

The Desert

**Written by
Carl Gustav Jung**

**Translated By
Mark Kyburz, John Peck, and Sonu Shamdasani**

**An excerpt from
The Red Book, volume IV**

Apart from leaving out colourings, relevant numbers and footnotes from the original work, no alterations to the text have been made.

Questions of legality are unknown, but if anyone starts asking... the safest course of action is to deny everything and, when no one is looking, drop this paper into your local flaming dumpster at the first sign of trouble, if you are ever caught while in possession of a copy of this paper. Also, you should seriously consider buying the book:

<https://www.amazon.com/Red-Book-Readers-Philemon/dp/0393089088>

The Desert

Sixth night. My soul leads me into the desert, into the desert of my own self. I did not think that my soul is a desert, a barren, hot desert, dusty and without drink. The journey leads through hot sand, slowly wading without a visible goal to hope for? How eerie is this wasteland. It seems to me that the way leads so far away from mankind. I take my way step by step, and do not know how long my journey will last.

Why is my self a desert? Have I lived too much outside of myself in men and events? Why did I avoid my self? Was I not dear to myself? But I have avoided the place of my soul. I was my thoughts, after I was no longer events and other men. But I was not my self, confronted with my thoughts. I should also rise up above my thoughts to my own self. My journey goes there, and that is why it leads away from men and events into solitude. Is it solitude, to be with oneself? Solitude is true only when the self is a desert. Should I also make a garden out of the desert? Should I people a desolate land? Should I open the airy magic garden of the wilderness? What leads me into the desert, and what am I to do there? Is it a deception that I can no longer trust my thoughts? Only life is true, and only life leads me into the desert, truly not my thinking, that would like to return to thoughts, to men and events, since it feels uncanny in the desert. My soul, what am I to do here? But my soul spoke to me and said, "Wait." I heard the cruel word. Torment belongs to the desert. I think of Christianity in the desert. Physically, those ancients went into the desert. Did they also enter into the desert of their own self? Or was their self not as barren and desolate as mine? There they wrestled with the devil. I wrestle with waiting. It seems to me not less since it is truly a hot hell.

Through giving my soul all I could give, I came to the place of the soul and found that this place was a hot desert, desolate and unfruitful. No culture of the mind is enough to make a garden out of your soul. I had cultivated my spirit, the spirit of this time in me, but not that spirit of the depths that turns to the things of the soul, the world of the soul. The soul has its own peculiar world. Only the self enters in there, or the man who has completely become his self, he who is neither in events, nor in men, nor in his thoughts. Through the turning of my desire from things to men, I turned my self away from things and men, but that is precisely how I became the secure prey of my thoughts, yes, I wholly became my thoughts.

I also had to detach myself from my thoughts through turning my desire away from them. And at once, I noticed that my self became a desert, where only the sun of unquiet desire burns. I

was overwhelmed by the endless infertility of this desert. Even if something could have thrived there, the creative power of desire was still absent. Wherever the creative power of desire is, there springs the soil's own seed. But do not forget to wait. Did you not see that when your creative force turned to the world, how the dead things moved under it and through it, how they grew and prospered, and how your thoughts flowed in rich rivers? If your creative force now turns to the place of the soul, you will see how your soul becomes green and how its field bears wonderful fruit.

Nobody can spare themselves the waiting and most will be unable to bear this torment, but will throw themselves with greed back at men, things, and thoughts, whose slaves they will become from then on. Since then it will have been clearly proved that this man is incapable of enduring beyond things, men, and thoughts, and they will hence become his master and he will become their fool, since he cannot be without them, not until even his soul has become a fruitful field. Also he whose soul is a garden, needs things, men, and thoughts, but he is their friend and not their slave and fool.

Everything to come was already in images: to find their soul, the ancients went into the desert. This is an image. The ancients lived their symbols, since the world had not yet become real for them. Thus they went into the solitude of the desert to teach us that the place of the soul is a lonely desert. There they found the abundance of visions, the fruits of the desert, the wondrous flowers of the soul. Think diligently about the images that the ancients have left behind. They show the way of what is to come. Look back at the collapse of empires, of growth and death, of the desert and monasteries, they are the images of what is to come. Everything has been foretold. But who knows how to interpret it?

When you say that the place of the soul is not, then it is not. But if you say that it is, then it is. Notice what the ancients said in images: the word is a creative act. The ancients said: in the beginning was the Word. Consider this and think upon it.

The words that oscillate between nonsense and supreme meaning are the oldest and truest.