By Howard Petote Post # 6 October 20, 2016

Tales From An Ancient Sea

Logan Pass, Glacier National Park, September 2016:

Ice water raced down the upper ledges in noisy rivulets, cascading off drops and bisecting meadows before hissing past the stony trail. Hikers climbed the slope above, diminishing into dots as clouds swept overhead, sporadically swallowing them and the black masses of rock that towered nearby. Just as I reached the overlook, sleet sprang from the frigid wind, stinging my face and dashing whatever view remained of Hidden Lake. A small knot of nature lovers—including my wife Melanie, my cousin Lois and her husband Fred—lingered as white pellets collided with raingear, sweaters, and a pair of calf-length tights. After a hurried lunch, I stood alone at the overlook rail—disappointed that this would probably be the extent of our hike—when I heard a stranger's voice call out, "Howard, is that you?" The middle-aged woman, her hood buttoned up tight about her head, walked toward me as I stared and said, "I was told you could tell me about the rocks."

Watching the TV show Jeopardy some time ago, the smart contestants knocked down the questions with ease until they were

forced to pick the last category standing—geology. The first question came up—a very simple question, and there was dead silence. I had to laugh as I gave the answer out loud. Geology, as a topic of conversation or study, doesn't usually generate a lot of excitement in our culture—obsessed as it is with sport and movie stars, the rich and famous, or the instant fix of social media. But there are fans, and the curious lady wanted to know—what are these rocks, where did they come from, how did this happen? Her curiosity, no doubt inspired by the stunning beauty of our surroundings, was understandable, but could she be expressing something deeper?

As a boy I was captivated by stones. I still remember the day, at age six perhaps, when I discovered that a plain, grey rock I plucked from my mom's garden held thousands of glittering quartz crystals. From then on I collected stones wherever I went, occasionally finding fossils in them, which only reinforced what I instinctively knew—that they are windows into other worlds. I studied geology and natural history, climbed mountains and cliff faces, explored caves, and eventually found myself out west, wandering among its dramatic deserts and mountain ranges. I sometimes wondered about this attraction, especially the passion I had for it as a youth. I knew early cultures had a sacred and magical connection to stone, and of modern mankind's admiration (and often obsession) for gems and

precious metals. But it wasn't until I studied Carl Jung's theories that I discovered something amazing. The Swiss intellect studied human nature on both a cultural and individual level, finding a shared history of reoccurring patterns or themes—no matter how separate or distinct one culture was from another. These patterns are symbolically expressed in our stories, songs, arts, architecture, and religions. In his studies of the human mind, he found these same patterns exist in the individual's unconscious mind, or psyche—manifesting themselves in dreams during our sleep, and in tendencies of behavior and thought while we are conscious. These elemental patterns he called the archetypes, and their universal nature he termed the collective unconscious. One of the major archetypes is that of The Self. It symbolizes our truest nature, and it always strives for wholeness and balance. It often reveals itself as a wise man or woman, a circle like a yin and yang or mandala, or in our fascination with stones. According to Jung, it is the eternal nature of stone, the perfect order and beauty of a crystal, the awesome presence of a mountain—and more abstractly, its union of matter and spirit—that we admire and associate with a yearning to be complete, to be in harmony with ourselves and the world.

Past the overlook rail, Hidden Lake floated in a ghostly abyss—the wind had shed its load of ice, but continued to assail the pass with its haunted, frantic sighs. The woman and I huddled close, and I

explained what I knew about these mountains. I told her how ancient sea bed and shoreline deposits to the west were compressed and turned into rock, and the incredible amount of time and energy it then took for those layers to be bent and folded upward. Under the largest fold, now leaning almost perpendicular, a massive fault developed—allowing an immense block of earth to slide eastward—shoving older rock atop younger in an epic collision now frozen in these mountain walls. She listened patiently to my butchered story, but when I told her to look on the trail for fossilized ripple marks, mud cracks, and raindrops—formed on a desolate seacoast a billion years ago—she turned to me and smiled.

For pictures, see the image gallery.