding NATO represented a grave threat to Russian security in its memory of the Nazi invasion of Russia during World War 2. Some say the economic threat of the EU in the form of Ukrainian economic growth and prosperity is an even greater threat to Putin’s “kleptocracy” in which a few enjoy the spoils of vast wealth while most of the country’s population remains relatively underperforming in relation to the growth of the West.

For links related to The Motherland, Ilyan, Putin and Russia:

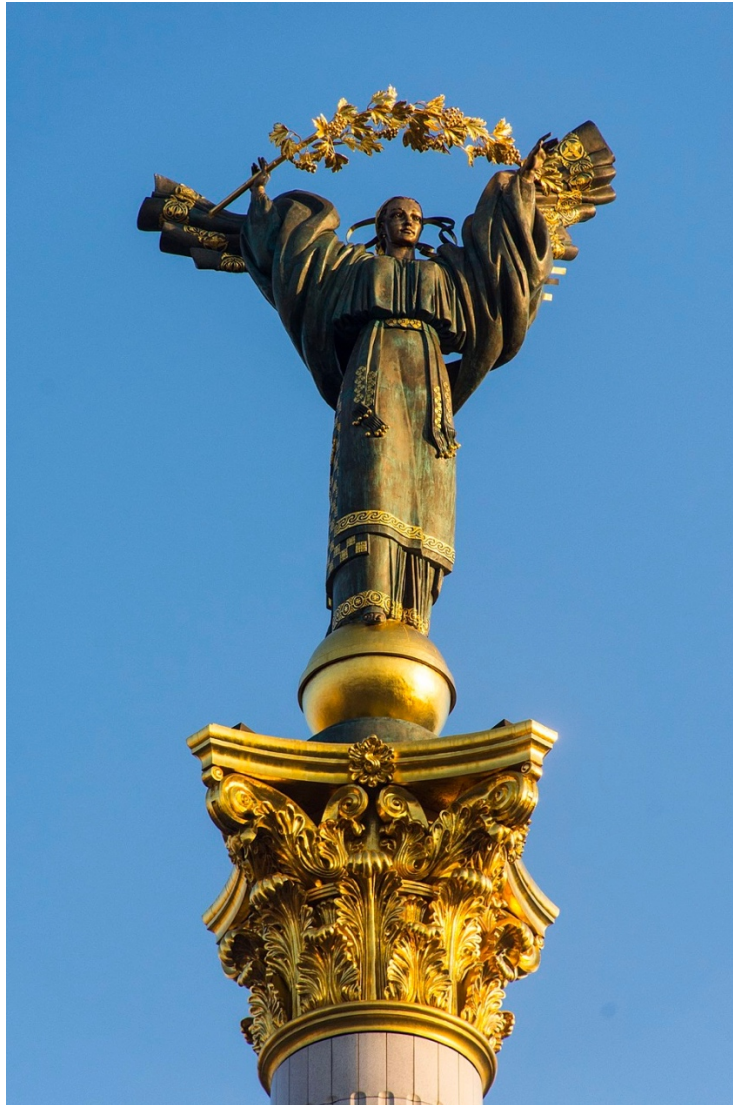
<https://youtu.be/BOMobUNmIbE>

<https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/03/16/ivan-ilyin-putins-philosopher-of-russian-fascism/>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2022/05/12/dugin-russia-ukraine-putin/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/podcasts/transcript-ezra-klein-interviews-timothy-snyder.html>





*Image 5*

To Zelensky's right in the collage is an image of The Independence Monument in Ukraine. It is a victory column located on Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in Kyiv, commemorating the independence of Ukraine from Russia in 1991. In its celebration of the freedom of Ukraine, it is a perfect symbol of the "group spirit" for which the Ukrainian people are now fighting and dying. The figure atop the monument is Berehynia a female spirit in Slavic mythology, who is regarded as a "Slavic goddess" with a function of "hearth mother and protectress of the home". Late 20th century

Ukrainian romantic nationalism centered on the matriarchal myth of Berehynia. [For a concise history of modern Ukraine and its independence movement see this article.](#)



*Image 11*

Further down in the collage, the spirit of each group is further represented by their own version of the Eastern Orthodox Christian religion. The image on the left shows the installation of Kirill as Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church in 2009. Interestingly, Kirill as Patriarch can be seen as representing both the Spirit of the group and its archetypal defenses. The Church has become a political weapon of the state.





*Image 12*

On the right is a church in Lviv, Ukraine where three Ukrainian soldiers are being mourned as fallen defenders of Ukraine against Russia.

### **Archetypal Defenses of the Group Spirit**

Donald Kalsched postulated that, in response to severe trauma, an individual develops defenses of the personal spirit. I suggest that groups react in much the same way: when a group has been attacked at the core of its being and values — as the United States was on 9/11— or when a group has been corroded at the core of its being and values — as Islam has been for the past 500 years — archetypal defenses are mobilized to protect the vulnerable and injured group spirit. These archetypal defenses can be ferocious and inhuman.

The demonic defenses often direct their primitive aggression back onto the wounded spirit of the group as evidenced in the self- mockery and self-denigration entrenched in the humor and self-perception of any number of oppressed minorities. But just as often these same defenses of the group spirit can turn their savage aggression out onto whomever or whatever appears to be a threat to the spirit, basic value, or identity of the group. I see this response as automatic, reflexive, and in some ways the most natural way for the group psyche to react. Those individuals identifying with the archetypal defenses of the group spirit can torture people in prison, behead people, and blow themselves and others up—without regard for their own personal well-being or the humanity of those who happen to be in their path. As defensive agents of a wounded group spirit, they are not constrained by normal human values or concerns. They are truly impersonal representatives of the group and its wounded spirit.



*Image 1*

The ultimate, archetypal defense of the group spirit is the threat or actual use of nuclear



weapons. This looms over the whole conflict, either as a manipulative tactic and/or as a very real possibility of the use of nuclear weapons in a conflict that escalates out of control.



*Image 6*

Coiled serpents square off against one another at the center of the collage. The most natural response to seeing coiled serpents in a defensive/aggressive posture to one another is to think of evil—as in the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Their archetypal antagonism certainly can unleash the most evil and destructive forces known to mankind. But, it is also worth thinking of them as being an expression of the natural posture that any living organism would take when its very existence is threatened with annihilation. This is not only true of individuals facing the threat of destruction but is amplified exponentially when a group is or perceives itself to be under attack with the possibility of its very existence being eliminated. In this sense the archetypal serpents squaring off against one another can be viewed as both the Shadow (as Jung called it) and as the normal response of any organism, individual or collective, when threatened with annihilation. When archetypal defenses of the group spirit are mobilized, the

casualties on both sides of the war defy imagination.

### **Non-Human Casualties of the Axes of Destruction**



*Image 7*

Part of the destruction is non-human: buildings, tanks, infrastructure, ships, anything that gets in the way of the war machine. This image shows the Moskva, flagship of Russia's Black Sea fleet, sinking after being hit with missiles from Ukraine. Both Ukraine and Russia suffer from the destructive havoc caused by war, although clearly in this war, Ukraine's cities and infrastructure are taking the brunt of the fury.



*Image 8*

There are so many structures that include homes, hospitals, apartment housing and every other kind of building that have been destroyed in Ukraine that the cost in human life, dislocation, rebuilding and time is inestimable.

## Human Casualties of the Axes of Destruction



*Image 9*

No one has a clear idea of how many Russian soldiers have lost their lives in the war with Ukraine but it already appears to be greater than 15,000. It has been reported that Russia has already lost as many soldiers in a few months of fighting in Ukraine as it did in the nine-year war with Afghanistan. The image of a lone, frozen Russian body near a tank says more than numbers in the thousands.





*Image 10*

This stark image of a civilian, Ukrainian family that was killed by mortar attack while fleeing brings the horror of war into human focus.

**SECOND AXIS: Where Different levels of the psyche are embodied in the imagery: archetypal, cultural, and individual**

The second interwoven axis that the collage represents is the one formed by the different levels of the psyche as it manifests in the world: the archetypal, the cultural, and the individual or personal. These levels of the psyche often interpenetrate and overlap one another, but there are times that phenomena more clearly arise from one level or another. Simultaneously, the dynamic relationship between the spirit of the group and its archetypal defenses are in play at every level in which psyche appears.

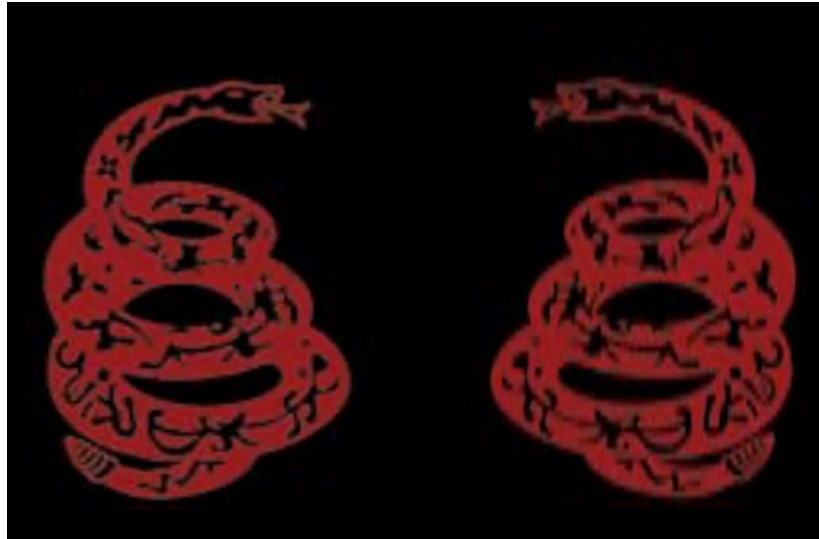
## Archetypal Embodiments of the conflict

In the collage, there are two images that emerge from the deepest, archetypal level of the psyche.



*Image 1*

The atomic bomb emerges as an archetypal symbol of destructive power. This was apparent to Robert Oppenheimer as he witnessed the first test detonation of the bomb on July 16, 1945. A line from the Hindu sacred text, the Bhagavad Gita, came to his mind: “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.”



*Image 6*

The second image coming from the archetypal realm of the psyche is of the two snakes paired off against each other. They symbolize an instinctual reaction of life defending itself against the imminent threat of attack, injury and possible death. This threat can come to an individual, to a group, or to the whole planet as in our current climate change crisis and the extinction anxiety that causes many of us to shudder.

### **Cultural Embodiments of the conflict**

In the collage there are several images where the cultural level of the psyche is represented as embodying the conflict.





*Image 11*



*Image 12*

Images 11 and 12 picture two different Eastern Orthodox ceremonies—the installation of Patriarch Kirill of Russia in one and the funeral services of fallen Ukrainian soldiers in the other. The churches become symbolic carriers and expressions of the two cultures.





*Image 13*

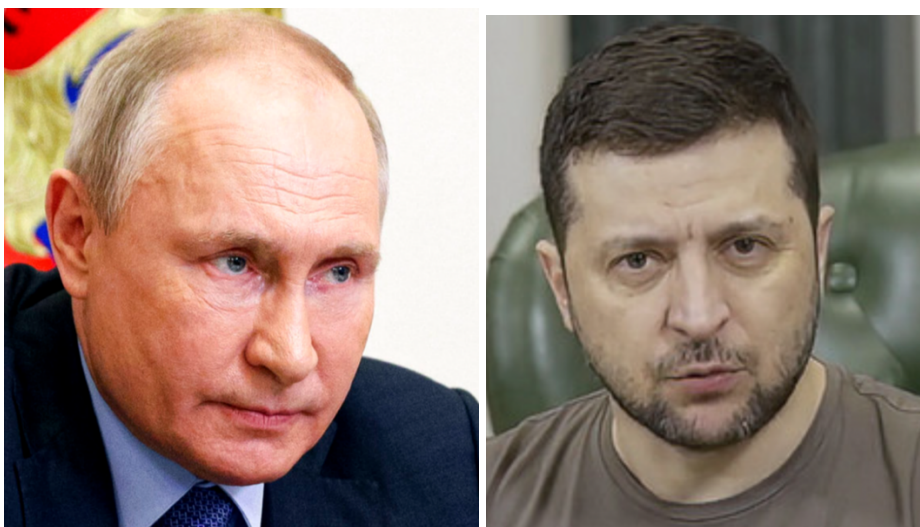


*Image 14*

Images 13 and 14 communicate at another level of the cultural or group level of the psyche in what I term cultural complexes. These images picture landmark events in the

history of Ukraine and Russia. These events have become embedded in the collective memory and emotional life of the citizens of Ukraine and Russia. As collective memory, they have the tendency to reinforce a given view of history in terms of how people view contemporary events. This self-selecting reinforcement of memory is accompanied with heightened emotion that is easily triggered and takes on a life of its own as an autonomous cultural complex, always ready to be triggered and contribute to the meaning of events. Cultural complexes are carriers of deeply held beliefs, collective memory and powerful emotion. Image 13 shows the 900-day siege of Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) by the Nazis beginning in 1941. It is no accident that Putin refers to the Ukrainians as Nazis as he is evoking the terrible memory of the Russian suffering at the hands of the Germans which is the trigger for a potent cultural complex. And the Ukrainians have their own cultural complex of having suffered at the hands of the Russians as evoked by this image of the 1918 siege of Kiev by the Bolsheviks.

### **Individual Embodiments of the Conflict**



*Images 2 and 3*

Images 2 and 3 are clear examples of the multiple layers of psyche at which an image can communicate. Putin and Zelensky are both individuals who simultaneously speak for the group at the cultural level of the psyche and for the archetype as very different kinds of leadership and authority.



*Image 9*





*Image 10*

Images 9 and 10 are more clearly speaking from the personal or individual level of the psyche. Perhaps as victims of the war, they symbolize more than the personal—but it is very much through the personal that these images bring home an experience of the horrible individual costs of war.

### **THIRD AXIS: The Mythopoetic Imagination: Gods and Demons Churn the Milk Ocean**



*Image 15: Gods and Demons Churn the Milk Ocean*

In working on this collage and its commentary, I consulted with various colleagues to see if these ideas and images spoke to them as having any meaning or relevance. The consultation turned into a set of lively, informal exchanges which became a way of continuing the creation of the collage. Here are some of the highlights of those communications. I started with my colleague John Beebe because I felt that the images in the collage formed a kind of “spine” of destructive energies that pour forth when the archetypal defenses of the group spirit are activated. John has written extensively on “the spine of integrity” from a typological perspective in a most creative way and I

wondered what John thought about my using the word “spine” to describe this far more negative process. John was of the opinion that “spine” was not the right word because the spine is a living, flexible part of organisms. John wrote:

“What the collage you have created powerfully depicts is a not so much a spine as a posture of demonic opposition, as befits a country with its back up, like Russia today, using a massively totalitarian stance in lieu of a spine...I wouldn’t call it spine because it doesn’t contain the vulnerability and aliveness of a spinal cord within, but only has the outer mimetic shell persona of one....The totalitarian posture is shameless and ultimately soulless, more a façade than a breathing link between ego and Self, because as a defense of the Self it has not accepted limitation as a condition of individuation and the ability to recognize otherness and others as a value. So, I myself would use another word than “spine” for what erects and gives temporary stature to that defensively aggressive posture so perfectly conveyed by your collage: perhaps the “defensive stance of massed destructiveness.”

**John’s response led me to further consider an essential question about “archetypal defenses of the group spirit”—whether they could be different from one group to another. In other words, Russia and Ukraine are locked in a terrible struggle in which the archetypal defenses of the group spirit on both sides are now dominant players in this deadly war— are these archetypal defenses the same on both sides or are they different in any significant way?** I asked John this additional, critical question and found his response most suggestive:

‘I think archetypal defenses of the group spirit are definitely involved, and I think those of the Ukrainians are different from those of the Russians. **It’s possible to oppose with integrity, and to be daimonic rather than demonic so that**



**the very same archetypal positions can create an infusion of healthy spirit rather than an egoistic determination to conquer. The difference lies in the integrity with which the shadow is held.”**

In his book *Energies and Patterns in Psychological Type*, p. 44. John lists the Demonic/daimonic as an archetype in the unconscious of any self-organizing personality and this could be the personality of a group as well as an individual. John goes on to say:

“The demonic/daimonic archetype structures and patterns the area of undermining and redemption. As shadow, it demonically undermines self and others, often to an evil degree; but when held and deployed with integrity, that is, holding ourselves responsible for our long-term effects on others, the same energy can become daimonic--uncannily angelic, an inspiring energy that creates ever further opportunities to develop integrity... Integrity is often followed by synchronicity. What I have chosen to call the Opposing Personality in all of us can become the voice of conscience in a group as well as individual ego, and that conscience can link with the even deeper Daimon in us that wants us to consider the needs of the Other we have been defending ourselves against. **When the group resorting to archetypal defenses realizes the shadow of defensiveness with integrity, the demonic energy involved is itself transformed into the daimonic, an uncanny spirit that infuses the group with a different quality of energy which can take even a people under threat beyond self-righteous self-assertiveness.** At that point, actions informed by respect for others begin to emerge. The group self has arrived at a stage of concern that knows that other groups have selves as well. When that awareness emerges, even an initially hostile engagement with the other may inspire a willing sensitivity to the needs of the whole, enabling the political process that follows to be transformative. Deep waters, but beautiful to contemplate.”

The upshot of my exchanges with John is that I did not use “spine” in my subtitle. I stayed with “axis/axes.” But it also helped make clearer to me the possibility that archetypal defenses of the group spirit can be related to in different ways by different groups of people. When the “shadow” aggressiveness of these defenses is held with integrity, a group might be able to take these destructive, undermining, and demonic energies and potentially transform them into something daimonic that can become “an occasion for the infusion of spirit”. Renne Cunningham’s book, *Archetypal Nonviolence: Jung, King, and Culture Through the Eyes of Selma*, documents such a process. **All of this can end up sounding like nice but abstract theory when the war on the ground is so ugly and destructive, no matter who is demonic or daimonic.** But it is helpful to see our way to a possible differentiation of these “archetypal defenses of the group spirit” based on how leaders and groups of people relate to the huge energies released when they are triggered. As John put it, “Integrity can infuse the archetypal defenses of the group with a spirit that takes the group beyond self-righteous self-assertion.”

In response to John’s pointing me in the direction of demonic/daimonic I began to research the symbolic imagery in ARAS related to the relationship between the demonic and daimonic. It did not take long to find a stunning Indian image that features the conflict between the daimonic and demonic in the image of the “Gods and Demons Churning the Milk Ocean.” The description of the image in ARAS states: (ref #:7AR.076)

“Two groups of figures are massed on opposite sides of a central axis, or axis mundi, consisting of a mountain resting on the back of a tortoise and bearing the figure of the god Vishnu. The axis mundi operates as a churning stick surrounded

by sea, and wrapped around it, a serpent's long body serves as a cord that reaches to two opposing shores. On the left shore are the gods, all of whom wear crowns, while the demons are amassed on the right. People and animals appear to be coming out of the water, some of them aided by figures on either shore...The gods and the demons work together, churning the milk ocean in order to obtain the elixir of immortality."

**Can the struggle between opposing “archetypal defenses of the group spirit” be related to the “churning of the milk ocean” in which the battle between demonic and daimonic forces is wired into the basic structure of human existence? How is the effort to create the “elixir of immortality” part of this battle? Is the “elixir of immortality” for Putin’s Russia symbolized by the Motherland Russia statue? Is the “elixir of immortality” for Zelensky’s Ukraine symbolized by The Independence monument? Gazing at the “churning of the milk ocean” image suggested to me a mythological underpinning to the Ukraine/Russian war. Does the Hindu vision offer us a glimpse of a common mythologem or mythopoetic insight into the seemingly unending conflicts between groups of people that are the hallmark of human history? After all, the Hindu spiritual imagination’s capacity to picture the nature of time and space and the unfolding of human affairs is extraordinary in the vastness and depth of its vision. It is quite likely that the Hindus have known something about the nature of war and the relationship between the Demonic and Daimonic long before the West was born. Aeons ago the Hindus’ religious intuition anticipated something about the nature of the birth and destruction of galaxies and the**

cosmos that we are now witnessing scientifically in the first images from NASA's James Webb telescope.



*Image 16: This landscape of “mountains” and “valleys” speckled with glittering stars is actually the edge of a nearby, young, star-forming region called NGC 3324 in the Carina Nebula. Captured in infrared light by NASA’s new James Webb Space Telescope, this image reveals for the first time previously invisible areas of star birth.)*

The Webb telescope images almost make the first image of this collage—the human creation of the nuclear weapon-- look puny, even though Robert Oppenheimer thought of a line from Hindu scripture on witnessing the first detonation of a nuclear weapon, “Now I become Death, the destroyer of worlds.” But perhaps I am indulging in a mythopoetic flight that can easily serve as its own dissociative defense that takes us way too far from the horrific realities of the war on the ground in Ukraine. It offers us very little in terms of being able to confront and do something about the ruthless and

barbaric destruction that is beyond comprehension or our capacity to emotionally take in the toll in suffering, loss and death in our fellow human beings.

### **The Double Ouroboros**

As I continued to probe the underlying dynamic relationship between the Russian and Ukrainian archetypal defenses of the group spirit, another colleague, Gus Cwik, suggested a further amplification of the relationship between the demonic and daimonic. Gus suggested the alchemical image of The Double Uroborus below, which shows a transformation of the demonic into the daimonic and the reverse of that, the daimonic becoming demonic in a circular, uroboric process.





*Image 17*

Gus writes:

“We might imagine Russia and Ukraine in this double ouroboros at the collective level. In the beginning it portrays the primal instinctual energies of the serpent and snake of the two countries stuck in a perpetual conflict pattern — each at once devouring the other and being devoured. Russia, as led by Putin, at first carries the dominant, kingly solar energies, inflated and high flying and desiring to reinstate the old USSR as it had been, denying change. The Ukraine, as led by Zelensky, carries the new lunar energies, ever changing and desiring to become more democratic. But the situation changed rapidly with Putin unknowingly eliciting a new collective spirit from the Ukrainians, which was witnessed by the entire world. And this transformation was experienced by the larger collective at an ‘experience near’ level through social media with the ever-present cell phone recording both the devastation and the resistance throughout it all. The Ukrainian spirit, winged and crowned, then becomes the dominating principle towards a new wholeness. The tree of life, once withered, shows new growth in the rising golden flower.”

This is another way of imagining the demonic serpent energy below with the potential for its destructive energies to be transformed into a winged serpent above that can be seen as daimonic. It can all get quite confusing and heady but, essentially, we are tracking archetypal serpent images as they appear in various forms. Can we imagine the transformation of demonic, destructive energies into something daimonic, creative, even spiritual at the level of the group psyche? **Can the Hindu kundalini model of serpentine energies located at the base of the spine in individuals be extended to the energies of large groups of humans in which war and the mobilization of archetypal energies of the group spirit erupt from the lowest level chakras of group psyches?** In tracking the archetypal serpentine



energies have we inadvertently created a collage that depicts a kundalini of war? Have we stumbled upon a kind of mythopoesis in which the collective psyche can be imagined to have its own way of expressing group kundalini like energies? In the case of the war in Ukraine, those kundalini like chakra energies of the group psyche have dwelled for the most part at the lowest level of chaotic destruction and aggression. We have seen a lot of the demonic and little of the daemonic, although many will point to the emerging spirit of the Ukrainian people and the renewal of the spirit of democratic freedom in the West as a hopeful sign of how the daimonic can offer an “infusion of healthy spirit rather than an egoistic determination to conquer.”

### **More Feedback from Colleagues on the Collage and Commentary**

Clearly, all of these questions and possibilities point to the fact that this is a very unfinished work in progress, an active imagination that began with a meditation on the energies and symbolic images of archetypal defenses of the group psyche.

The current incarnation of the collage and its commentary are intended to be open-ended, to serve the purpose of stimulating reflection and leading to more questions rather than easy answers. There are no underlying certainties or clear answers to the age-old, gaping human wounds opened once again by the current war in Ukraine.

And yet, how easy it is to be carried away by these imponderables! As Jungians we love to look for the possibility of transformation. Our core mantra of alchemical transformation is chanted even in the darkest moments when it seems as though our world is practicing the reverse alchemical art of turning gold into shit. Two more

colleagues subsequently weighed in on the collage and its notion of the archetypal defenses of the group spirit.

Former Senator Bill Bradley, whose prescient comments at the October 2020 “The Reality of Fragmentation and The Yearning for Healing” virtual conference ([https://aras.org/sites/default/files/docs/019Bradley\\_o.pdf](https://aras.org/sites/default/files/docs/019Bradley_o.pdf)), had the following to say as a way of grounding my intuitive tendency to take flight in the symbolic.

“Thanks for your very illuminating article. I find your analysis of the group spirit and group defenses right on target. It explains why the Russians believe the propaganda. They are not working from facts but from memory and from something deeper--their collective psyche. And as we have seen the barbarity flows naturally from the defense of the “group spirit”. Really good. I find the formulation of the transformation from demonic to daimonic less convincing. Where for example is the evidence that the Ukrainians are manifesting the daimonic? And where does it lead if they are when we think of the carnage? While the double uroborus is a fascinating image I don’t see it playing out in this conflict. Finally where do the energies coming from the lowest chakra in the group psyche lead us in real life, in the conflict?”

Bill’s question about “where do the energies coming from the lowest chakra in group life lead us in real life, in the conflict” goes to the heart of the matter. At one level, we don’t know where this is all leading us, but at this moment it seems more likely that it leads to more death and destruction, to a possible stalemate, and another cold war. In other words, the group energies of the lowest chakra activated in this war may not lead anywhere, except to more of the same—at least in the near term.

But, as if to set the churning of the milk ocean in motion once again, I received a different response from Betty Teng almost at the same moment I received Bill's. Along with Jonathan Kopp, Betty and I co-produced the MindofState podcast for two seasons of inquiry into the relationship between psyche and polis or mind and state (<https://mindofstate.com/curriculum/>):

Betty wrote:

Thanks for sending me your paper -- ! As ever, your expansion of the frame for considering something so confounding as Russia's invasion of Ukraine to include not only the historical, but the mythological, the symbolic, and the cultural -- by addressing what threat and dominance means to Putin, to the Russians, and to the Ukrainians across time -- you give context to a conflict that has felt anachronistic and frankly, on Putin's part, hysterical.

Your collage juxtaposing Putin and Zelensky, and Russian and Ukrainian myths, symbols and images clearly illustrate the collective psychological roots of this war. You asked if this was "nuts" -- far, far from it. For me it *adds* sense to a nonsense and chaos amplified by the media's daily reportage. And the collage, along with reference to Kalsched's theory of how unconscious, vicious defenses get triggered when the traumatized feel attacked, explained Putin's Russian nationalist madness in terms I could understand and make use of. I'm of course an analyst, so this is my language, but having this opened up gave me room to consider clinical circumstances where a patient or an abusive mate attempts to destroy who or what they perceive to threaten their identity. Understanding how Ukraine came to symbolize all Putin wanted to cut off and destroy because it's success in the West poses a threat to his grandiose yet fragile sense of Russian sanctity -- these are dynamics that I and, I'm sure many colleagues, recognize.

What especially hooked me was your reference to Russia and Ukraine as demonic/daemonic forces locked in an inevitable circular conflict -- as represented by the double ouroboros and even the amazing image, "Gods and Demons Churning the Milk Ocean." It seems (and correct me if I'm off) that the Russia/Ukraine conflict, in exposing Putin as demonic and Zelensky as daemonic, leads the world into a new and different realm. As painful and horrific a convulsion as this is, setting off economic, social, political and even environmental ripple effects, what I get from what you said is that a way to consider this war is as a marker that we undergo a massive shift on many levels -- and the "churning of the milk ocean" driven by opposing forces is inevitable and necessary to progress through time, rather than remain stagnant, excruciating and sad as this conflict is.

I now hope I've made sense. Thanks again for sharing this -- by expanding my view, it afforded me more room to consider a heartbreaking conflict which threatens every day to collapse my mental space.

Yours,  
Betty

I shared Bill Bradley's response with Betty Teng and Betty's response with Bill (this virtual conversation growing into a round table?):

Betty had the following to say:

Hey Tom:

I think, interestingly, you have here a psyche / polis take on your paper.

For me, Bill -- very smartly and so thoughtfully -- seeks to ground the symbolism -- the daemonic, the opposites churning, the double ouroboros -- in something that can be seen and evidenced. While I agree with him that perhaps you could further illustrate how Zelensky and the Ukrainians exhibit the Daemonic under extreme annihilating pressure from the Demonic Putin, I also get where you are going and I require less evidence. Bill's and my stances are different -- what I am looking for through *psyche* is a way to make meaning of this chaos and you offer the mythological and the archetypal as ancient (time worn) ways to consider what resists organization -- and that helps me. Bill, as speaking from *polis*, is far more pragmatic and realistic. His compassion leads him not to want to step away or lighten the load of the destruction so we may see it in full. He does not want to be soothed. Meanwhile, I appreciate your sublimation as another way to hold it -- and bear this. It seems to me Bill can't abide making the unbearable bearable. He is not wrong -- Bill implies we in the US have the privilege of being able to think and make meaning and to symbolize -- and this is perhaps jarring against the hell and meaninglessness churning in Ukraine and infecting the globe. But from the perspective of treating trauma -- again from my *psyche* position -- symbolism and articulation have to be deployed to combat the brutish Hobbesian concrete thoughtlessness of power and subjugation. As you say, there is no way to know how this progresses -- as Robert Lifton often says, things are dark, but to consider how they turn can give us insight into where the openings are. We all must find our ways to sit with the terror of the unknown.

Thanks for including me in this dialogue.

Betty

It would be easy for this conversation about demonic/daimonic to turn into its own double ouroboros, going round and round in the question of when and how and if the demonic archetypal defenses of the group spirit might be related to in a way that they



become daimonic. But, there seems to be little debate among the colleagues who participated in this discussion that these defenses are real, that they are potent, and that they are raining down destruction on the people of Ukraine and the soldiers of Russia.

**Elucidating the reality of the archetypal defenses of the group spirit and their destructive potency is the central point of this paper.** I will let Betty Teng have the last word in this discussion about demonic/daimonic:

“Where does this all lead us? How does this alleviate suffering? Can we make sanitized theories and analogies about such baseness? I have a *polis* part in me that asks these questions. But the *psyche* in me seeks space, a container, a means to hold paradoxes, as noxious as they might be. It could also be my Buddhist underpinnings -- things rise in the world and so how do we accept them -- even the horrors and the wanton suffering -- as a part of reality, as they are? Your paper seeks to bridge the gap between the two, between *polis* and *psyche*, as it applies to the Russia / Ukraine war.”

Again, all of these different responses from colleagues point to the fact that this is a very unfinished work in progress and that its goal is to stimulate the *psyche* and the *polis* in each of us and to create enough mental space to reflect on many levels simultaneously. It is created in the spirit of Olga Tokarczuk who writes in *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*:

“It’s a good thing that God, if he exists, and even if he doesn’t, gives us a place where we can think in peace. Perhaps that’s the whole point of prayer—to think to yourself in peace, to want nothing, to ask for nothing, but simply to sort out your own mind. That should be enough.”

Perhaps, dear reader, you will have time “to sort out your own mind” on some of these themes and issues. You can submit your own collages and commentary on this topic to our Forum (aras.org/forum) or by email to [info@aras.org](mailto:info@aras.org).





**Key to New Collage:**

1. Nuclear Blast
2. Putin
3. Zelensky
4. “The Motherland Calls”, Russian statue honoring heroes of Battle of Stalingrad
5. Ukrainian Statue, Berehynia, celebrating independence of Ukraine in 1991
6. Coiled Serpents as archetypal defenses of the group spirit
7. Russian Moskva sunk
8. Destroyed Ukrainian building 2022
9. Dead Russian Soldier by Tank
10. Ukrainian family killed by mortar while fleeing

11. Bishop Kirill, Installation as Primate of Russian Orthodox Church 2009
12. Ukrainian Church Service honoring dead soldiers in war with Russia 2022
13. Siege of Leningrad by Nazis during World War 1940s
14. Bolshevik occupation of Ukraine in 1918
15. Gods and Demons Churning the Milk Ocean or Double Ouroboros