

# Chapter One

## JUNG AND THE DISCOVERY OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

Excerpted from

### Hidden Wisdom

A Guide to the Western Inner Traditions

Richard Smoley and Jay Kinney

Psychology is an infant science. Although reflections on human nature can be found as far back as the written record goes, the scientific investigation of the mind goes back scarcely more than a century; indeed, many date its inception to the publication of Sigmund Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900.

Freud's great insight, discussed first in this book and elaborated in his later writings, was actually the discovery of what we don't know: the subconscious, that great unfathomed area of the mind that contains fears, hopes, longings, and terrors so deep that we live in complete ignorance of them. Freud regarded the subconscious as the region of primal desires—principally sexual desires—that the conscious mind has deemed unacceptable and chosen to repress. For the rest of his long career, he would attempt to unearth the mysteries of this nether region as they were disclosed in dreams, jokes, and slips of the tongue.

It would be hard to overstate the importance of Freud's discovery; much of twentieth-century thought would have been impossible without it. But Freud's views had been in circulation only a short while when other psychiatrists, including some of his own pupils, began to find fault with them. One of the chief issues had to do with spirituality.

Freud had little patience with religious manifestations of any sort. He regarded mystical experience, with its sense of merging with a greater whole, as an unconscious attempt to recapture the "oceanic" quality of the infantile state, when the individual does not yet see himself as an "I" distinct from the rest of the world. Freud also mistrusted religion, seeing it as the result of a repressed libido or sex drive.

For some of his associates, this view failed to do justice either to the richness of religious experience or to the heights of human spiritual aspiration. Foremost of those who took issue with Freud on this score was Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), a Swiss psychiatrist who had long been fascinated by the occult (he wrote his dissertation on psychic phenomena).<sup>1</sup> Jung became interested in Freud's ideas and finally met him in 1907. The two men rapidly became close friends, and at one point Freud even seemed to be grooming Jung to be his successor as leader of the psychoanalytic movement. After several years, however, Freud and Jung began to grow apart. Though personal issues

contributed to their estrangement, they had also begun to differ on their views of the psyche, especially the unconscious.

## THE DISCOVERY OF THE ARCHETYPES

Jung spent most of the first decade of the twentieth century as staff psychiatrist of the Burghölzli, a respected Swiss mental hospital. His clinical work there with psychotic and schizophrenic patients led him to make an odd observation. He found that their fantasies and delusions often bore a striking resemblance to ancient myths—even when there was no way they could have read or heard of those myths.

One celebrated case involved a patient diagnosed with paranoid dementia. In Jung's description, "The patient sees in the sun an 'upright tail' similar to an erected penis. When he moves his head back and forth, then, too, the sun's penis sways back and forth in a like manner, and out of that the wind arises."

To most people, this weird delusion might seem meaningless. Not to Jung. He noticed that it resembled a text from the Mithra cult, a mystery religion that flourished in the late Roman Empire. The text reads, "In like manner the so-called tube, the origin of the ministering wind, will become visible. For it will appear to you as a tube hanging down from the sun."<sup>2</sup>

How could this coincidence be explained? The patient was hardly likely to have read the text, since institutionalized psychotics rarely keep abreast of classical scholarship; besides, the man had been admitted to the asylum years before the document was published.<sup>3</sup> To explain this case, and others like it, Jung posited an unconscious layer of the mind that is more than a mere collection of repressed desires. It is common to all humankind and, he felt, serves as a repository not only for the images of our dreams, fantasies, and hallucinations, but also for the universal symbols of myth and religion. Jung would come to call this realm the *collective unconscious*. The symbols themselves were produced by forces he called *archetypes*.

Like Freud, Jung gave central importance to the role of unconscious drives or instincts in the human psyche. Whereas Freud thought these could for the most part be traced to the sex drive, however, Jung considered such a view too simplistic. In addition to the ordinary instincts designed to preserve self and species, Jung came to see another, even more important drive: the drive toward self-realization. He understood the archetypes as forces that urge us, sometimes gently, sometimes harshly, toward this greater wholeness.

Today, books and magazines are full of talk about "self-realization" and "greater wholeness." But the more one looks into these ideas, the more elusive they seem. What is the "self" that I'm supposed to realize? Does it exist already, or do I make it up as I go along? For that matter, how does it differ from the "I" that I am now? Such questions cut to the heart of Jung's psychology. They also show why his ideas have found their way into discussions of esoteric and mystical traditions.

Most forms of psychotherapy have one chief aim: to resolve various kinds of problems—depression, anxiety, sexual or emotional dysfunction—and help people live more balanced lives. There is nothing wrong with this goal, but it does not address the ultimate meaning of human existence. Jung believed that unless one faces this question, particularly in the second half of life, one cannot, in the deepest sense, be sane or healthy.

Why? Because the ordinary street-level self, the “I” that goes to work and pays the bills and watches TV, is not the whole self.

## THE EGO AND THE SELF

Jung distinguished what he called the *ego*, the conscious “I” that we normally identify with, from the *Self* which is the center of our being, conscious and unconscious, and which of course is much larger than the ego. Jung’s pupil Marie-Louise von Franz likened the Self to the center of an enormous dark sphere, with the conscious ego as only a small patch of light on the surface.<sup>4</sup> Most modern people lack any means of extending this patch of light so that it illuminates more of the whole, and this disconnection from our own deepest being accounts for the anomie that troubles our lives.

Jung also tells us, however, that this dissociation is not complete. The archetypes leak through the porous barriers of consciousness in various forms, especially through dreams. Working with dream images can thus help bring the hidden treasures of the unconscious to light.

In Jung’s view, dreams have two basic functions. In the first place, they show what’s going on in the unconscious. As we grow, change, and adjust to the storms and stresses of daily life, the unconscious must make adjustments of its own. These adjustments are reflected in our dreams, which in their strange, allusive language, with its peculiarly logical illogic, serve as a kind of seismograph, indicating the shifts and movements of the psyche.

Often the unconscious seems entirely capable of regulating our psychic equilibrium without any help from the conscious ego. But this isn’t always true, a fact that leads to the second function of dreams: the ego is just as much a part of our nature as anything else, and it too has to be brought into the picture. Sometimes it even has to be told where it’s off base. This probably explains those dreams whose meaning is all too clear, even to the rational mind. Jung cites an amusing example:

There was . . . a lady who was well known for her stupid prejudices and her stubborn resistance to reasoned argument. One could have argued with her all night to no effect; she would have taken not the slightest notice. Her dreams, however, took a different line of approach. One night, she dreamed she was attending an important social occasion. She was greeted by the hostess with the words: “How nice that you could come. All your friends are here, and they are waiting for you.” The hostess then led her to the door and opened it, and the dreamer stepped through—into a cowshed!<sup>5</sup>

Clearly the unconscious has a vested interest in communicating with the street-level ego, which has the choice of accepting or refusing the insights offered. But what about the ego? Is it in its turn interested in listening to and speaking to the unconscious?

Usually it isn’t. We are, of course, occasionally disturbed by nightmares or warned away from disaster by some premonitory dream. But in most cases the ego and the unconscious are dissociated from each other, like two completely separate people who rent out different stories of the same building. This is the predicament of modern humanity, which has worked so hard to reinforce the conscious mind at the expense of

older, more primitive (but more vital) dimensions. Overcoming this split requires tremendous courage and effort, but only if we do overcome it will we find richness and fulfillment in life. Forging a conscious relationship with the Self is known as *individuation*. It is the goal of Jungian analysis.

## ACTIVE IMAGINATION

How does individuation take place? How does one introduce the ego to the unconscious? As we've seen, the barrier between these two aspects of the psyche is permeable. It is more open in sleep, for example, when mental activity is occupied by dreams, and it tends to be more closed when exposed to the bright light of daytime consciousness.

Yet even when we're awake, the barrier is occasionally let down a bit. This can happen spontaneously during times of emotional crisis or depression; Jung called this state the *abaissement du niveau mental*, or "lowering of the mental level."<sup>6</sup> It is the "dark night of the soul" mentioned by the Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross, the "dark wood" in which Dante finds himself lost at the opening of his *Inferno*. In deeply disturbed cases, like the patient who saw the tube coming out of the sun, this "lowering" is often more or less permanent, allowing unconscious elements to leak through all the time.

Jung evolved his own way of "lowering the mental level" of the psyche during his sessions with patients. He called it active imagination and described it as

a method . . . of introspection for observing the stream of interior images. One concentrates one's attention on some impressive but unintelligible dream-image; or on a spontaneous visual impression, and observes the changes taking place in it. Meanwhile, of course, all criticism must be suspended and the happenings observed and noted with absolute objectivity. Obviously, too, the objection that the whole thing is "arbitrary" and "thought up" must be set aside, since it springs from the anxiety of an ego-consciousness which brooks no master besides itself in its own house.<sup>7</sup>

Active imagination is the chief "meditative practice" of Jungian psychology; indeed Jung was probably thinking of this technique when he urged that Western man "remain true to himself and develop out of his own nature all that the East has brought forth from its inner being"<sup>8</sup>

How does it work? Usually the patient brings in a recent dream, or sometimes a daydream. Then, under the analyst's guidance, he or she is encouraged to take a character or symbol from the dream and work with it in the way described above. Sometimes several dream images or characters are imagined together and allowed to interact in the arena of the patient's imagination. In other cases, say where a dream has ended at a particularly critical or dramatic point, the patient will use active imagination to continue the dream and try to resolve the issues it presents.

Working with an analyst in this fashion over a course of time (usually several years), patients often find that the symbols in their dreams and fantasies change remarkably. Working with many clients over his career, Jung began to find some similarities in the ways their inner lives were changed by exploring the unconscious.

Although he always stressed the importance of individual differences, he was eventually able to draw a general portrait of the process of individuation as it happens to most people.

Individuation requires us to face the archetypes that lie hidden below the threshold of conscious thought, as well as the *complexes*, the bundle of emotionally charged individual associations in which the archetypes are wrapped. In his writings, Jung describes a number of common archetypes including the trickster, the hero, and the wise old man. But individuation can be seen primarily as an encounter with three archetypes: the shadow, the anima/animus, and the Self.

## THE SHADOW KNOWS

A radio show in the 1940s used to ask: “Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows.” This is not far from Jung’s view. “The shadow coincides with the ‘personal’ unconscious (which corresponds to Freud’s conception of the unconscious),” he writes. “The shadow personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself and yet is thrusting itself upon him directly or indirectly”<sup>9</sup>

As Jung points out, the realm of the shadow is the area where his psychology most resembles Freud’s. Much of Freud’s psychology had to do with repressed drives—desires or aversions that the conscious mind cannot accept and must push into the background. But as both Freud and Jung understood, these urges are usually only imperfectly concealed. They “thrust themselves” upon us in various forms, ranging from jokes and slips of the tongue to dreams and phobias. Or, as Jung would say, we may, *project* them onto somebody else. *Projection* is Jung’s term for that uneasy compromise whereby one sees one’s own faults in others but not in oneself.

Because the shadow consists of precisely those things we don’t want to admit about ourselves, it’s particularly susceptible to projection. Hence Jung’s metaphor: the shadow is the dark image that we cast onto others. We all project our shadows as individuals upon other individuals, but Jung also saw this as a collective phenomenon, something to which nations, races, and various social subgroups can succumb. Here the results are disastrous. Of the Third Reich, Jung wrote:

This spectacle recalls the figure of what Nietzsche so aptly calls the “pale criminal,” who in reality shows all the signs of hysteria. He simply will not and cannot admit that he is what he is; he cannot endure his own guilt, just as he could not help incurring it. He will stoop to every kind of self-deception if only he can escape the sight of himself . . . . A feeling of inferiority . . . can easily lead to an hysterical dissociation of the personality, which consists essentially in one hand not knowing what the other is doing, in wanting to jump over one’s shadow, and in looking for everything dark, inferior, and culpable *in others*.<sup>10</sup>

This is a good description of shadow projection on the collective level. The remedy, however, is more easily described than carried out: one must recognize these forces in oneself and see them clearly, without yielding to them: “It is everybody’s allotted fate to become conscious of and learn to deal with this shadow.”<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, this mandate is still harder to fulfill on a group level, where even comparatively sane

people can be overcome by the spirit of the mob. Hence Jung tended to mistrust collective efforts and instead held out more hope for individual transformation. It was no coincidence that he called his method of development “individuation.”

Yet the shadow cannot be equated solely with evil. It simply consists of what we can’t accept about ourselves; thus its contents, however terrifying they may appear to us personally, are from an objective point of view often quite innocent, and may even include positive qualities that for one reason or another we can’t admit we have.

## THE OTHER SEX WITHIN

Having encountered the shadow—and Jungians stress that this encounter will continue throughout our lives—the individual may then find another archetype lurking behind it. “In the unconscious of every man there is hidden a feminine personality, and in that of every woman a masculine personality,” Jung wrote.<sup>12</sup> To the female aspect of a man he gave the name *anima*; the male aspect of a woman he called the *animus*.

The anima figure often appears as a man’s ideal woman. At one extreme, she may reflect his highest aspirations, as Beatrice did for Dante; or, at the other, she may appear as the embodiment of carnality or debauchery. The anima, like the unconscious in general, tends to compensate for overdeveloped features of the consciousness; the anima of a man who is too rational and controlled may look like a slattern or a whore.

The anima can and does appear in dreams, but she is also projected onto flesh-and-blood women, in a process commonly known as falling in love. Both literature and popular culture furnish examples of disastrous anima projections: the tormented love of the medical student Philip Carey for the vulgar Mildred Rogers in W. Somerset Maugham’s *Of Human Bondage*; the tyrannical schoolteacher in Josef von Sternberg’s film *The Blue Angel* who succumbs to the charms of a cabaret singer; and more recent examples in films like *Something Wild* and *Desperately Seeking Susan*.

No matter what form the anima takes, she always has the same characteristic: she is not quite human. She remains an abstraction. When a man projects his anima onto a real woman, what he loves is (at least initially) not the woman herself but his own idealized feminine self. Thus he sets the stage for disillusionment. Marcel Proust’s character Charles Swann, the unhappy lover of the courtesan Odette, sums it up well when he cries, “To think that I wasted years of my life, that I wanted to die, that I had my greatest love for a woman who didn’t appeal to me, who wasn’t my type!”

Exactly the same thing happens to women. The animus may appear as a dream lover, the knight in shining armor, or in a darker guise, like Tennessee Williams’s Stanley Kowalski. Again there is the same disjunction between ideal and reality, with the same disappointment. The truth, when recognized, casts the relationship into doubt; the lover may be discarded, and a fresher screen for fantasies may be sought in someone else. If not, and if there is enough substance to their bond, the partners face the intricate task of disengaging the real people from the projections of the anima and animus. Jungians generally regard this as the passing of a relationship from infatuation to mature, stable love.

Male and female, conscious and unconscious, darkness and light: such polarities form the dominant theme of the way of individuation. On paper they look innocuous enough, but as experienced in one’s own life, they are anything but easy or comfortable.

More than most thinkers, Jung understood the radical conflicts that lie in every human being, as well as the suffering they cause. He saw the remedy not in the suppression or conquest of one element by another, but in their reconciliation in a *coniunctio oppositorum*, “the conjunction of opposites”—a type of “mystical marriage.”

There is more than one *coniunctio* on the path; indeed, each major stage of the individuation process involves an inner “marriage” of this type. At the stage we’re discussing here, once the anima/animus has been confronted, the ego begins to withdraw its projections onto others and unites with its own inner opposite. A woman may absorb some of the strength, courage, and passion she has projected onto men, while a man may find that his hard edges begin to soften. When this process has ripened, the individual is ready to face the archetype that lies behind the anima/animus: the Self.

## MEETING THE SELF

In Marie-Louise von Franz’s simile, the ego is like a small illuminated patch on the surface of an enormous dark sphere. The light of consciousness, however brightly it may burn, will probably never encompass the entire sphere; it isn’t big enough. But Jung held that through certain kinds of introspection, the conscious mind can enlarge its scope so as to at least catch glimpses of the whole. At this point, the archetype of the Self begins to manifest.

How does the Self make its presence felt? Again, dream imagery is the most familiar way. Here the Self, unlike the anima or animus, is most likely to appear as a being of the *same* sex as the subject: “In the dreams of a woman this center [the Self] is usually personified as a superior female figure—a priestess, sorceress, earth mother, or goddess of nature or love. In the case of a man, it manifests itself as a masculine initiator and guardian (an Indian guru), a wise old man, a spirit of nature, and so forth.” While it can often appear as an older figure, it can also take the form of a divine youth, symbolizing “a creative *élan vital*, and a new spiritual orientation.” Other guises include helpful animals, hermaphrodites (symbolizing the union of masculine and feminine), and even stones, particularly of the precious and magical variety.<sup>13</sup>

The most famous image of the Self, and one that possessed a special fascination for Jung, is the *mandala*. *Mandala* means “circle” in Sanskrit, and usually refers to a sacred circle. In recent years these symbolic images have become familiar in the West, partly because of Jung’s influence and partly because of the popularity of Tibetan Buddhism, which provides the most familiar examples.

Yet a mandala is more than a circle, however sacred. Jung observes: “There are innumerable variants of the motif . . . but they are all based on the squaring of a circle. Their basic motif is the premonition of a center of personality, a kind of central point within the psyche, to which everything is related, by which everything is arranged, and which is itself a source of energy.”<sup>14</sup>

The “squaring of the circle” is a familiar mathematical problem: it refers to the impossibility of constructing a square with exactly the same area as a circle (because a circle’s area, unlike that of a square, is determined by *pi*, an irrational number). Jung, however, saw another, more profound meaning in the phrase. For him, as for many mystics, the circle symbolized the divine, the ineffable; he was fond of the medieval

aphorism “God is a circle whose circumference is nowhere and whose center is everywhere.” The square, on the other hand, is the ultimate symbol of solidity and materiality. The “squaring of the circle” thus refers to the embodiment of the divine nature of man in materiality—the central goal not only of Jungian individuation but, one could argue, of human life as well.

Some descriptions make it seem as if a decisive encounter with the Self, whether as a dream of a mandala or in some other form, is a once-in-a-lifetime event; one is, as it were, “individuated” and can go on to something else. This isn’t true. Most Jungians stress that individuation goes on throughout life; the developed individual is constantly exploring the depths of the unconscious and constantly coming up with new riches. Still, the appearance of the archetype of the Self may well mark a watershed in a person’s life. Because individuation is concerned with the meaning of existence, Jung saw it as an issue likely to face a more mature individual; he often noted that most of his patients were in the second half of life.

### THE MEANING OF COINCIDENCE

Dreams are not the only means by which an archetype can manifest itself. Jung encouraged his patients to use art as a means of exploring the unconscious, while today some Jungian child psychologists use “sand play”—involving a sandbox with a large number of various toy figures—to help children express issues they cannot address in words. But of all the ways in which an archetype can make its presence felt, perhaps the most curious involves *synchronicity*, which Jung nebulously defined as “an acausal connecting principle.”

Synchronicity is a difficult idea to comprehend, not only because it flies in the face of conventional reason but because our understanding of causality itself is so shadowy. To examine it, we might start with Jung’s remark that “it often seems that even inanimate objects co-operate with the unconscious in the arrangement of symbolic patterns.” As an example he cites “numerous well-authenticated stories of clocks stopping at the moment of their owner’s death,” which, happened, for example, to Frederick the Great of Prussia.<sup>15</sup> Synchronicities differ from ordinary coincidences in that they are *meaningful*.

One of the most striking examples can be found in an episode that took place in 1909, when Jung was still close to Freud. Even at this time the two men disagreed about parapsychology. Visiting Freud in Vienna, Jung asked him what he thought about synchronicity. “Because of his materialistic prejudice,” Jung recalled, “he rejected this entire complex of questions as nonsensical, and did so in terms of so shallow a positivism that I had difficulty in checking the sharp retort on the end of my tongue.”

While Freud was talking, Jung had an odd sensation:

It was as if my diaphragm were made of iron and were becoming red-hot—a glowing vault. And at that moment there was such a loud report in the bookcase, which stood right there next to us, that we both started up in alarm, fearing the thing was going to topple over on us. I said to Freud, “There, that is an example of a so-called catalytic exteriorization phenomenon.”

“Oh, come,” he exclaimed. “That is sheer bosh.”

“It is not,” I replied. “You are mistaken, Herr Professor. And to prove my point I now predict that in a moment there will be another such loud report!” Sure enough, no sooner had I said the words than the same detonation went off in the bookcase.<sup>16</sup>

Despite its overwhelming eeriness, this “catalytic exteriorization phenomenon” failed to change Freud’s mind. He later brushed it aside in a letter to Jung,<sup>17</sup> after that they never discussed the incident again.

This example, which itself belongs in the literature of the paranormal, is not typical of synchronicities; most of the time they occur entirely in the sphere of ordinary reality. They may take the form of a chance meeting with someone you were just thinking of, the sighting of a bird or animal just as you were asking for a sign, or even “accidentally” opening a book to some passage that tells you exactly what you need to hear at that moment.

### UFOS AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

Synchronicities can occur on a collective level too. The most fascinating example in modern times is the UFO phenomenon. Though UFOs, flying saucers, and their kin have fascinated people at least since the beginning of the century, rumors and sightings of them have become far more common since the end of World War II. Jung, in a 1958 essay entitled “Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies,” doesn’t attempt to explain them as a physical phenomenon. Citing the conclusions of the former head of UFO investigations for the US. Air Force, he says simply, “*Something is seen, but one doesn’t know what*”<sup>18</sup>—a statement that, forty years later, still seems to sum up our findings about this mystery.

Jung also points out that UFOs often come in circular or cylindrical shapes, which “have always symbolized the union of opposites:” Like the mandala, another circular form, they seem to symbolize the Self, not in an individual, personal sense, but in a collective one. We have, he reminds us, come to an age when “untold millions of so-called Christians have lost their belief in a real and living mediator.” Yet at the same time “a political, social, philosophical, and religious conflict of unprecedented proportions has split the consciousness of our age. When such tremendous opposites split asunder, we may expect with certainty that the need for a saviour will make itself felt.”<sup>19</sup>

Jung is saying that we as a civilization are projecting our longing for wholeness onto these “things seen in the skies.” He is careful to stress that this is a question not of individual but of collective psychology, since UFOs are “mostly seen by people who do not believe in them or who regard the whole problem with indifference.”<sup>20</sup> Jung is also careful not to reduce the UFO phenomenon to *merely* a matter of projection, as if it were a collective delusion; UFOs are not only visible but even appear as blips on radar screens. His conclusion:

It seems to me—speaking with all due reserve—that there is a third possibility: that Ufos [*sic*] are real material phenomena of an unknown nature, presumably coming from outer space . . . . Just at the moment when the eyes of mankind are turned towards the heavens, partly on account of their fantasies about possible

space-ships, and partly in a figurative sense because their earthly existence is threatened, unconscious contents have projected themselves on these inexplicable heavenly phenomena and given them a significance they in no way deserve. Since they seem to have appeared more frequently after the second World War than before, it may be that they are synchronistic phenomena or “meaningful coincidences.”<sup>21</sup>

Recent years have seen more sinister UFO rumors, which speak of abductions and abuse and unpleasant little grey aliens with malevolent intentions for humanity. Interestingly, these rumors have especially proliferated since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Now that one major conflict on earth has been removed, are we starting to project our hostile fantasies, not onto other humans, but on races from other planets?

Whatever we may think of such speculations, it’s important to remember that Jung would not have seen them reductionistically. Simply because something has taken on a projection does not in and of itself mean it is unreal or “just our imagination.” UFOs, close encounters, abductions, and such things may or may not be physical realities apart from our projections. Jung, were he alive today, would most likely have recommended investigations of both the psychological and the material kind.

## A THEORY OF TYPES

One final aspect of Jung’s view of the psyche must be briefly addressed: his theory of types. The idea that human beings can be roughly categorized into a small number of recognizable types is not a new one; it goes back at least as far as Aristotle’s pupil Theophrastus, who wrote a book about it called *The Characters*.<sup>22</sup> We can find echoes of the same idea in the horoscope section of the newspaper, or in the modern-day theory known as the *enneagram of personality* (which will be discussed in chapter 9).

Jung’s version is comparatively simple. To begin with, he distinguished between people he called *extraverts*, those who fundamentally tend to move outward from themselves toward engagement with the world; and *introverts*, those whose basic direction is inward, toward themselves and away from the world.

It’s easy enough to see the value of such a theory, if only from the fact that these words have entered the common language. But Jung did not stop there. He also observed that people could be divided into four groups according to their dominant psychological functions. Those who are most inclined toward thought and intellectuality were *thinking* types; *feeling* types are oriented toward the emotions; and *sensing* types tend to focus toward the sensations of the body. To this threefold division of humanity (which boasts considerable antiquity, going as far back as the *Republic* of Plato) Jung added a fourth type: the *intuitive*. “We should speak of . . . intuition if we are dealing with a kind of perception which cannot be traced directly to conscious sensory experience. I have therefore defined sensation as perception through conscious sensory processes, and intuition as perception by way of unconscious contents and connections.”<sup>23</sup>

By Jung’s theory, every person not only has one dominant function, but is also either extraverted or introverted. Thus one can be either an introverted or an extraverted sensing type, and so on. He further arranged these types in a fourfold scheme (see il-

lustration, below) which, not surprisingly, resembles a mandala. According to this scheme, certain types are clearly opposed to each other: thinking to feeling, sensation to intuition. Jung postulated that if one of these functions is *dominant*, or most developed, the

**Figure 1. A schema of Jung's theory of types. The dominant function is the opposite to the inferior function. That is, if your thinking function is the best developed, your feeling function will be the least developed. The inferior function is also the gateway to the unconscious.**

one opposite it will be *inferior*, or least developed. Furthermore, the inferior function is the gateway to the unconscious.

This is an extremely crucial point, and, generally speaking, it applies to all theories of type. For these theories say that we all have certain predispositions in our characters; some are stronger, some weaker. In order to have full access to our potential, we must develop that which is weakest in us.

According to Jung's theory, the philosopher is unlikely to become a good mechanic, while the man who can fix anything in five minutes may never develop superior capacities for abstract thought. The inferior function in any of us will probably never become dominant; our strengths will remain our strengths and our weaknesses our weaknesses. Jung is not saying that the leopard must change its spots, but that unsuspected riches lie buried in the part of the psyche that is most hidden, neglected, and perhaps despised. Cultivating these weaker sides is a vital step in transformation.<sup>24</sup>

You may catch a glimpse of how this works in practice if you chance to visit an esoteric school. You will sometimes notice that things look a little jerrybuilt, or that repairs have been done somewhat clumsily or awkwardly. This is not necessarily a sign of incompetence. Quite often it means that a student has been put to a task that is not his or her forte: the goal is not to have a picture-perfect operation but to help people work on themselves—as Jung would put it, to develop their inferior functions.

### A JUNGIAN RELIGION?

Some questions remain. Jung's psychology, as we have seen, comes out of his therapeutic work with patients ranging from the mildly disturbed to the insane. On the other hand, Jung attached great importance to the mythic and religious symbols that he believed are an intrinsic part of the human psyche. To what extent, then, is Jung's system a form of psychotherapy? To what extent is it a religious system?

Jung took an ambiguous position regarding these issues. He did not want to start a new religion. Indeed, whenever possible he would encourage his patients to return to the religion of their childhood, believing that their greatest hope for inner wholeness lay there. At the same time he saw that the great religion of the West—Christianity—had lost its meaning for many people, and in this he found the cause for much of the turbulence and dislocation of modern life.

Among Jung's followers, however, one encounters people who regard Jungian psychology as their religion and dream analysis as their spiritual practice.<sup>25</sup> Are they right to do this? Did Jung create, intentionally or inadvertently, a new faith that would supplant the waning religions of Western civilization?

In one sense anything that calls itself a religion must attempt to tell us about the unseen powers that rule the universe. It must purport to explain not only the workings of these powers but how we must conduct ourselves toward them—in ritual; worship, or ethical behavior. Most religions (though not all) speak of a God or of gods.

Jung's view of such issues can be gleaned from a famous reply he gave in a BBC interview that was broadcast in 1959. The interviewer asked him if he believed in God. He answered, "I know. I don't have to believe, I know."<sup>26</sup>

This could hardly sound more unequivocal. But in a letter written a few weeks later, Jung explained his statement thus: "[It] does not mean: I do know a certain God (Zeus, Yahweh, Allah, the Trinitarian God, etc.) but rather: I do know that I am obviously confronted with a factor unknown in itself, which I call 'God' . . . This is the name by which I designate all things which cross my wilful path violently and recklessly, all things which upset my subjective views, plans, and intentions and change the course of my life for better or worse."<sup>27</sup>

This statement points to the crucial difference between Jung's psychology and religion as such. Jung was an empiricist. Metaphysical speculation did not interest him; indeed it is unclear whether he thought anything useful could even be learned by such means. Throughout his career he was concerned not with the abstract truths of the universe, but with leading individuals toward wholeness. One approach he found useful was integrating the various archetypes, including the archetype of the Self. Although the Self may *look like* God to the individual, Jung refused to take the step of saying the Self corresponded to an actual God in the world. For this reason the great Jewish philosopher Martin Buber accused him of equating a transcendent being with psychic processes.<sup>28</sup>

Jung's reluctance to speak about these issues can also be traced to the influence of Immanuel Kant, whom he deeply revered. Kant said we can never perceive the world as it is in its own right; we can only perceive it through certain *categories* of experience, such as time, space, and causality, which are built into the human mind. Jung seemed to include the archetypes among these "categories."<sup>29</sup> They are the filters through which we must look whenever we experience anything, and we must be very cautious in speaking about the world—much less God—as it is apart from them.

## THE PROMISE AND THE COSTS

If Jungianism is not a religion, what is it? What can one expect from Jungian analysis?

The answer is simple: Jungian analysis is a form of psychotherapy. It is generally offered in a therapeutic context, usually in one-hour sessions with an analyst once or twice a week. Because training for Jungian analysts is itself along and expensive process, the price will be correspondingly high—an estimated \$100–\$150 per hour. Since the process of Jungian analysis usually spans several years, one can expect treatment to cost thousands, even tens of thousands of dollars. Of all the paths discussed in this book, Jungian analysis is likely to cost the most in sheer financial terms.

On the other hand, Jungian analysis is a respected part of the therapeutic mainstream. This is not to say that every therapist who claims to be a Jungian is reputable and competent—here; as in other realms, one must do one’s homework and trust one’s best judgment—but Jungian analysis has proved helpful for many. Though any given approach is unlikely to benefit everyone, it’s safe to say that if you feel the need for psychotherapy and find yourself in sympathy with the ideas presented in this chapter, you may find Jungian analysis worth exploring.

Today, though, most people who have been touched by these ideas have not gone through formal analysis. The fact is that Jungian concepts have filtered into popular consciousness, not only through Jung’s own writings, which are widely available, but also in various other forms. The most obvious of these are books with a strongly Jungian flavor, including Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Robert Bly’s *Iron John*, Clarissa Pinkola Estés’ *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, and the novels of Robertson Davies. But Jung’s ideas have also found their way into the collective psyche through other means, including movies (George Lucas’s *Stars Wars* films were partly inspired by *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*) and television programs like Bill Moyers’ PBS interviews with Joseph Campbell, one of the best-known and best-loved interpreters of myth in our time.

One offspring of Jung’s ideas, a system known as *archetypal psychology*, has taken on a direction of its own in recent years, chiefly through the inspiration of James Hillman. Hillman, who was trained as a Jungian analyst, became disaffected with the importance Jung gave to the archetype of the Self. Hillman came to see the psyche “polytheistically”: the archetypes, Hillman tells us, live in us in a more egalitarian, free-wheeling, and tumultuous fashion than Jung believed. In this they resemble the lively though troublesome gods of Olympus.

Influenced by writers as diverse as Marsilio Ficino, Keats, and Coleridge, Hillman also emphasizes the notion of *soul*, which he defines as a middle realm between the world of matter and the spirit proper. The neglect of “soul,” Hillman believes, is one of the chief sources of our current discontent. Writers influenced by Hillman’s works include Robert Sardello and Thomas Moore, author of the best-selling *Care of the Soul*.<sup>30</sup>

It is far from surprising that Jung’s intellectual descendants use quasi-religious terms like “soul,” for there is an irreducibly religious—or, as he would have said, “numinous”—tone to Jung’s ideas. This numinosity reached its crescendo in a curious little document that dates to the winter of 1916–17, at the height of World War I and at a period of great emotional upheaval for Jung himself. In this atmosphere Jung, haunted by strange apparitions, found himself composing what today would be called a piece of “channeled” material—that is, a work that seems to be dictated to the writer by an unseen being or presence.

Jung did not publish the work called *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos*, or *The Seven Sermons to the Dead*,<sup>31</sup> in his lifetime, and only showed it to close friends and associates. Later in his life he even dismissed it as a “youthful indiscretion.” But as he also admitted, “These conversations with the dead formed a kind of prelude to what I had to communicate to the world about the unconscious.”<sup>32</sup>

The work begins, with a reference to Jerusalem—the holiest of holy cities for both Jews and Christians; the very embodiment of exoteric revealed religion: “The dead came back from Jerusalem-, where they found not what they sought.” The text that follows,

which fills only a few pages, sets out a cryptic esoteric system that speaks of the “Pleroma,” which is “the nothingness and the fullness,” and of the god Abraxas, who “speaketh that hallowed and accursed word which is life and death at the same time.”

As author Stephan Hoeller has observed about Jung, “Some think that he is a spiritual pagan, while others accuse him of being biased in the direction of Christianity. This little book would set both of these opinions in the wrong, for it shows that he is a kind of Gnostic.”<sup>33</sup> To understand what this means, we must now turn to Gnosticism itself.

## SUGGESTED READING

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.

Joseph Campbell is, one of the most celebrated exponents of Jung’s ideas. In this, his most famous work, he explicates the archetype of the hero.

Edinger, Edward F. *Ego and Archetype*. Boston: Shambhala, 1992.

An illuminating discussion of the individuation process as expressed in myths and symbols.

Jung, C. G., ed. *Man and His Symbols*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1964.

An accessible and lavishly illustrated introduction to Jung’s ideas, written by Jung and some of his closest associates. Perhaps the best, starting-point for gaining access to Jung.

Other works by Jung that will be useful at the outset are the following:

*Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. Translated by W. S. Dell and Cary E. Baynes. New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1933.

This collection of essays stresses the connection of Jung’s ideas with the dilemmas of modern culture.

*Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Edited by Aniela Jaffé. Translated by Richard and Clara Winston. New York: Vintage, 1961.

Jung’s memoirs; the closest thing to an autobiography that he ever wrote.

*Collected Works*. Princeton: Princeton/Bollingen, 1953–96.

A multivolume edition of Jung’s writings translated into English. Many of his more popular writings, such as *Synchronicity* and *Flying Saucers*, are available as paperbacks from the same publisher.

Noll, Richard. *The Jung Cult: The Origins of a Charismatic Movement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

A strong and at times vitriolic critique of Jung and his ideas. Worth reading for its insights into Jung’s cultural context, as well as for a dramatically different perspective on Jung than that of Jungians.

Robertson, Robin. *Beginner’s Guide to Jungian Psychology*. York Beach, Maine: Nicolas-Hays, 1992.

A lucid account of basic Jungian theory. Probably the best introduction to Jung’s ideas apart from those written by Jung himself.

Sharp, Daryl. C. G. *Jung Lexicon: A Primer of Terms and Concepts*. Toronto: Inner City Books, 1991.

A good reference source for Jungian ideas and concepts, citing definitions and explanations from Jung's own works.