

On Depth Psychology: It's Meaning and Magic

“Man is in need of a symbolic life . . . we don't have it . . . we have no time no place . . . only symbolic life can express the need of the soul-- the daily need of the soul”
(Jung, 1939, *The Symbolic Life*)

“An unconscious symbol is lived but not perceived. . . .the ultimate goal of Jungian psychotherapy is to make the symbolic process conscious”
(Edinger, 1992, p. 113).

Depth psychology, a term first coined by Swiss psychiatrist, Eugene Bleuler, around the end of the 1800's, has its beginnings in the work of Sigmund Freud and another Swiss psychiatrist, Carl Gustav Jung, along with Pierre Janet and William James. Depth Psychology explores the hidden or deeper parts of human experience by seeing things in depth rather than taking them apart. Certainly, it involves deep inquiry into the symbolic meaning of things, of symptoms, images, and emotions that arise in one's life, influencing each of us regardless of whether we are aware of it or not (Ellenberger, 1970). It includes aspects of Psychology, Philosophy, Mythology, Anthropology, and Ecology and the way each of them influences us as individuals. These fields affect how we relate to ourselves, each other, and our culture, our species, and our planet as well. Above all, Depth Psychology is a study of the Unconscious, that which is outside of our awareness and which we unable to know directly.

It was Freud who first introduced the concept that each of us experiences impact from a hidden, unobservable world of secrets, doubts, and fictions that we consistently repress outside our consciousness. These repressed issues cause feelings of fear, shame, anger, and anxiety for which the source is often not identified or acknowledged (Elliott, 2002). Most of us experience a “self” as something we “have”: an established component that is constant, observable and fairly unchanging. That self we see and know is made up of beliefs, past experiences, emotions, relationships, values, and judgments that have built up significantly in early childhood, shaping

the self we perceive ourselves to be and strongly influencing our thoughts, decisions, and actions with ourselves and others. In short, it makes me the “me” I know today.

The study of Psychology holds that the self we think we know is only a tiny portion of the self that really exists. The *ego* self, the self we are aware of and can observe, is just the tip of an iceberg in a vast ocean of unconsciousness. Since what is unconscious is not known, our known version of our self is limited and confined. We are vastly influenced by the immense hidden aspects of the greater self that surrounds us, which is mostly out of sight or understanding. Depth Psychology seeks to uncover or reveal repressed or hidden aspects of our self, rather like opening a window from inside the limited existence we experience through the everyday self we know and out onto the depths of the soul. Depth, closely correlated with Jungian psychology because of the powerful influence of Carl Jung’s contributions to the field includes “the experience of the sacred, of mystery, and of the ineffable. . . an approach that is at home with myth and symbol, with the religious and spiritual traditions of the world, with anthropology and archeology, with art, poetry, and literature” (Sonoma State University, 2010).

The founding psychologists believed the unconscious has its own logic and will and so it is vital to observe what resides in the unconscious in order to decode the messages communicates. These messages emerge into consciousness through symbols in dreams, art, nature, and story. According to Chalquist (2009), “Depth’ refers to what's below the surface of psychic manifestations like behaviors, conflicts, relationships, family dynamics, dreams, even social and political events.” Additionally, “The modern field of Depth Psychology originates in . . . the importance of symbol and metaphor in personal and cultural imagery or the recognition of the dynamic interplay between the natural world and the human psyche (Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2010). Depth Psychology seeks to regard what is silenced, marginalized or hidden at the edges of what we believe to be normal in our culture and our world. It challenges norms and asks more

questions rather than settling on fixed answers. It looks beyond symptoms to find the underlying root rather than simply trying to fix or mask the symptom. It seeks to put issues into a larger context using image, story, and myth. Once a symptom or problem can be located in a larger framework, it is easier to get a big picture or a metaphor for what is really going on.

The Study of Soul

The word “psychology” is made up of the word “psyche,” meaning *soul*, and “logos,” *to study*. Therefore, Depth Psychology, at its core, is the study of the soul. According to best-selling author of *Care of the Soul*, Thomas Moore (1992), “soul” is not a thing but rather a dimension of experience. It is related to depth, to substance, and to relationship to the world (Moore, 1992). James Hillman (1975), contemporary author and pioneer of Archetypal Psychology, outlines five functions of soul: (1) it makes all meaning possible, (2) it turns events into experiences, (3) it involves a deepening of experience, (4) is communicated in love, and (5) has a special relation with death (Hillman, 1975) (p. xvi). For Hillman, as a result of these five characteristics, the soul represents the imaginative possibility of our nature, a possibility that is realized in reflective speculation, dream, image, and fantasy. Indigenous and earth-based cultures held the belief that malaise and illness came from a “loss of soul,” occurring when the soul fled or was abducted to the underworld and had to be called back by the shaman, the spiritual caretaker of the community. Thus, early Depth Psychologists were also considered doctors of the soul (Ellenberger, 1970).

Soul involves depth. When we say something has soul, it implies a deeper level than the normal, everyday thing. Each of us, at any given moment, is both a source of soul and a container for soul. Without it, we are lost; without acknowledging and embracing it, *it* is lost. Each of us longs to be reunited. Soul, as I have come to think of it, is a **Source Of Unconscious Longing (SOUL)**: we are seeking to find what is missing, the connection we have lost and are yearning for at some deep level; the implicit desire to make deep meaning of both inner and outer nature, to

find balance in a world where we have radically tipped that innate balance that indigenous peoples know comes with nature and earth. By searching for soul, we embark on a journey of epic proportions, a so-called “hero’s journey” of myth.

Given the vastness we encounter in contemplation of the concept of soul, Depth Psychology focuses more on the inquiry and does not prefer to enter into definitions and answers that are fixed and inflexible. Soul is, above all, unique, creative, and changeable, and to know one aspect of it is to only know a tiny fraction. The goal, then, according to Jung, is to seek to know, then include and integrate parts of ourselves that reside in the unconscious in order to become more whole. Jung states it this way, “Since everything living strives for wholeness, the inevitable one-sidedness of our conscious life is continually being corrected and compensated by the universal human being in us, whose goal is the ultimate integration of conscious and unconscious” (1960, p. 80).

Jung’s Theories

Depth Psychology has been heavily influenced by C.G. Jung. One of Jung’s fundamental tenets that differentiated him from his mentor, Sigmund Freud, was to allege the existence of a *collective unconscious*, a province that includes all psychic material and systems that are not conscious, and which is vast and inexhaustible; limitless, unknowable, and indefinable.

According to Jung, the unconscious is made up of *archetypes*, autonomous instincts, patterns, or behaviors, which are common across all eras, peoples, and places. Archetypes organize the contents of the unconscious and connect it, at its deepest levels, to nature (1964).

Jung believed the language of archetypes, and therefore of the unconscious, is manifest in symbols and images, which entice us with their numinous power to enter into relationship with them and to participate in a reciprocal act of transformation. The term *numinous* can describe an encounter with expressions of the unconscious in the form of powerful images and emotions

From this, we begin to gain a much larger sense of what Jung called the *Self*, an ordering, regulating harmonizing and meaning-giving agency of the psyche. The Self, according to Jung, is an inner guiding factor, and the totality of the psyche. It is this central archetype around which we circumambulate and gain experience, instinctively seeking wholeness in the process of *individuation* (in Storr, 1983; Smith 2007).

A *symbol* stands for something unknown; a mystery, which can never be exhausted in meaning but which is contextually significant to a particular individual. Jungian analyst, Edward Whitmont (1969), contends that symbols allow the emergence of themes from the unconscious in an attempt to reconnect us with a mode of experiencing from which we have become disconnected. We experience both *external* objects, things we can see or experience with our senses and which have meaning for us in a specific context we have learned, and we also experience *inner* objects that we can't necessarily know or recognize. Both are represented by images, and "the same images which present themselves to us as representatives of the outside world are subsequently used by the psyche to express the inner world" (1969, p. 29). Thus, the external object that represents some unknown inner object becomes a symbol, which is "the best possible representation of something that can never be known" (Hopcke, 1999, p. 29). Intuiting the meaning of this object beyond what we already understand it to be is the idea of *symbolic thought* (Whitmont, 1969). Ryan (2002) calls the symbol both the guiding force that opens the portal to the archetype as well as a vehicle to navigate the deeper parts of the unconscious. Jung (1964) strongly promoted living the symbolic life: that is, taking symbolic experiences seriously.

According to Jung:

the powerful symbols emanating from this imaging faculty of the soul mysteriously attract all with whom they come into contact and, awakening them to the heritage of the collective unconscious, allow them to experience and express symbols with a similar numinous power of attraction. (Ryan, 2002, p. 80)

External objects and internal events both reflect the same message. Jung refers to integrating the external world through the senses on one hand, but also suggests we “translate into visual reality the world within us” (Ryan, 2002, p. 156). If we were to view the unconscious as a wilderness, it is possible to see how elements on the inside of our psyches are also represented by things that we see in the physical world around us, and to draw parallel meaning between them. The compelling monuments and features in the outer landscape can correlate what Ryan refers to as “structures of the psyche”(p. 156) becoming symbolic in the “inner psychic landscape of the mind” (p. 156).

Jung goes on, “Since psyche and matter are contained in one and the same world, and moreover are in continuous contact with one another and ultimately rest on the irrepresentable transcendental factors. . . . psyche and matter are two different aspects of one and the same thing” (Jung, 1960, para. 418). A study of symbols, events, and nature in general, both inner and outer, is a powerful way to interpret the aspects of the unconscious that we cannot otherwise know. Symbols also occur in myths and in dreams. Jung refers to integrating the external world through our senses, but also suggests the opposite: that we “translate into visual reality the world within us” (Jung in Ryan, 2002, p. 156). Thus, the compelling monuments and features in the outer landscape can correlate what Ryan refers to “structures of the psyche”(p. 156) becoming symbolic in the “inner psychic landscape of the mind” (p. 156).

Jung believed we spend the first half of life or so developing our ego so it becomes a strong vehicle to carry us through our experiences: thus we can mature, learn, find a way to support ourselves, relate to others in our culture, form relationships, raise children, etc. However, halfway through our lives, the larger entity Jung called the “Self” knocks at our door, driving us toward finding greater meaning and increasing wholeness. In this process, we re-establish contact

with the unconscious ground we left through conditioning and logical processes while growing up. According to Jung, only a well-developed ego is strong enough to encounter the increasing manifestations of the unconscious and its archetypes. During the process of individuation, the call to self-improvement in the second half of life, we become conscious of the Self. In regarding it, we allow it to influence us and help us grow.

Important Arenas in Depth Psychology

The Imaginal. What Jung first called the unconscious also contains the *imaginal* realm, a term borrowed from French philosopher Henry Corbin. In contrast with imagination, the imaginal indicates a reality that is present in the same time and space as ordinary reality but usually invisible to us and best accessed through altered states of consciousness. Interpretation of symbols and symptoms is often done through *active imagination*, the practice of dialoging and interacting with symbols in the imaginal realm where they reside; through dream analysis, and through depth-oriented studies of a culture's traditions, myths, and stories. Encounter with the imaginal generates rapture, awe, power, understanding, and ultimately—transformation. Hillman (1979) suggests actively engaging with symbolic images and energies by treating them as autonomous entities and entering *their* territory to engage in dialogue or allow a relationship to develop:

There are two ways of engaging with the symbolic, archetypal, and mythological forms that reside in the wild landscape of our unconscious. One is to encounter them as they emerge, grappling and wrestling with them in ordinary everyday reality, turning our gaze to their veiled faces and hooded eyes to see what mystery lies there. The other way, however, is ultimately an inevitable call to descend into the depths where the forms dwell, facing and interacting with them in their own turf, the mysterious inner territory of the underworld that supports and sustains them—and us. p. xxx

Culture. Because culture is riddled with symbolism and tradition, it deeply impacts every individual's psyche, and thus, the two are not separate. Depth psychology respects the inherent nature of the individual, and also of each culture, extending its focus to include how individuals,

groups, cultures, nations, and the planet are each affected by the multitude of ways in which they all interact. Diane Taylor referred *percepticide*, the concept of numbness or a cutting-off seeing because it is more than we can bear. Robert J. Lifton identified this tendency as "psychic numbing" the idea that our modern, western ego represses, ignores, and numbs itself from engaging with inner and outer voices and images and movements that go beyond the mainstream consciousness (Shulman-Lorenz & Watkins, 2002). According to Chalquist (2009), Depth Psychology arose as the drive toward liberation manifest around the world, particularly in the twentieth century.

Nature. Many contemporary philosophers and writers have identified a split between humans and the world of nature, observing how we tend to separate ourselves into another category altogether, one based on progress and technology. We have long forgotten our inner nature, and our human nature. Jung insists:

Man feels isolated in the cosmos. He is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional participation in natural events, which hitherto had symbolic meaning for him. Thunder is no longer the voice of a god, nor is lightning his avenging missile. No river contains a spirit, no tree makes a man's life, no snake is the embodiment of wisdom and no mountain still harbours a great demon. Neither do things speak to him nor can he speak to things, like stones, springs, plants and animals. (Jung in Sabini, 2005, pp. 79-80)

Further, Jung says because we are so out of touch with that natural part of ourselves, the archaic human that experiences primordial images, the part of our psyche that has its roots in nature, we have suffered instinctual atrophy which leads to disorientation in everyday human situations (Jung in Sabini, 2005xxx). By reconnecting with nature, both inner and outer, we can relocate ourselves within the greater tapestry of creation, taking a place in nature alongside our counterparts and developing increased understanding of our role in life.

Myth. The importance of symbol and metaphor in personal and cultural imagery is vital. Jung wrote, "Spirit is the inside of things and matter is their visible outer aspect" (in Sabini, p. 2).

Since the psyche spontaneously generates mythico-religious symbolism, paying attention and listening is a vital part of noticing meaningful symbols as they emerge. Depth Psychology understands myth works as a repository of recurring situations, so recognizing a specific myth, the way it unfolds, and the meaning it holds for a particular individual can be vital for understanding contemporary events and situations (Chalquist, 2009). “The function of myth,” said Joseph Campbell, “is to pull you into accord with the rhythm of the universe.” (in McCarthy, 1988, p. 1). Campbell adhered to the idea that myth and ceremonial rites enable the mind to be in harmony with the body and the way of life to be in harmony with the way nature requires (Campbell & Moyers, 1991). According to Chalquist (2009):

All minds, all lives, are ultimately embedded in some sort of myth-making. Mythology is not a series of old explanations for natural events; it is rather the richness and wisdom of humanity played out in a wondrous symbolical storytelling. . . . Personal symptoms, conflicts, and stucknesses contain a mythic or transpersonal/archetypal core that when interpreted can reintroduce the client to the meaning of his struggles.

Summary

In short, the Depth Psychological view focuses on mystery and the creativity and potentiality that resides in the unknown. The mysteries of the unconscious manifest when they are ready. According to James Hillman, contemporary archetypal psychologist, each of us is pulled toward a *telos*, a whole and complete finished product, each unique, like an acorn that turns into a massive oak tree. This is also the call of the Self to which Jung refers.

Jungian thought identifies “health” as wholeness, and “pathology” or lack of health as lack of wholeness. Jung (1964) asserted that current western cultures have lost a sense of the sacred, and in so doing have become dislocated and disoriented, losing meaning and vitality by losing contact with what he calls the regulating center of the soul. This condition of being out of balance is often referred to by indigenous and earth-based people as loss of soul. Smith (2007) argues that a retrieval of the sacred is essential for retrieval of the soul.

Smith (2007), noting the pathological conditions emerging in contemporary culture, says we have repressed the contents of the unconscious and summarily forgotten it entirely, disregarding the magic and mystery there. The sheer lack of soul in current times and culture epitomizes the tremendous precipice on which we perch as a result. Jung, sensing the enormity of the split between our conscious everyday lifestyle and the vast depth of the psyche, warns, “We do not understand yet that the discovery of the unconscious means an enormous spiritual task, which must be accomplished if we wish to preserve our civilization” (in Sabini, 2005, p. 145). According to Jung, the only way to address the deep loss of connection to soul that we are experiencing as a species is to reestablish our connection to the sacred.

As a call from the unconscious, any symptom we manifest, psychological or physical, represents a deeper reality. Personal symptoms, conflicts, and blocks relate to or are based on a mythic or archetypal level, which, when understood and witnessed can inform us on the meaning of our struggles and tests. We must look more deeply into the profound depths of the soul, the *rhizome*, the root from where the symptom arises and discover how to address it in its own symbolic realm; in its own language of image, story, and myth. We must treat it from a depth psychological standpoint.

Depth Psychology listens to voices from the margins, voices that have been silenced, voices from every culture and walk of life in order to bring their insights to bear on current challenges we all face. As we learn and grow, we can better develop uniquely into who we are. By working with deep, soulful aspects of human life, we begin to understand the hidden parts of personal experience, the dynamic interplay between the natural world and the human psyche. The Depth practitioner acts as a witness to the inner and outer nature of all that exists, honoring the autonomy and sacredness of all things and allowing each thing to manifest in its own way. Rather

than judging, Depth Psychology embraces the act of holding the tension between opposites, allowing a new, third way to arise out of the chaos created by the original conflict.

Depth Psychology sees beyond our conditioned, hierarchical, black-and-white thinking, asking deeper questions about reality. It is inclusive, not assuming mankind is superior to all other forms of life (or spirit), but welcoming of all beings, all voices, seen and heard or unseen and unheard. It insists on a re-enchantment of a world we have consistently de-souled, seeing nature and objects around us as dead matter that can be manipulated, abused, used up, or eradicated. Depth Psychology allows us to feel again, holding the tension and despair that erupts in us in response to conflict and strife, eradicating layer after layer of the psychic numbing and objectification we have instilled in ourselves in order to survive. Psychologist Glen Slater states, “Soul relies on what’s missing to keep the imagination alive” (in Hillman, 2005, p. xxiii). The cultivation of the imagination translates to a restoration of meaning, bringing context to our individual lives. Once we are able to locate ourselves in the larger story, to understand our role as one thread in an incredible tapestry of being, to accept the various parts of ourselves we have repressed, ignored, or unknowingly split off, we become empowered to live our lives more fully with passion, emotion, and intention.

I am, O Anxious One. Don't you hear my voice
 surging forth with all my earthly feelings?
 They yearn so high, that they have sprouted wings
 and whitely fly in circles round your face.
 My soul, dressed in silence, rises up
 and stands alone before you: can't you see?
 don't you know that my prayer is growing ripe
 upon your vision as upon a tree?
 If you are the dreamer, I am what you dream.
 But when you want to wake, I am your wish,
 and I grow strong with all magnificence
 and turn myself into a star's vast silence

above the strange and distant city, Time.

--Rainer Maria Rilke

Recommended Links on Depth Psychology

- Pacifica Graduate Institute - <http://www.pacifica.edu>
- Sonoma State University Master's Program in Depth Psychology:
<http://www.sonoma.edu/psychology/depth/program.html>
- Terrapsychology/Chalquist - <http://www.terrapsych.com>
- Depth Psychology Today Blog - <http://www.depthpsychologytoday.com/>

Recommended Authors in the Area of Depth Psychology

David Abram	Judith Harris	Robert Romanyshyn
Anne Baring	James Hillman	Robert E. Ryan
Morris Berman	Derrick Jensen	Meredith Sabini
Jerome Bernstein	C.G. Jung	Robert Sardello
Thomas Berry	JoAnna Macy	Paul Shepard
Joseph Campbell	Michael Meade	C. Michael Smith
Craig Chalquist	Ralph Metzner	Mary Watkins
Wade Davis	Arnold Mindell	Terry TempestWilliams
Chellis Glendinning	Thomas Moore	Marion Woodman
Susan Griffin	Bill Plotkin	
Stan Grof	Annie Rogers	

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