

Jungian Psychology and Personal Correlations

Part 1 of 7

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Recently Gertrude read to me a small book called *He* and written by Robert Johnson.¹ This is a work which applies the symbolism of the Grail to the development of Western man, particularly in the form of American Western man, in terms of his psychological stages. The work is based upon the Grail myth treated as a representation developing from the unconscious and in symbolic form presenting the pattern in which the typical Western male man develops. It is not the psychological development of the female. I understand there is another volume by the same author dealing with the psychology of the female.² I am deeply impressed with the meaning which Robert Johnson has derived from the obscure symbolism of the Grail myth, and I wish to discuss this subject in a fairly broad way.

Dr. Johnson classifies himself as a Jungian analyst and this means that he accepts and continues the fundamental postulates of the Jungian psychology. Three of these postulates are of fundamental importance and I shall list them as follows: the first postulate is that man has beneath his field of relative consciousness here a domain known as the “unconscious,” which is akin to the consciousness in that it is psychical but in a form which is unconscious to us; second, the second postulate is that man has a complex psychology known by the title of “psychological type”—that human beings are organized in various ways psychologically so that the human whole may be classified into a group of types each member of a given type having characteristics similar to those others who are also members of that type, but diverging from the psychology of other types; and third, there is the postulate that in the unconscious there are certain archetypes, among these four of particular importance are as follows: the “shadow,” the “anima” in the case of the male or the “animus” in the case of the female, “Mephisto,” and the “Sage.”

First, consider the postulate that behind, below, or above the field of our conscious operations there is an unconscious psyche which influences our lives. Our conscious field consists of thoughts, affections, sensations, and actions with which we all are familiar. The unconscious is conceived as influencing this outer life in ways which we cannot ordinarily trace. In Jung’s conception the unconscious consists of two parts: first, a *personal unconscious*, and a *collective unconscious*. The personal unconscious, in large measure at least, is the repository of elements that were at one time conscious to us, but either forgotten or repressed by us into the unconscious. This aspect of the unconscious was recognized by Sigmund Freud and seems, at least in his earlier psychology, to have been the only aspect which he recognized and consisted of essentially inferior material. But Jung adds the conception of a collective unconscious

¹ Robert Johnson, *He* (King of Prussia, Pa.: Religious Publishing Co., 1974).

² Johnson, Robert, *She* (King of Prussia, Pa.: Religious Publishing Co., 1976).

which influences all men more or less profoundly, which may nonetheless vary in certain details from race to race so that we may speak of a racial unconscious that has its own peculiarities differing from race to race, while still beyond this is the great depth of psychical influence that belongs to humanity as a whole and ultimately reaches into depths that are influential with respect to all creatures.

Dr. Jung was not the first among Western researchers or thinkers to recognize the fact of a deep, collective unconscious. He simply took this idea and developed it more systematically. Thus there was the earlier work of the philosopher von Hartmann whose principal work is called *The Philosophy of the Unconscious*. There was also the work of a physician whose name I do not at this moment recall who also made a similar discovery from a different non-philosophical angle.³ Dr. Jung refers to both of these contributors, but seems to be more in rapport with the position of the physician. But even von Hartmann was not the first; before von Hartmann, Immanuel Kant spoke of the thoughts which we think but do not know that we think them. Thus the conception is not new as one would expect of any essentially true, fundamental conception.

Now, in the development of the conception of the unconscious by Dr. Jung, he maintains that the unconscious can communicate to our conscious side and it does this very largely through our dreams. But it is not exclusively in this way that it communicates with our surface consciousness. It also can communicate through that function which Dr. Jung calls “creative fantasy,” a process in which one may start just imagining a series of events or a story while something from the depths takes over, as it were, so that an autonomous element participates in the development of the fantasy. When it is said that the myth of the Grail was a communication from the unconscious, we may very largely suppose that it was through the latter process of creative fantasy, a sort of story telling guided by the imagination of the teller of the story.

The story of the Grail has been written up by different writers: one of them German, one French, and others. We may assume that these were not the originators of the fantasy but rather recorders of it, that it grew up over a period of time by the story telling of certain individuals who had the capacity to bring out material from the depths even though they did not realize the importance of that material. So when Dr. Johnson develops an interpretation from the Grail myth that fits, or seems to fit, the development of the Western male, he is treating it as a symbolic story that has actual applications in the sequence of psychical development of Western male man.

In general, the unconscious does not communicate to the surface consciousness by means of the highly articulate and sophisticated language of philosophy and science, but, on the other hand, uses images of sensible events such as the events of a story produced by creative fantasy or by the sensible events of a dream in which the dreamer participates. That which is being said by the unconscious in these cases requires interpretation to

³ Jung, C.G., *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, vol. 9, part 1 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1959), 152.

Although various philosophers, among them Leibniz, Kant, and Schelling, had already pointed very clearly to the problem of the dark side of the psyche, it was a physician who felt impelled, from his scientific and medical experience, to point to the *unconscious* as the essential basis of the psyche. This was C. G. Carus, the authority whom Eduard von Hartmann followed.

become available to our objective understanding, and the function of an analyst, in the sense of a Jungian analyst, is to interpret this imagery in a form that is useful and intelligible in terms of our understanding. This is a special skill that not many possess and it is in this respect that Dr. Johnson has revealed something like genius, for he has taken the obscure language of the Grail and applied it to actual experiences through which the male Western, or particularly the male American, passes. This skill at interpretation is a matter of premier importance. The language of the unconscious is not our developed, articulate formal language or conceptual language. It must be translated in terms of that conceptual language before we can make intelligent use of it.

I introduce a footnote at this point. In this tape, I am not producing simply a commentary on Dr. Johnson's volume, I am rather developing a line of thought which was stimulated by the reading of that volume, and it may very well develop in directions that depart in very considerable measure from the subject matter of that volume. End of the footnote.

What is the nature of the unconscious? Is it a psychical mass which is truly unconscious from its own point of view as well as from the standpoint of our objective, surface consciousness, or is it conscious on its own level and only not within the range of our surface consciousness, so that from the standpoint of the latter, it seems to be unconscious? I hold to the latter analysis and in this I am confirmed by the standpoint of Sri Aurobindo who somewhere, I think in his *Synthesis of Yoga*, has said that the unconscious means *another way of consciousness*.⁴ In that case, we have a different meaning. It simply means that we're moving from one plane of consciousness to another plane of consciousness and that the relationship between the two planes is such that the material of one plane is not conscious on the level of the other plane, or at least is not conscious on the level of this surface plane of consciousness of our ordinary intercourse. Then upon the basis of this assumption one may ask how far does the concept of the unconscious extend? What does it comprehend? Is it a restricted domain or a domain so broad as to comprehend all possibilities of consciousness other than that of our surface consciousness? I interpret Dr. Jung's use of the term in the latter broad sense. I may be not in agreement with his own understanding; as to that I do not know. But this is the impression I derive from my reading of Dr. Jung's works; that the real meaning of the unconscious is to be regarded as a blanket term which covers every possibility other than that which belongs to our ordinary surface consciousness. In this case, we're dealing with something of enormous extent and of illimitable importance.

How great this may be is suggested by the analysis of states of consciousness given to us by Sri Aurobindo in which we have a very high order of differentiation in the possibilities of consciousness other than that of our surface consciousness. I will outline the system as it is formulated by him. He has identified, from the bottom up, two layers

⁴ Aurobindo Ghose, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, vol. 20 of the *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centennial Library* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, 1970), 370:

What we call unconsciousness is simply other-consciousness; it is the going in of this surface wave of our mental awareness of outer objects into our subliminal self-awareness and into our awareness too of other planes of existence. We are really no more unconscious when we are asleep or stunned or drugged or "dead" or in any other state, than when we are plunged in inner thought oblivious of our physical selves and our surroundings.

of subconscious consciousness, namely, two layers of inferior consciousness below that of our surface consciousness. Then, on the level of our surface consciousness but subliminal with respect to that surface consciousness, he lists three types of consciousness called the “subtle physical,” the “subtle vital,” and the “subtle mental,” of which we are not ordinarily aware in terms of our ordinary consciousness. Then vertically above the intellectual consciousness which we have on this surface mind there is the “overhead mind”;⁵ above that, the “illuminative mind”; still above that, the “intuition” on its own proper plane, of which the intuitions we experience in our life are only reflections; still above that, “overmind” which is viewed as the mental operation, the process whereby the whole cosmos is ruled; then still above this in what he calls the upper hemisphere, or in other words the truly transcendent, there is “supermind,” which is called the executive principle of *Sachchidananda*; and above “supermind,” the level of *Ananda* proper; then the level of *Chit*; and finally the level of *Sat*. This produces an extremely complex system and comprehends material of quite variable importance.

Now, what is it that we contact in the dream? Most ordinarily, the dream consciousness, as I understand Aurobindo’s system, would be material that comes from the subconscious level and is generally of a very inferior sort. The characteristic of the subconscious as reported by Aurobindo is a high order of irrationality, and many of our ordinary dreams are of this sort. They do not seem to carry meaning of any particular importance. Then we come into the possibility of a dream that may be a reference from the subtle physical, the subtle vital, or the subtle mental; and, then, possibly certain contacts in unusual sleeping states that come from the superconscious levels. In this case, if a night experience, a sleeping experience, that one had came from a superconscious level, it would tend to have a major importance in our lives. It would be, if called a dream, a royal sort of dream—something that would have a major effect upon us. But there is another distinction made by Sri Aurobindo which is of this sort: that not all of the experiences during sleep are truly dreams, but that there are some that are truly real experiences—just as real as our waking experiences—and are not something merely to be interpreted symbolically, but to be interpreted as actual, in the same way that we would regard events in outer life as actual. These evidently are very rare but are of premier importance.

In his chapter on the method of the Vedanta⁶ in the volume *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo gives a keyword connected with the subconscious and a keyword connected with the superconscious. The keyword connected with the subconscious is ‘Life’, and the keyword connected with the superconscious is ‘Light’. This would imply that material of importance for depth psychology that is oriented to Life, essentially, is material from the subconscious. And this seems to be the main material that is brought up in the dream

⁵ Wolff meant to say, “. . . there is the ‘higher mind’ . . .”

⁶ Aurobindo Ghose, *The Life Divine*, vol. 18 of the *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centennial Library* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, 1970), 65-66:

The subconscious and the superconscious are two different formulations of the same All. The master-word of the subconscious is Life, the master-word of the superconscious is Light. In the subconscious knowledge or consciousness is involved in action, for action is the essence of Life. In the superconscious action re-enters into Light and no longer contains involved knowledge but is itself contained in a supreme consciousness.

experience. The material that belongs to the superconscious proper, or with Light, belongs rather to the path connected with yoga; and in this case the prime material does not come from dream in ordinary sleep, but rather is found in states of consciousness involving some degree of trance ranging from light trance in which there is open correlation with ordinary consciousness to the depth of a catatonic trance where there is a complete break with ordinary consciousness. I think the domain of psychotherapy is primarily oriented to the subconscious and only in minor degree reaches into the domain of the subliminal or, particularly, into the domain of the superconscious. This would imply that depth psychology as we know it only skirts the domain of yoga, but does not truly penetrate into it. The dream is not the great teacher on the yogic path, but rather a discipline that eventuates into states of consciousness outwardly connected with trance in some degree, rather than with experiences during sleep. Yet all of this is connected with the blanket meaning of the term ‘unconscious’ as used in depth psychology.

I think it is important to say something about the drug experience as it relates to the opening up of certain experiences that fall within the range of the blanket meaning of the ‘unconscious’. There are certain substances in the world that produce psychical effects. Among these are marijuana, with its concentrate hashish, mescal, a certain cactus, a certain mushroom, alcohol, nitrous oxide, Demerol, and other substances. These, if ingested, can produce altered states of consciousness that would fall within the blanket term of the ‘collective unconscious’. I am outside the circle of those who have experimented with drugs except for one experience with Demerol, which was prescribed by a physician for a physical condition. I did experience a state of euphoria connected with this drug. It made the simple process of life itself seem extraordinarily delightful. But that is as far as my experience goes. I depend upon reports that are either written or which I have heard orally. These indicate that from the ingestion of these substances, altered states of experience may be realized, that some of them are highly delightful, some, on the other hand, are extremely hellish and depressing.

Now, it so happens that a few of the experiences reported by the drug culture do parallel certain experiences derived from authentic yoga; and it does appear that many who have engaged in the practice of use of drugs have felt they have found something that acts like a shortcut toward the yogic goal. Actually, the knowledge of drugs is ancient, and if the manuals of yoga warn against it, it is not because of lack of ancient experience. What happens in this connection is not authentic yoga.

An idea of what really has happened is very well indicated in some of the writings of Sri Aurobindo. There is that which is called the path which leads from ordinary experience through an intermediate zone to the state of the liberating Realization. In this intermediate zone there is a group of experiences of various sorts, some of them dealing with hostile forces, others seeming to be of a supernal sort.⁷ And among these experiences are some that seem to be a duplication of the states of consciousness attained by authentic yoga. But Aurobindo has pointed out that in this intermediate zone there is that which he called the valley of the false glimmer—a very seductive place and therefore a very dangerous place in which to linger. And some of the experiences in this valley of the false glimmer do seem to parallel authentic yogic experience, but, in point of fact,

⁷ Aurobindo Ghose, *Letters on Yoga*, vol. 23 of the *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centennial Library* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, 1970), 1039-1046.

they are counterfeits. They imitate the authentic experience in the same way that counterfeit money appears to look like the real authentic money, but it is not so in fact. I must warn that the tampering with drugs is extremely dangerous and may radically postpone the time when one may succeed in making the authentic yogic breakthrough maybe for several lifetimes. The true path must be traveled, and it is an austere path, an exacting path, and there are statements in the literature that indicate that normally it is a path that requires seven incarnations.⁸ It is an act of absolute folly to imagine that by taking a mere drug, a mere material substance, one can short-circuit the path. It cannot be done. It must be traveled all the way.

Certain characteristics of the drug consciousness enable us to differentiate between it and the authentic liberating consciousness. For one thing, the authentic liberating consciousness enhances the resources of the mind, enables one to deal more effectively with the mind than before; whereas, the drug experience seems in all the cases, at least those that I have seen, to produce a softening of mental capacity. And furthermore, in the drug experience there's a tendency to withdraw from the feeling of self-responsibility—a moral decline; whereas, the authentic yogic experience leads to an accentuation of the moral capacity and the feeling of moral responsibility. I think there is perhaps no mistake greater that anyone can make than to engage in the use of drugs that produce seductive experiences. They are one of the outstanding dangers of the way.

As an illustration, I will remind you of an experience reported by Jack London in his volume *John Barleycorn*. At an experience of advanced intoxication he had awakened, so he reports, a state which he called the “White Logic,” one in which he seemed to see that all of the universe, all of experience, was empty and essentially meaningless, that it carried no value whatsoever—a hell indeed.⁹ Beware of this method of penetrating into that enormous zone covered by the blanket term the ‘collective unconscious’.

⁸ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence*, (Pasadena, Calif.: Theosophical University Press, 1946), 69:

Calm and unmoved the Pilgrim glideth up the stream that to Nirvana leads. He knoweth that the more his feet will bleed, the whiter will himself be washed. He knoweth well that after seven short and fleeting births Nirvana will be his . . .

⁹ Jack London, *John Barleycorn*, (New York: The Century Co., 1913), 308:

And now comes John Barleycorn with the curse he lays upon the imaginative man who is lusty with life and desire to live. John Barleycorn sends his White Logic, the argent messenger of truth beyond truth, the antithesis of life, cruel and bleak as interstellar space, pulseless and frozen as absolute zero, dazzling with the frost of irrefragable logic and unforgettable fact. John Barleycorn will not let the dreamer dream, the liver live. He destroys birth and death, and dissipates to mist the paradox of being, until his victim cries out, as in “The City of Dreadful Night”: “Our life's a cheat, our death a black abyss.” And the feet of the victim of such dreadful intimacy take hold of the way of death.