

The Inner Journey Through the Unconscious and the Process of Self-Realization

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Abstract

This essay is an exposition of the inner journey through the unconscious and the process of self-realization. The sections in this essay are: the inner journey, the hero's journey, the psyche, the call, dark night of the soul, dream symbols, individuation, the Self, synchronicity and Self-realization.

The Inner Journey

The inner journey is a journey through our unconscious psyche. It is a voyage of self-discovery and self-transformation. The unconscious is revealed, examined and assimilated through dream interpretation or forms of active imagination, writing poetry or producing artwork etc. As we bring our unconscious into consciousness we are integrating our shadow which contains unknown or repressed aspects of ourselves. This is a process of self-realization and personality development with the goal of becoming a whole person. This is also known as individuation. Individuation is the process of becoming a whole unique individual.

The Hero's Journey

The unconscious will use any medium available to express itself, relate to our conscious ego and bring itself into consciousness. Myth is a medium used by the unconscious for this purpose. It provides us with a cultural context by which we can relate to the symbolism and structure of our individual dreams and thus give meaning to our dreams. 'Myths are public dreams, dreams are private myths' (Joseph Campbell). Joseph Campbell described the *inner journey* as the *hero's journey* in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Campbell was a comparative mythologist who after extensive study of world mythologies came to the understanding that numerous myths have a common underlying structure which he termed monomyth: 'A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man' (Campbell, 1949, p. 30). The mysterious adventure is the hero's inner journey through his or her own psyche.

The Psyche

The psyche is a system of interrelated parts. Individuation is the process of bringing these parts into consciousness and integrating them to achieve wholeness and maturity. An integrated and balanced mind is desirable for optimum psychological functioning and enhanced cognition. And when the lower mind or human personality has been brought into consciousness one is elevated into higher consciousness.

Ego-consciousness or I-consciousness is our conscious mind and personal aspect of the psyche. Ego-consciousness is our self-awareness and contains all that is conscious in our personality with the ego as its centre who is the subject and will of conscious life. We identify ourselves with our ego-consciousness and what we are conscious of ourselves to be. As we go through life and progress in the process of self-realization our identity, and therefore ego-consciousness, is continually changing: I and mother are one, I am John, I am my body, I am my mind, I am consciousness, I am energy.

The persona is the mask we present to the world and the identity we developed through the process of imitation, socialization, genderization and role modelling to achieve adaptation with the collective. It is formed around the accepted norms and values of our culture and environment and is built upon our ego-consciousness which is characterized by our strongest psychological functions of consciousness and our defining attitude of introversion or extraversion.

We have four cognitive functions of consciousness: thinking, feeling, sensing and intuition. We have a primary function, an auxiliary function, a tertiary function and an inferior function. For example, I am an INTJ. My primary function of consciousness is intuition, my auxiliary is thinking, my tertiary is feeling and my inferior function is sensation. I am logical and rational and used to identify myself exclusively as being a thinker and this facilitated my adaptation to the external world by my becoming an engineer. However, as we progress in the process of individuation our personality and cognition become more balanced. My thinking is now complemented with feeling.

Our inferior, incompatible and immoral characteristics which conflict with our perceived ideal image (persona) are repressed to form a shadow, although our shadow can also contain unrecognised positive qualities. Our shadow is unconscious and it takes considerable moral effort to bring it into consciousness but when we realise that everyone has a darkside there is nothing to be ashamed of. We all have our strengths and weaknesses. Everyone feels fear and everyone is selfish. And we've all did and thought things we aren't proud of. Our conscious mind is a fraction of our psyche and the vast remainder is unconscious.

Our unconscious has a personal, collective and universal layer. The personal unconscious is specific to the individual and contains unconscious personal traits and experiences. The collective unconscious is the collective layer of the unconscious that all mankind has in common. It is comprised of elements of the psyche (archetypes) which are represented by archetypal images (symbols) in dreams, myths and other forms of creative expression. Archetypes are constituent parts of the psyche and innate ideas which provide the foundation of our thinking and perception. They include the anima, animus, Great Man, Great Woman, child, id, and the Self. The universal unconscious is the deepest transcendental layer of the collective unconscious and is universal.

The Call

'The actual process of individuation – the conscious coming-to-terms with one's own inner centre (psychic nucleus) or Self – generally begins with a wounding of the personality and the suffering that accompanies it. This initial shock amounts to a sort of "call," although it is not often recognized as such. On the contrary, the ego feels hampered in its will or its desire and usually projects the obstruction onto something external. That is, the ego accuses God or the economic situation or the boss or the marriage partner of being responsible for whatever is obstructing it. Or perhaps everything seems outwardly alright, but beneath the surface a person is suffering from a deadly boredom that makes everything seem meaningless and empty. Many myths and fairy tales symbolically describe this initial stage in the process of individuation by telling of a king who has fallen ill or grown old' (von Franz, 1964, p. 169).

The midlife crisis is a call to the inner journey, individuation and self-transformation. The inner journey is preceded by an outbreak of neurosis and the dissolution of the persona. Energy or libido is withdrawn from external aims and activities when a person no longer feels they can function in the world as they are, cannot see any way forward in life or life has become meaningless. The conflict, dissociation and depression experienced by the individual may be representative of the one-sidedness and disharmony of culture in general, and is more deeply felt by people who are less able to conform to a materialistic society that excludes and denies our transpersonal identity and lives by a persona myth only: get a job, become your job, make

money, marry, produce children and then die without knowing who you really are or what your life meant and leave a legacy of destruction on the planet for your children to enjoy.

‘There are vast masses of the population who, despite their notorious unconsciousness, never get anywhere near a neurosis. The few who are smitten by such a fate are really persons of the “higher” type who, for one reason or another, have remained too long on a primitive level. Their nature does not in the long run tolerate persistence in what is for them an unnatural torpor. As a result of their narrow conscious outlook and their cramped existence they save energy; bit by bit it accumulates in the unconscious and finally explodes in the form of a more or less acute neurosis’ (Jung, 1935, para. 291).

Dark Night of the Soul

Carl Jung referred to such a crisis as the *night sea journey*. The *night sea journey* is ‘An archetypal motif in mythology, psychologically associated with depression and the loss of energy characteristic of neurosis...Mythologically, the night sea journey motif usually involves being swallowed by a dragon or sea monster...In the language of the mystics it is the dark night of the soul. Jung interpreted such legends symbolically, as illustrations of the regressive movement of energy in an outbreak of neurosis and its potential progression’ (Sharp, 1991, p. 90). This is characterised by the withdrawal of libido from external drive when the conscious attitude collapses and a person’s energy is directed inwardly to seek a resolution.

‘A collapse of the conscious attitude is no small matter. It always feels like the end of the world, as though everything had tumbled back into original chaos. One feels delivered up, disoriented, like a rudderless ship that is abandoned to the moods of the elements. So at least it seems. In reality, however, one has fallen back upon the collective unconscious, which now takes over the leadership. We could multiply examples of cases where, at the critical moment, a “saving” thought, a vision, an “inner voice,” [a dream] came with an irresistible power of conviction and gave life a new direction’ (Jung, 1935, para. 254).

‘The moment of irruption can...be very sudden, so that consciousness is instantaneously flooded with extremely strange and apparently quite unsuspected contents. That is how it looks to the layman and even to the person concerned, but the experienced observer knows that psychological events are never sudden. In reality the eruption has been preparing for many years, often for half a lifetime, and already in childhood all sorts of remarkable signs could have been detected which, in more or less symbolic fashion, hinted at abnormal future developments’ (Jung, 1935, para. 270).

Dream Symbols

The shadow represents unknown or repressed qualities of our personality and usually appears as a man in men’s dreams and a woman in women’s dreams. The anima represents the feminine side of a person and is associated with feeling and intuition. The animus represents the masculine side of a person and is associated with thinking and sensation. The anima is a female figure and the animus is a male figure. When the tertiary function of consciousness is coming into consciousness the anima or animus will appear and one is initiated into the process of individuation. The initiation dream may be in the form of a disastrous journey or dreaded impasse in which our conscious mind, in the form of a ship or vehicle of some kind, cannot take us any further. Our ego-consciousness is undermined and our unconscious comes to the rescue with guidance which enables us to resume our journey and move forward again.

The anima and animus are also messengers who convey communications and wisdom from our unconscious. The unconscious in this context being our unconscious mind and is commonly known as our inner wisdom, inner guru or Higher Power and appear in dreams as a Great Man or Great Woman we hold in high esteem. When the anima or animus has been sufficiently integrated the Great Man or Great Woman will follow. The Great Man is a sublime

patriarchal figure and the Great Woman is a sublime matriarchal figure. They are awe-inspiring and invoke our father and mother instincts. The conscious mind comes under the spell of the Great Man and Great Woman and submits willingly to the wisdom and guidance of the unconscious which leads to a union of ego-consciousness with the unconscious. The inner guru will then guide a person to self-realization.

This is represented by the child archetype which symbolizes an integrated personality with four differentiated cognitive functions of consciousness (thinking, feeling, sensing and intuition).¹ The child also represents the union of ego-consciousness with the unconscious. The union of the unconscious with ego-consciousness is not to be sought prematurely however, as the ego will be susceptible to identifying with the unconscious which is a collective component and transpersonal aspect of the psyche.

Identification with the unconscious causes inflation of the personality and in some cases has produced permanent psychosis. A healthy, mature and developed ego-consciousness with a strong personal identity will recover from a union with the unconscious, regaining its personal identity, and work in conjunction with the unconscious. The unconscious also carries a shadow and must also be integrated to achieve wholeness. The collective shadow is our repressed emotional nature, impulses and desires which come from the id. The id is the source of instinctual impulses and appears as an animal in dreams.

The Self is the transcendental centre of the unconscious and is our essence. Symbols of the Self include the sun, fire, sky and water. The Self will appear in our dreams when we have achieved a union with our unconscious. As our identity shifts to the Self we transcend the lower mind and achieve higher consciousness. That is to say, we no longer identify with our thoughts, feelings and sensations. We are the awareness of our thoughts feelings and sensations. We are awareness. We are consciousness. Further integration of the unconscious through the inner journey produces an 'individual' with an integrated personality who is one with Nature and is directed from within. Becoming a whole unique transcended person is the goal but the journey never ends, we are always becoming and discovering.

Individuation

'Every advance in culture is, psychologically, an extension of consciousness, a coming to consciousness that can take place only through discrimination. Therefore an advance always begins with individuation, that is to say with the individual, conscious of his isolation, cutting a new path through hitherto untrodden territory. To do this he must first return to the fundamental facts of his own being, irrespective of all authority and tradition, and allow himself to become conscious of his distinctiveness. If he succeeds in giving collective validity to his widened consciousness, he creates a tension of opposites that provides the stimulation which culture needs for its further progress' (Jung, 1928, para. 111).

Individuation² marks a departure from a person's drive to develop and differentiate their strongest psychological functions and form their persona to achieve specialization in the first half of life. It is a drive for selfhood and wholeness in the personality and a giving up of our old persona identity, which we formed to become a utility and function for the collective, and integrate the unconscious aspects of ourselves contained in our shadow which we identify in others through projection. It is a shift in adaptation from the external world, collective values

¹ At the most advanced level of integration the ego will be able to orient between eight function-attitudes of consciousness at will.

² More specifically, this is the centring / integration stage of individuation which is the third stage of individuation, using Eric Neumann's paradigm, and occurs in the second half of life. The first and second stages occurring in the first half of life are the containment nurturance stage (childhood) and the adapting and adjusting stage (adulthood).

and cultural consciousness to our inner world and the unconscious. The *hero's journey* is an archetypal story describing the process of individuation. This process is the ego's confrontation and assimilation of the unconscious, leading to an unfolding and integration of the whole unique personality to form a synthesis of opposites in the psyche - with the Self as the transcendent and unifying centre - of which the ego becomes a part of the whole.

Individuation is a psychic metamorphosis that expands our ego-consciousness by integrating our shadow and shifts our perceived centre of the psyche from the ego to the Self which is the centre of the unconscious and the regulating core of the psyche. The Self is the psyche's transcendental inner sun and Source of subtle energy and is our essence. This shift is experienced as a Copernican revolution within the psyche and is a quickening of maturation and widening of consciousness. The ego loses its perceived centrality within the psyche while remaining the centre of consciousness and becomes an integrated ego-consciousness with four differentiated functions of consciousness. Ego-consciousness takes its place as a satellite of the unconscious whose centre is the Self which is the true centre of the psyche. A centred and integrated personality is now informed and directed from within.

The Self

'God is an intelligible sphere - a sphere known to mind, not to the senses - whose center is everywhere and whose circumference nowhere' (Campbell, 1988). The Self is the transpersonal centre of our psyche, and the transpersonal centre of every psyche: the *Ground of all Being*. True Brotherhood comes from this intuitive awareness that the core of our being is the transcendental core of all mankind. This awareness pierces through uniqueness and differences of race, colour, creed, class, gender, sexuality etc. and into the very heart of a person, and all beings! This is the principle of unity that underlies all creation. Oneness and diversity can be experienced without contradiction. The Self is our essence and is our energy. Our essence is an energy field which is part of a Universal Energy Field.

Synchronicity

The Universal Energy Field pervades the cosmos and connects all things. How do we know this Universal Field? By its effects. Gravity is analogous to the Universal Field in that it is also an invisible force which we know by its effects. We can't observe gravity directly with the senses but we can observe how matter is effected by it: what goes up must come down, the ocean's tides, the orbits of the planets etc. So what are the effects of the Universal Field? Synchronicity is an effect produced by the Universal Field. Synchronicities are meaningful coincidences. It is the significance of these coincidences for the person experiencing them which makes them meaningful.

Synchronicities appear to be unrelated but are actually connected by the principle of the Universal Energy Field which permeates the universe and connects all things. The energy dimension is operating at a higher frequency than the material universe and is outside the range of the ordinary human senses but is known by our sixth sense (intuition) which is repressed and undeveloped in modern people.

There is no separation in the energy dimension. This is the realm of the unseen: subtle reality: energy: consciousness. Space is the metaphysical or immaterial aspect of a single entity we call the universe. Objects and people only appear to be separated by space, a person is not encapsulated in a physical body and mental processes are not confined within the human brain. Our fields extend beyond our physical bodies. Our minds are interacting subconsciously and nonlocally which give rise to synchronistic experiences. *Everything is connected by the Universal Field.*

Self-realization

The Universal Energy Field is Universal Consciousness. Our brain is the physical and impermanent aspect of the psyche and our energy is the transcendental and eternal aspect of the psyche. The brain does not produce consciousness. The brain is a function of consciousness giving us a temporal experience. We 'are' consciousness. We are an energy form having a human experience. Our consciousness is an aspect of Universal Consciousness.

Universal Consciousness is the Self. The Self is our transpersonal identity. Self-realization occurs when we overcome our anxiety and illusion of 'the other.' When one achieves Self-realization one's individual ego-consciousness joins with the Self and becomes part of the collective. One mind becomes part of the Universal Mind. We are all One. As Self-realized and aware individuals, we experience oneness in a differentiated unity. Objects and people are clearly differentiated but are all part of the Self. The bliss of being we experienced unconsciously in our infancy is experienced consciously in adulthood.

When we achieve Self-realization we don't lose ourselves in the collective. We retain our individual identity and personal agency. We lose our separation from people. We gain greater empathy for people. We enjoy greater intimacy and enhanced relations with people. We are children of the Universe.

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