

"Becoming oneself -- a goal in Carl Jung's conception of therapy"

by Eric Miller, May 2016

Recently I read Marie-Louise von France's book, *Individuation in Fairytales* (1977). The following notes are from, or are prompted by, this book.

Carl Jung's approach to therapy is useful and popular for practicing the Arts Therapies. Jung believed that a productive part of the therapeutic process could involve expressing inner thoughts and feelings in symbolic concrete forms. He believed that one could access, summon, give voice to, get at, get a grasp on, unearth, excavate, incarnate, and express certain contents of one's unconscious through artistic play. These playful art activities could include creating, shaping, constructing, building, composing, and otherwise arranging material drawn from one's memory and imagination.

In play, one can express various aspects of one's personality, including aspects of which one might have previously been unaware. One way to play is to personify material -- pretending pots and pans, plants, animals, etc, have human-type personalities and language abilities.

A good way for one to explore aspects of one's unconscious is to produce images and voices, and thereby cause aspects of one's soul to surface. Then one could observe, interact with, incorporate, and utilise these hidden aspects of one's personality.

The emphasis here is on the processes of expressing and of thinking about these expressions -- not on the production of beautiful polished objects of art.

Jung believed that accessing aspects of one's unconscious is a central aspect of therapy. Only by accessing such aspects could one begin to integrate the aspects of one's self, to create a whole, unified self. He referred to this integration process as "Individuation".

Jung wrote about the steps in the process of individuation, of becoming oneself, of becoming more conscious of one's entire self. Internal and/or external guidance may be needed in this process. The process of inner growth, of becoming increasingly aware of who one is, of developing towards fulfilling one's potential, of blooming, needs to be monitored and regulated.

An inner brake is built into the experience of any instinct, which controls it naturally from within. One benefits by acknowledging, assimilating, integrating, incorporating, and sublimating various aspects of one's self. To "sublimate" raw emotions is to acknowledge them and in some cases work out compromises regarding them, so these emotions and inclinations could serve productive purposes.

According to this approach, one may benefit from seeking out and becoming "friends" with the numerous personalities inside one (the aspects of one's inner personality). Once this friendship occurs, the conscious ego and the inner aspect go on together. Once a voice/character/aspect of oneself is discovered, once a relationship with it is established, there is no forgetting, no turning back regarding this relationship. One's conscious ego might seek help from one's unconscious. Being able to access aspects of one's unconscious can make one a more resourceful person.

It can be agony for the self to be confined in ego consciousness. If the ego conception is too narrow, the self may explode it, and explode out of it.

If one attempts to suppress, repress, aspects on one's self, among the things that can happen are: 1) the "dead" might come back to life, to "haunt" one (things might just "pop out", "erupt"), 2) one might come to feel disorientated, dissociated (lack of connection between aspects of one's self), discombobulated (awkwardly uncoordinated), and out-of-sync with oneself; and experience irritability, depression, and/or loss of vitality.

Suppressing, repressing a "demon" is a temporary solution. It is usually better to seek to give voice to and then sublimate whatever challenging material might be coming up.

People who do not know enough about their own unconscious are the people who are most likely to fall victim to negative influences (from within and without).

Mental health involves achieving a balance between being controlled by one's consciousness and one's unconscious. One can compensate for limited consciousness by accessing the subterranean riches, the buried treasures, in one's unconscious. One's consciousness may be enlivened by one's unconscious. This may lead to feeling renewed, revitalised, and revived; to feeling alive; and to enjoying being alive. These are important goals in life.

Material from the unconscious may enliven a person, and/or may help a person to choose to proceed in a new direction.

Material comes up and approaches the threshold of consciousness.

The unconscious, and the collective unconscious, may have a transforming influence on one's consciousness.

The entire self -- not the conscious ego -- has the power. The conscious ego is like a rider of a horse. Results are best when the rider and the horse work and play together, in partnership, with mutual respect for, and understanding of, each other.

One may be afraid to descend into one's unconscious, fearing unsolvable chaos, confusion, conflict, fury, pain, and madness.

The closer one approaches to the inner center of one's personality, the more repulsing, evading forces resist being uncovered. There is often a "defense mechanism" of avoiding being understood (and thus of avoiding being vulnerable, manipulated, and possibly being taken advantage of and damaged).

Both dreams (coming from one's unconscious) and fairytales (coming from one's culture and society) can heal, counterbalance, criticise, help one to work out compromises with, and complete, the conscious attitudes of one's self, and of the dominant culture of one's society.

It can be therapeutic to become aware of familiar spirits, voices, attitudes, and feelings, within oneself. To consider, in one's imagination, in one's daydreams, what figures often pop up and confront, guide, advise, encourage and/or discourage one? With what imaginary figures does one often consult? Who are some members of one's "internal team"? What animals, elements of nature, emotions and inclinations (all of which can be personified), and what people, often come to mind?

One may have 20 or so regularly-present internal voices, complexes -- and they may all talk with each other.

One should be very cautious about permitting one's conscious ego to judge negatively an inner "voice". Mutual respect between one's consciousness and the elements of one's inner world is usually called for. Each has its contributions to make to a healthy personality. One should not seek to fully use, exploit, control, or sublimate certain inner emotions and inclinations -- some inner aspects should be acknowledged and left "wild", untamed, as long as they do not disturb one's consciousness too much.

Real experience involves experience of the real. If one documents the process of experiencing "ecstatic moments of realisation", one may then be able to re-visit the experience and keep the doors open between one's consciousness and unconscious. To *realise* something is to make something real, including by making it as permanent and accessible as possible -- not fleeting, intermittent, evanescent, inaccessible, unreliable, or erratic.

One sometimes projects one's emotional needs onto objects. Objects are lifeless. Deep satisfaction is more often experienced in pleasurable and flowing processes, including in ongoing relationships between people who support each other.

Getting in communication with one's unconscious may involve achieving more "relatedness" -- with aspects of one's self, and with aspects of one's environment (including people).

A hero/heroine in a fairytale may make a mistake that eventually leads to his/her development and success.

Under wrong, unjust conditions -- a bird might not sing, prayers might not be effective, etc.

In fairytales sometimes, a character may be instructed to grab a bird. This may require concentration, dedication, and self-discipline. Later it may be good to give the bird some freedom.

In fairytales sometimes, a character may be instructed: Do not look back. Do not take too much (do not be greedy). Do not permit oneself to be diverted from one's task. Do not get side-tracked by words, or by sensational displays of intellectual and/or formal brilliance.

A storyteller may help to mature the mind of the listener by leading the listener to certain realisations which may help to change and even cure conscious attitudes of the listener that may be in need of change or cure.

In much of Indian culture, story -- especially in the form of epics -- has remained in the realm of adult culture. This imaginative "story" aspect of experience is more accessible in India than in the West.

Bitterness is a symptom of people who are fighting themselves, who are struggling with unresolved internal conflicts. This may produce hard-heartedness and a refusal to feel sympathy for and empathy with others. Frustration, deprivation, and suffering in childhood may lead to desires to devour, eat, dominate, own, demolish, punish, and stamp out others. Anger, rage, and resentment might be there, as well as a desire for revenge as compensation.

Breaking a spell. Blocks in one's thoughts and behaviour are self-imposed (although they may have originally come from others, and now have been internalised). Especially in fairytales, a block may be experienced and symbolised as a spell, a curse, imposed from without, externally, by another person (who may have magical or supernatural powers). That is, one sometimes projects a self-imposed block onto an external figure and imagines that this figure is causing one to be blocked. One may feel a curse has reduced one to, has contained one in and limited one to, animal behavior. What breaks spells? -- "true love's first kiss", relationship, relatedness, being able to love, the presence of a partner whom one is able to love and who is able to love. Just as, "When the student is ready, the teacher appears", so when one is ready to love, the one to be loved appears. When one is ready to love, one attracts the one to be loved.

Water may represent rejuvenation. Springs, streams, wells, and fountains of youth. A cup of cool water in the desert. To bathe, immerse, be baptised, and be reborn. If too much emotion is involved, one may feel there is a danger of flooding and drowning.

Fish may symbolise material spontaneously coming up from the unconscious when new wisdom, or new application of wisdom, is required.

Bird may represent one's soul, life, spirit, and/or the spirit of truth. It may represent mysterious truth from the unconscious. It may be a guiding factor. Pearls of wisdom, and flowers, may come from its mouth.

Fox, being clever, may assist one in the internal communication process, by helping one to discover and recover thoughts and feelings within one's self.

Male aspect of one's self (associated with **consciousness**, and the ego) -- Logic, rationality, rules, rigidity, control, conventional, heartless, calcified, petrified, static, one-sided utilitarian exploitation, calculating, manipulating, imprisoned and imprisoning, independent, isolated, going through the motions, using an abstract formula, one's heart is not in it, one is not animated, one is not in the flow, one is not in the rhythm, lifeless, flat, loss of contact with the nurturing earth (environment), cut off, superficial, inauthentic, thoughtless wordiness and verbosity, formalistic, lack of empathy for others.

Female aspect of one's self (associated with **the unconscious**) -- Love, emotions, spontaneity, fluid, flow of life, playful, instinctive, reconciles opposites, dead things are reborn, relatedness, intuition, adds new colors and dimensions to one's feelings and thoughts, freshness, possibility of deep inner experience, luminous, numinous (suggesting the presence of the divine), animated, illuminated.